

## From Struggle to Strength: The Story of Binita Mallik, a Hero for Lodha Children

*For 22-year-old Binata Mallik, mother of four young children, providing adequate care and nutrition for her children and taking care of her own nutritional needs, has been an uphill battle. Married as a child at the tender age of 15, Binita was under-weight during all her pregnancies, which is a potential concern for adverse maternal and foetal health outcomes. This had resulted in all her four children being underweight and the youngest child, just one year old, being severely wasted. In addition to her parental responsibilities, she also bears the burden of labouring daily for her wages and go foraging for food, wood, and leaves in the forests of Odisha.*

*Fortunately for Binita, the admittance of her children in the Nutrition Rehabilitation Centre (NRC) in the state, has saved her children's lives, along with improving her own health and nutrition.*

### Test of trials

Binita Mallik belongs to the Lodha tribe, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) from the Mayurbhanj district of Odisha and her story is not an anomaly in the rural areas of the state. Owing to the issue of a high prevalence of child marriage, early, unspaced and frequent pregnancies, low income, lack of adequate knowledge around nutrition among communities here, the nutrition status of many women of the Lodha tribe is suboptimal.

For hundreds of women in this tribe, the poor status of their health and nutrition is often exacerbated by the burden of having to carry out physically strenuous livelihood practices like manual labour, foraging and the like.

In this context, it becomes very challenging for these women to provide adequate care and nutrition for their young children.



*Binita Mallik, our unsung hero, who saved her son's life by timely admitting him in an NRC (National Rehabilitation Centre) in Mayurbhanj district, Odisha. Photo credit: Centre for Regional Education Forest and Tourism Development Agency (CREFTDA), February 2022.*

### Nutrition Resource Centre: Giving a breath of life

With the aim to improve the nutritional status of people of the Lodha tribe, in 2019, UNICEF supported the establishment of the Nutrition Resource Centre (NRC), jointly started by the Odisha PVTG Empowerment and Livelihood Improvement Programme (OPELIP) and the Lodha Development Agency (LDA). The NRC seeks to achieve this its aim of improving nutrition among the Lodhas through the promotion of nutritional awareness and monitoring of nutritional activities to address the lacunae.

While Binita herself was initially reluctant and not trusting of sending her children to the NRC, a Community Resource Person (CRP) of the village, along with the Social Mobiliser and Nutrition Officer of the LDA, Morada, visited her family and encouraged her to do so. They apprised Binata of the nutrition deficiency of the children and the need for proper nourishment and care for their holistic wellbeing.

After consistent efforts, Binata agreed to visit the NRC with her children and make continue regular visits to the centre, and to attend both the VHSND sessions and the mothers' group meetings.

Today, UNICEF is proud to support the activities of the NRC where other Lodha women in Binita's village continue to visit and receive essential nutrition information and services for themselves and for every child.

[For more information, please contact](#)

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*Binita with an Anganwadi worker (unnamed) from her village, who provided her with counselling on maternal and child nutrition.*

*Photo credit: CREFDTA, February 2022.*

At the NRC, Binita was provided counselling on healthy eating practices for her children, provided crèche services as a safe space with educational and play activities and provided information about nutrition, growth requirements of children, and good nutrition and health practices for herself.

Empowered with the right information and resources, Binita, along with the care providers at the centre, significantly improved the nutritional status of all her children and saved them from possible fatality. At present, her children have come out from the vicious cycle of malnutrition, with a body weight at par with recommended body- mass index (BMI).

### **Woman of the hour**

Binita Malik's heroic efforts and success as a mother has become an eye-opener for many other parents in the Lodha community. Her story stands as an exemplary living story of a tribal woman who mobilised herself to provide critical nutritional services to her children, saving their lives.

One woman's actions have become a ripple in the ocean and encouraged several other Lodha women to become sensitised and inspired to further act – towards improved and continued good nutrition status of themselves and their babies.