

# Secure Land Rights for Women: Indispensable for Sustainable Development

SABITA PARIDA

*Assuring and securing land rights for women requires transformation at various levels—individual, familial and societal; only then will development goals become a sustainable reality in the foreseeable future*

Worldwide, the concept of secure land rights for women is increasingly getting acceptance as key to sustainable and equitable development. The implementation period of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) gets over in 2015; the United Nations, with the support of government and civil society organizations all over the world, has initiated a process of formulating 'Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs) to replace MDGs. This is being done in a bottom-up approach. SDGs are based on the experience of MDGs and aim at making them more explicit and elaborate. Instead of capturing only growth and development, the new framework tries to capture people's aspirations, rights and concerns for ecological sustainability. The issue of secure rights for women over land is discussed three times in the proposed SDG document—in the sections on gender equality, ecological sustainability and indigenous people's right over land. This shows how crucial women's secure land rights are for gender equality and for community development.

However, worldwide, women are largely regarded as the responsibility or property of men—be it in Africa or in South Asia, where the countries perform poorly in the Gender Development Index (GDI), or in Latin America, where in most countries, on an average, they perform somewhat better in GDI. A women farmer from Guatemala said, "Society is not comfortable with land rights for women because how can a property own a property." Through history, irrespective of religion, both land and women have been considered man's property and this defines his social value. In pre-Islamic Arabia, the number of wives a man had was the measure of a man's value in society; and, like property, after the death of the father, the older son used to inherit all the wives, except his biological mother.

Policy reforms or social change are not always stirred by the rights-based arguments only, justifications based on ‘benefits’ as defined by economics also are critical for bringing that change. What is the economic gain of the initiative? What will be the spillover effect of benefitting a single individual or a particular community on the wider society and community? These questions are often asked—even more so when women’s rights are involved. Some of the arguments given by society and family disfavoring land rights for women are land fragmentation, land being left fallow, low productivity due to bad management. At the same time, these questions are not being asked when a brother wants his share or when a son wants his share—land fragmentation happens then also, and the probability of fallow land and low productivity are there in those scenarios as well. When it comes to a man’s land ownership in a patriarchal world, it is a given. Hence, for wider acceptability of land rights for women, sometimes it is crucial to explore its impact on the larger community and the wider issues of well-being.

*Women’s land rights are part of her human rights. If a son has right over his father’s property so does the daughter; if a wife spends 3,300 hours every year on the family land to maintain it and to get produce from it, it will be a travesty to call it the husband’s land only. She should indeed have equal right over that land*

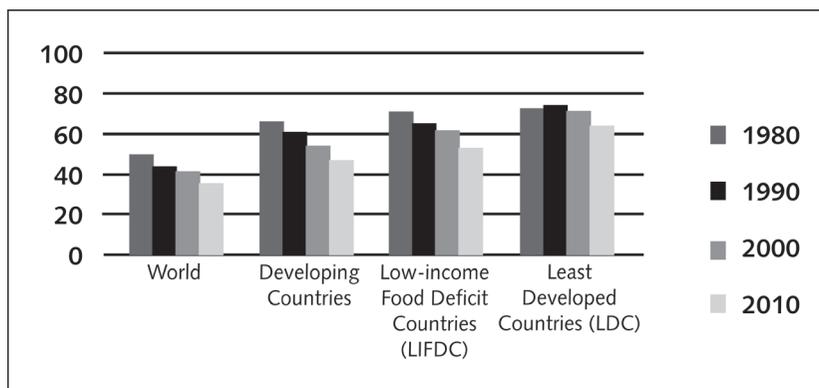
## LAND RIGHTS FOR WOMEN—HOW RELEVANT?

Women’s land rights are part of her human rights. If a son has right over his father’s property so does the daughter; if a wife spends 3,300 hours every year in the family land to maintain it and to get produce from it, it will be a travesty to call it the husband’s land only. She should indeed have equal right over that land.

Secure land rights are found to be crucial for women’s economic empowerment, for their bargaining capacity, both in the private and public spheres, for reducing violence against women; for increasing agricultural productivity and for enhancing their well-being through varied ways such as children’s health and education.

