

For Susanna it was the story that Nirmala Poona shared with us about how her life had been transformed since participating in the Self-Help Group (SHG). We all met Nirmala after observing a training session held for local village women explaining how the group works and the opportunities that open up from the group membership. Prior to the formation of these groups the women had little or no education and were reliant on their husband's income to support the family, which in many cases was insufficient for daily needs.

The SHG's have united women and empowered them to learn new income-generating skills that they can perform whilst in the home taking care of their children. These groups have been operating for the past 17 years and now have more than 2,900 women participating.

We met Nirmala at her home and with the help of PRASAD Chikitsa's Operations manager Milind Nargund as translator, she shared her story. She told of her previous struggle to feed her family before she joined the Self-Help Group for women in her location and started contributing 100 rupees per month (\$2 AUD).

In the West when we want flour or spices we simply go to the supermarket and choose and buy what we want from a vast selection. In rural India it is not like that. Seeds and grains are purchased in the market and then taken elsewhere to be ground as required, for a small amount of money.

Nirmala started with a hand grinder pretty much like that out of Biblical times – 2 huge flat stones turned by hand crushing the grain between them. From her participation in the group she was able to obtain a loan to buy an electric grinder which meant that she could grind more grain with less physical strain and in a quicker time, thereby increasing her service for the local women and generating more income for herself.

She has done so well that with the help of PRASAD, she has been able to build a toilet in her home, and later made a shop at the front of the house which increases her income further. She now is adding about 150 rupees per day to the family income, and all whilst staying at home with her young children. No wonder she is proudly telling her life-changing story with such a beaming smile.

And no wonder Susanna was deeply moved by this and reiterated that it is stories like this which make her so proud to be part of PRASAD's great work.



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