

Case Study

Interview unique number: 05
Interview date: 29/11/2019
District: **Dungurpur**
State: **Rajasthan**

Name: **Sheela Kumari**
Age: **26**
Gender: **Female**
Education: **M.A. History**
Marital Status: **Engaged**
Highest education: **Master's in Arts**
Current self-employment/ employment status: **DPO Worker**
Type of impairment: **Locomotor**
Any other members with disabilities in family: **NA**

Sheela is a 26-years-old independent woman with disability who has survived the difficulties of claiming her right to education. She lives in a rural setting of Dungurpur, Rajasthan in India. When she was four months old, she fell from the first floor of her house and got severely injured. Due to lack of specialised medical facilities in the nearest available health centre, she could not get proper treatment, which resulted in her lifelong disability. Her uncle was supporting the family at that time as her father was not earning, hence it was challenging for the family to support her treatment.

Sheela stated, "There are no big hospitals in my village. I got injured when I was four months old but was admitted at the age of 3 in a big hospital where I got proper treatment. As I could not walk, so my father had to be with me all the time. Later, I was taken to Mumbai for treatment; however, it was very difficult as we were very poor."

Inaccessible health facilities, both physically and financially, were one of the biggest disappointments that Sheela and her family went through. Sheela underwent several surgeries in her teens and in absence of adequate mobility aid, she used to walk with a wooden stick. She and her family faced humiliation in the health centres due to poverty and terrible attitude of medical staff.

She also faced lot of challenges to get educated. She stated that her father used to carry her to the school because she could not walk. Her mother gave emphasis on getting her educated but her father, on the other hand, was not very encouraging as it was very difficult for him to leave work and take care of Sheela during her school. This is how Sheela narrates her school life:

"My father often taunted me for taking me to the school as he could not go to work outside. Till class five teacher was good to me. In ninth standard, I was refused admission in the government school. We went to meet government officials of Education Department at district level. The official gave a notice to school administration so that I am not denied admission. After going back to the school with the letter the school teachers became angry. They would always criticize me because of my complaint against them. Everyone would laugh at me in school and tease me, 'why do you sit like this, why do you extend your legs?' Teachers would say, 'if you take off from school, you should sit at home'. I felt miserable and tolerated this for months. One day, I spoke to school principal and requested her to advice everyone not to tease me. Next day, during assembly and prayer time, the principal talked about me and explained to everyone not to harass me. After that, things changed. No one teased me, just stared occasionally as I was the only person with disability in the school. I wished if there were more kids with disability, attitude of students and children could have been different".

After class seven, she started to live in a government school hostel. The hostel was 45kms away from her home and the school was 500 metres away from the hostel. Her hostel also was not accessible and she faced tough times away from mother and managing daily chores alone. Although, she had to move back to her house because her mother's illness, she shifted to a new school which was also 8kms away. At first, she used to go by herself but later her father arranged for a jeep, which costed Rs. 1500/- per month. They really wished if

Sheela asserts, "Till class 10th, I was not invited for any picnic or extracurricular activities/ events of school. In class 11th, teachers changed and then I got a chance to go for the picnic. I was told by my class teacher, 'drop out of studies and sit at home,' but I did not give up. It was the toughest

they could get travel allowance from the government and this amount would not have been a burden on family income. Eventually, she managed to complete her schooling and pursued Masters in Arts. Currently, she works with an NGO and work for people with disabilities. She trained other women with disabilities (WwDs) on provisions of Indian Disability Act and its provisions. She faced challenges in commuting for field work, odd working hours and inaccessible toilet facilities; however, she managed to be an active DPO member.

She does not want other women and children with disabilities to suffer and struggle for their rights to education, health, enjoyment, and life opportunities and thus suggest the following recommendations:

- Teacher's attitude towards children with disabilities should not be discriminatory and be friendly so that they feel welcome and cared for like non-disabled children. Hence, their training on disability inclusive mainstream education is mandatory
- Accessible and women friendly hostels should be provided by the government and this should be non-negotiable in all blocks and districts
- For students and teachers with disability, infrastructure accessibility in classroom and schools should be provided on priority
- Reasonable accommodation, job specific recruitment training and capacity building skills to be provided to WwDs at their workspace
- Sightsavers, partner organizations, and DPOs to have mandatory personal support system by means of assistant during intercity travel and advance should be given for travel expenditure
- Personal mobility devices, adapted vehicles and transport allowance should be provided by the employer/ NGO/Govt. to WwDs
- Ease out document submission by the government to avail assistive devices at subsidised rates
- Each DPO member should be trained on SDGs targets and indicators as she was benefitted a lot by the knowledge imparted during training
- On call availability of female doctors in primary health centres (PHCs), community health centres (CHCs) and other government hospitals till the time a permanent doctor is not available for these health centres
- Accessibility of medical equipment and sensitization training of medical staff in all government health centres. She was x-rayed several times; however the x-ray machine was mounted high and she was unable to climb the table independently
- Free medical check-up of twice a year in all government health centres. Government should roll out policy for social security of WwDs
- For availing disability certificates, revealing deformed body part for photography is promoting abused and it should be stopped immediately by the government
- Awareness and sensitivity on disability for police department, especially focusing on issues faced by WwDs who are blind and also have speech & hearing impairment
- '*Mahila*' (Women) help-desks in each police station and woman manning the desk should know sign language
- Women drivers needed in public transport to combat increasing violence and abuse towards women passengers