In 2012, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) stated that if women farmers had equal access to resources and assets as men, productivity in developing countries will increase by 20–30 per cent; and the increased crop produce will be sufficient to reduce the world malnutrition rate by 12 to 17 per cent.

**Fig. 1: Percentage of Economically Active Women Engaged in Agriculture, 1980–2010 (Projected)**



Women farmers, worldwide, contribute significantly to food production. FAO did an analysis on the percentage of economically active women in agriculture for the period of 1980–2010 (projected) and found a decreasing rate of women's engagement in agriculture (Fig 1); however, the projection has found that even in 2010 in least developed

and low income food deficit countries, more than 60 percent economically active women will be engaged in agriculture. Most of them lack equal access to resources like credit, seed, fertilizer, technology and information; and hence are not able to attain their full potential as farmers. Often, they have to face both social and institutional barriers that restrict their productivity.

Many anthropological studies conducted in South Asia and Latin America suggest that if the income comes from the mother rather than the father, there is higher probability that the money will be spent for children's health, nutrition and education. A study conducted in Nepal, specifically on women's land rights, found that it has a significant positive impact on the children's education. Studies conducted by Dr. Bina Agrawal in Kerala found that there is a lower probability that women with land rights will face domestic violence from their intimate partners in comparison to women who do not own any land. Women's income

*Many anthropological studies conducted in South Asia and Latin America suggest that if the income comes from the mother rather than the father, there is higher probability that the money will be spent for children's health, nutrition and education*

from employment in the formal sector is found to have an impact on the reduction of violence against women; however, secure land rights has a higher positive impact.

#### **LAND RIGHTS FOR WOMEN IN INDIA: ITS RELEVANCE**

In India, according to the Hunger and Malnutrition (HUNGaMA) Report 2011, with the high levels

of acute malnutrition, almost three children die every minute. Despite the increasing economic growth, India's malnutrition rate is way higher than its southern counterparts—Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Second, women farmers comprise around 37 per cent of the agriculture workforce in India and that percentage is increasing, with the increased migration of men, and resulting in, what is now known as, the 'feminization of agriculture'.

In India, as in many other countries, land title is the prime requisite for recognition as a farmer. According to the government, a farmer is one who has land. Without it, one is unable to access government subsidies, training or institutional credit. According to the Agriculture Census 2010–11, rural India has 38 per cent women-headed households and only 12.69 per cent of the rural women have operational land ownership. So, a large number of women farmers are engaged in agriculture without having access to any government benefits

"Women farmers are recognized more as home-makers and less as farmers. They should, however, get recognition for their labour outside the home also. It is very important for women farmers to have land, property and house in their name or own it jointly with their husbands so that husbands are not able to sell anything without the wife's consent. There have been many cases where a drunkard or gambler husband has sold his property, leaving his family in the lurch. So there must be some legal document ensuring the wife's financial security." Kamlesh, Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh

and training. Everyone engaged in agriculture understands very well the significance of on-time credit (especially before the monsoon season), quality inputs (seed with good viability) and technical knowledge (how to prepare raised nursery beds, SRI, etc.) on crop productivity. However, most women farmers do not have access to all these benefits because they do not have land titles in their name. Banks need collateral, usually land and house documents, to finance any credit. As a result, women farmers are not able to access institutional credit, and are often left out of government subsidies and loan-waiver programmes.

Oxfam conducted a study in 2006 in Uttar Pradesh on the status of women farmers. The findings suggest that only 6 per cent of the women own land, only 2 per cent of them have access to institutional credit and only 1 per cent of them have access to agricultural training programmes. Women farmers in Uttar Pradesh, during a campaign on women's land rights, shared that they do not feel comfortable about entering the mainstream agriculture system whether it is Agriculture Technology Management Agency (ATMA) or any other agriculture training programme, because "it is not customized for them."

