

BIRU'S STORY

INDIA



[Watch Biru's Story on Vimeo](#)



Biru is seen working at his bicycle repair shop outside his home in his village in the state of Jharkhand, India. Photo: Sameer Bara

Biru, 30, lives in a rural village in Jharkand State in India's east. He lost mobility in one of his legs, after contracting polio as a child, which makes it difficult for him to walk. He managed to complete his education until grade six but was always dependent on his parents to get him to school because he was unable to walk so far on his own.

A member of India's Ho ethnic minority population, Biru started to work as a shepherd from a young age, looking after other people's cattle. He continued this work, after he married his wife, Budhni and had four daughters, even though keeping up with the cattle was a challenge.

"The problem was that I couldn't walk in mud, I used to fall and the grazing cattle would sometimes make me run, I could not handle them. I also used to face psychological challenges," Biru says. "Looking at others who did not have a disability, I wondered what it was like to be them. I was wondering how to look after my family".

Over 26 million people who have a disability in India also live in poverty. A further, 69 percent of the population living with a disability reside in rural areas which makes access to support services, education and employment an even greater challenge.¹ Discrimination can further limit job opportunities and lead to social exclusion.

Although he had taught himself to repair bicycles, by watching other people, Biru never dreamed of using his skills to start his own business.

Then in 2016, Caritas India's staff saw Biru struggling to walk along with the cattle and invited him to join its Community Led Development and Governance (Gram Nirman) program which is supported by Caritas Australia.

The program works with tribal communities and vulnerable groups, such as people living with a disability, women and the elderly. It supports them to develop small businesses, including improving farming and financial management skills, which helps them to increase their incomes.

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Biru became involved in one of the program's community support groups which encourages members to draw on their resources to improve their incomes and quality of life.

"I was motivated by the team, my life started changing after I entered the program," Biru says. "I didn't know that I had the skills to manage a shop, but after receiving the support, I started with cycle repairing, then I realised I can manage other skills too, like repairing motorcycles."

His new business received an enthusiastic response. People started coming from kilometres away to get their bicycles fixed. They would also offer to travel to nearby towns to access bicycle parts for him.

Before, Biru had felt like a burden. Now, his community has a better understanding of how people living with a disability can participate in community life and decision-making.

"Now members of my community have started listening to my opinion. I am getting appreciation and recognition," Biru says.

Around 100,000 people have benefitted from this program so far, including over 15,000 families who have increased their incomes by between 40 and 50 percent.

However, COVID-19 has had a significant impact on villages and businesses across India, like Biru's, over the past year. With your support, Caritas Australia has been working with Caritas India to provide dry ration kits for families, as well as vital information about wearing face masks, social distancing and hygiene, to prevent the spread of the virus.

Biru is keen to build his business, as well as a better house for his family, and he is eager for his children to receive a good education.

"I would like to thank, from the bottom of my heart, the people of Australia for supporting this program and for helping us to live in dignity," Biru says. "I pray that you continue to reach out to many more to help them."

Biru is able to provide a good life for his family – and an essential service to his community. He has discovered a sense of pride, confidence and hope which has inspired others living with a disability and paved the way for future generations.

Along with your generous support, this program is supported by the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

¹ [Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation- Government of India](#)



Photo: Sameer Bara



TASK 1: Discussion

- A. What were some of the challenges Biru faced while growing up in India?

- B. Explain how Caritas Australia and Caritas India supported Biru to achieve his full potential.

- C. How has your support of Caritas Australia impacted Biru's adult life?

- D. Which Catholic Social Teachings do you see reflected in Biru's story?

- E. How is Biru acting as a leader in his community?

TASK 2: Take the Challenge

Be like Biru and teach yourself a new skill or learn it from someone who is willing to teach you. For example: learn how to fix a puncture in a bike tyre, a new computer skill or cook a new recipe for your family.

What new skill will you learn? How will you learn it?

TASK 3: Strengths and Talents

Biru felt that it was difficult for him to contribute to his community. However, even if we don't realise it, we all have strengths and talents, some come naturally and others we need to learn.

What are your strengths and talents?

How could you use these strengths and talents to help others?

Ride your Bicycle

National Ride to School Day falls within March each year. Encourage your friends to ride to school. Perhaps you could even hold a "repair your bike" workshop on that day.



A CATHOLIC WORLDVIEW (JUDGE)

To have courage for whatever comes in life, everything lies in that.

St Teresa of Avila

Read the quote above and reflect on what it means.

- *How are Gospel values being upheld in Biru's story?*
- *The word 'courage' appears many times in Scripture. Why do you think this is?*
- *How can faith be a source of courage for you/others?*

FAITH IN ACTION (ACT)

- How can you be more inclusive of your fellow students, friends and people you may work with?
- How might you raise awareness of access in your community in response to what you have read and thought about in Biru's story?
- Think about how accessible your school/parish grounds are. Who should lead reflection, evaluations and improvements in this area?
(Clue: think about the CST principles of participation and subsidiarity)