



A blessing after adversity

The need for a basic service like sanitation can drive the determination of a person to fight for it. Such is the case of Akka Tai, a slum dweller of Kolhapur who proved to be a determined woman in times of adversity to fight for her family's basic sanitation needs.

Akka Krushnat Awale, a 50 years old resident of the settlement of Kalamba Filter Housing in Kolhapur, has always belonged to a poverty-stricken family. Her husband, Mr. Krushnat works as a cleaner at the Kolhapur Municipal Corporation. Being an alcoholic, he does not contribute much towards household expenses. Out of her three children, her elder son Dattu aged 25, is disabled since birth and is a major responsibility for Akka Tai. Every day, due to lack of a toilet in the house, he would defecate anywhere inside and Akka Tai had to clean as she could not carry him to the nearby community toilet block. All this led to the unhygienic condition within the house as well as the entire neighborhood.

After being struck by paralysis, her mother-in-law was bedridden as well, which doubled her responsibility to look after her and her son. To stabilize her family financially, she had to work as a maid in the nearby households and the stress of managing everything led to emotional and physical frustration. Her younger son was forced to start working as a casual laborer by the age of 17 but earned a meager income which wasn't enough to sustain the family. A few years later, her mother-in-law passed away and she got her younger son married which helped her to take on additional work to earn, while the young daughter-in-law looked after the household.

Things started turning around when Akka got to know about Shelter Associate's 'One home one toilet' project in the slum of Rajendra Nagar. Akka was delighted when SA started facilitating toilets in her slum and was determined to have one in her house as well. Around the same time, her daughter-in-law got pregnant and she had to choose between her medical expenses and raising funds for the construction of the toilet. Their eagerness to have a toilet drove them to mortgage their mangalsutra, the most sacred marital possession. Their hardships did not end even after raising funds. Akka's husband resisted having a toilet in the house as he perceived it as a waste of money. With much persuasion by the family and community members, he finally agreed to it.

The toilet in the house has given Akka Tai a major relief and a sense of dignity for which she says,

“All my life has passed in filth where I had to work single-handedly to support my family who suffered along with me. The condition was worse for my elder son Dattu, as he could not go to the CTB. But now, I just don't know how to thank SA, not only for me but on behalf of my entire family. Now Dattu can at least crawl to the toilet for relieving himself.

After facing so many hurdles, I thank SA for this invaluable gift which has happily coincided with the arrival of an addition to the family-my granddaughter.”



Akka Awale with her family