*Most agriculture planning, training and implementation are not geared for and do not consider women farmers because they are not considered to be farmers—they are just helping hands in the field and own no land in their name*

Why gender mainstreaming and incorporation of women's concerns are important in agriculture planning is evident from this example. Women farmers of Saharanpur and Pilibhit lobbied and advocated for the creation of a gender-sensitive market space in *mandis*; most often the *mandis* don't have separate toilets for women, a basic gender-sensitive infrastructure.

Most agriculture planning, training and implementation are not geared for and do not consider women farmers because they are not considered to be farmers—they are just helping hands in the field and own no land in their name.

Farmers' suicides have recently grabbed the attention of the public and the policy makers. This is a severe crisis that Indian agriculture has been grappling with for the last two decades. Earlier the suicides were restricted to two states—undivided Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra; now, the number of suicides is rising several states across the country. Women are left to fend for their families after their husbands' suicides despite not having secure land rights nor having any access to resources. As Ranjana Padhy's book on farmers' suicides suggests no one had any concern for '*Those Who do not Die*'.

"Women work in the fields but do not have land in their names. If the land were to be in the wife's name, the husband would not be able to intimidate her or throw her out of the house or indulge in domestic violence. Land ownership is a big weapon in a woman's hand. It acts as a deterrent to men beating their wives, selling their farmland or wasting money on alcohol." Lilawati Devi, Shahjahanpur, Uttar Pradesh

"I have 2 *bighas* of land in my name; this has given me some sense of security." Savitri Devi Shahjahanpur, Uttar Pradesh

Violence against women in India, both in private and public sphere, has increasingly become a social concern with more number of cases being reported. An assessment of various court cases of domestic violence suggests that women are compelled to stay in a violent relationship because they do not have any other place to go. Patriarchal mindsets and societal norms do not allow a married women in India to return to their parental homes; if they do so, in most cases, they have to face rejection and ill-treatment from their brothers and sisters-in-law. Land and house always work as a fall-back option. Islawati Devi, a woman farmer from Uttar Pradesh and a member of the Aaroh campaign, says, "Land rights for women work as a security, in case of a divorce or the death of the husband."

#### **SECURE LAND RIGHTS FOR WOMEN: DECISIVE FOR DEVELOPMENT YET NEGLECTED**

The demand for women's land rights is not a new phenomenon. In India, women activists have demanded land rights for women as far back as 1936. In the Bodhgaya movement (a peasant movement in Bihar), women peasants participated in large numbers and demanded land rights. There are several reasons for the concept of 'secure land rights for women' not yet being given enough importance in policy making, civil society and public discussions. Land is a very crucial asset, not only for cultivation but also for industrial purposes. With the increasing population and the industrialization, the value of land has skyrocketed in the last few decades. In rural India, even today, land determines the social status whereas, in urban India, it is both the land and the house. On any scale, be it economic or social, land is a high-value asset.

*Many women in Odisha, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh say that often Land Revenue Officers and the police discourage women from claiming their inheritance rights*

Social values and cultural norms have an enormous impact on public policies and practices. Land reforms in West Bengal, otherwise regarded as one of the most progressive initiatives to bridge inequality, totally missed out on the gender perspective.

Around 86 per cent of land in India is private land and the ownership is inherited. The Hindu Succession Act, which determines the rules of inheritance for Hindus, Jains, Buddhists and Parsis in India (who together represent around 82 per cent of the Indian population), did not acknowledge women's right to property until 2005. The prime reason for not giving a woman any inheritance rights on land is because the family wants to keep the property intact and within the family.

Patriarchal mindsets not only govern policy formation but also obstruct the implementation of progressive laws. Forty-nine years of unwavering struggle was required to bring amendments in the gender discriminatory Hindu personal law of 1956, which did not recognize women's share in inherited property. In 2005, the efforts of activists and academicians such as Justice Leila Seth and Dr. Bina Agarwal brought about an amendment to the Hindu Succession Act of 1956, and eventually recognized that daughters and sons have equal right to their father's land, including agricultural land. Although agriculture and land are state subjects in India, inheritance rules override state laws. However, after 10 years of enactment of the Amendment, women's land ownership statistics do not show any major changes; and perhaps may require many more years to actualize on the ground.

Many women in Odisha, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh say that often Land Revenue Officers and the police discourage women from claiming their inheritance rights. Under the

Succession Act, if women are not interested in claiming their share, it can be written off. Often, this rule is used by the women, either by choice or by force. Women prefer to write-off their share in their brother's name due to social obligations. Most often, a daughter's consent on giving up her share to her brothers has been taken either within the four walls of her home or in social forums. This is a clear indication of how seriously women's rights are taken. Property sharing between brothers has never been so simple. In the social construct, the owner of a property is the man; it will take years for progressive laws such as the Hindu Succession Amendment Act to change that norm. The value of land too is a determinant of the willingness of the family to give the daughter her share.

The land system in India is quite complex. In matters of succession, there were many different schools, such as the Dayabhaga in Bengal and the adjoining areas; the Mayukha in Bombay, Konkan and Gujarat; and the Marumakkattayam of the Nambudiris in Kerala and the Mitakshara in other parts of

India, with slight variations. The Mayukha (Bombay) is more gender-sensitive and recognizes women as heirs; but in the Mitakshara, the co-parceners (joint property holders) include only man-son, grandson and great-grandson. In the joint family system in India, in most cases, land is still in the name of the forefathers; it has not been transferred to the next generations. For generations, families divide the land among each other without any legal process and transfer only the cultivation rights. In most of these cases, it is impossible to actualize women's land rights.

Women's inheritance is difficult to ensure because they themselves prefer not to claim their parental land. Landesa and the UN Women's study in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Bihar found that most Indian women prefer to take a share or ownership in their husband's land rather than in that of their parents.

In Uttar Pradesh, during an interaction with the Aaroh campaign members, one woman said, "I have spent most part of my active life

Savitri was married at the young age of 16 into a farmer's family. Her husband, the eldest of three sons, was a farmer. Although Savitri did not know much about farming, she happily helped him in the fields. Her happy married life came to an abrupt end with her husband's sudden death. Until her husband was alive, all was well. There was poverty but no mental stress. There was never any disagreement between the two. But within 15 days of his death, life turned bitter for her.

Her in-laws threw her out of the house. They wanted to keep her son but wanted her to leave the house with her five daughters. She was brutally beaten, threatened and abused by her father-in-law and her husband's younger brothers. They even threatened to kill her. She sent her three children to her parents' house for some time. But even the three who were with her in their father's house were not given enough food to eat. Savitri had no other option but to start working as a farm labourer to make ends meet. At last, she approached the Courts and managed to get some monetary compensation and 2 bighas of land from the 22 bighas owned by her father-in-law.

Source: This story is a part of the Oxfam India Publication, *Leader Lies in You*, a CNS (Citizen News Service) publication.

“The 12 bighas of land which we own is in the name of my father-in-law. But this does not bother me. I have never felt the need to have legal rights over the land that I plough. The family acknowledges my contribution and I am happy with that. In my case, it does not matter in whose name the land is. But this does become an issue for many women where the husband does not see eye to eye with the wife. Women are only recognized as someone’s wife.” Islawati Devi, Chachikpur, Ambedkar Nagar district, Uttar Pradesh.

“If the husband is an alcoholic, the land should belong to both husband and wife, and even the bank account should be in their joint names. An irresponsible husband is quite likely to sell his land, house or property, putting the wife and children in grave trouble. So, in such circumstances, joint ownership and property rights for the women must be there.” Leela Devi, Pilibhit, Uttar Pradesh

working on my husband’s land—contributing to building it; so, I feel more confident to claim a right over my spouse’s land.” Hence, the Aaroh campaign started demanding an amendment in the Uttar Pradesh Zamindar Bill Abolition Act (UP State Land Laws) in favour of a joint land title. Currently, if any husband wants to share his land with his wife, he has to pay mutation charges, which are equivalent to the land registration charges and involves a long administrative process. As part of the Aaroh campaign, about 7,000 men in Uttar Pradesh agreed to share their land with their spouses; however, the mutation charge and the cumbersome administrative process stopped them from doing so.

The imagery of patriarchy obstructing the securing of land rights for women is that of man against woman. Patriarchy is, indeed, about power. Often, women are found to be more patriarchal than men; sometimes knowingly, if it suits them, and sometimes unknowingly they accept the dominance. Often, women themselves believe that land is solely a man’s prerogative and will be best managed by a man. A baseline study done by Oxfam India in 2012 found that around 53 per cent women respondents believed that men should be the

owners of the land. Women’s ownership of the land or house is discussed only when there are problems in the marital relationship.

### HOPE FOR CHANGE

Ensuring secure land rights for women in India is a herculean task. It needs action such as bringing changes in the social norms as well as in personal and land policies, to create an enabling atmosphere for policy implementations. However, it does not mean that initiatives are not being taken to increase women’s access to, and control over, land. In the last few years, a consensus has been built, worldwide, that access and control over the assets by women farmers are the key to increasing agricultural productivity. FAO, ADB and World Bank have all presented reports to support this argument.

The UN special rapporteur for food, Hilal Elver, claimed that land rights for women and women farmers’ access to other productive resources are crucial to ensure the right to food in productive countries. During the entire SDG discussion, many countries and various stakeholders emphasized the importance of land rights for women and tried to keep it as a development indicator for at least three goals.

Back in India, since the Eighth Five Year Plan period, secure women's land rights have been brought up as a development concern. The group working on the disadvantaged community for the Twelfth Five Year Plan came out with a strong and detailed recommendation for securing land rights for women. Recently, some states, under their women and girl-child policies, have started acknowledging land rights for women and are trying to bring some changes in their state policies such as in Odisha and Uttar Pradesh.

Odisha's Women and Girl Child Policy 2014 comes with an incentive plan for land registration in the name of women. Many states including Delhi and Uttar Pradesh have incentivized land registration processes in place. In Delhi, the registration of land in a man's name requires a payment of 8 per cent of the value of land as registration fee whereas for a woman, the requirement is 6 per cent. For joint registration, the fee is 7 per cent. Oxfam India's study with Landesa in Uttar Pradesh on joint land title found that the incentive policy works in favour of women because the number of land registrations in the name of women due to the lower registration fee has increased. Studies in other states, after controlling other influential factors, will be required to prove this. Recently, the Uttar Pradesh government constituted a committee to assess the revenue loss that the state would incur if they were to not take the mutation charges during land transfers, specifically among blood relations and spouses. There is, therefore, an enabling policy atmosphere being created, to ensure secure land rights for women.

*Mainly landless women farmers and some small and marginal farmers come together, to lease land and cultivate the land. Like Self-Help Groups, all the decisions including crop selection and the use of agriculture produce are being taken by the women*

In India, a woman can own land in three ways: (i) through inheritance, (ii) by purchasing from the market, (iii) through state programmes. Many state governments have programmes to provide land for the landless for homestead purposes. Under the 'Vasundhara' programme, the Odisha government gives four decimals of land and the Bihar government three decimals of

land to landless families. The Bihar government, on demand, is also contemplating increasing this amount to five decimals. The land given by the state governments under various land programmes are in joint names. The Twelfth Five Year Plan has advised giving land, either in the name of a woman only as a single title or to provide two land titles to the husband and wife, with a separable landholding. Homestead land ensures both security and livelihood to a woman. Although a kitchen garden is not enough to provide a secure livelihood, it can ensure some income for a woman. Besides the state programmes, the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006, which grants rights to community over forest land, has also issued titles in joint names. Women's participation has also been ensured in community forest rights and other *gram panchayat* processes.

The group working on the disadvantaged community for the Twelfth Five Year Plan under the leadership of Dr. Bina Agarwal suggested the promotion of Collective Women Farmers' Groups as a way ahead to resolve the landless women farmers' access to land. It is prevalent in many states, including Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. The Collective Women Farmers' Group is increasingly being promoted in Bihar, the state with the highest number of

landless farmers and tenants, and in parts of Nepal. Mainly landless women farmers and some small and marginal farmers come together, to lease land<sup>1</sup> and cultivate the land. Like Self-Help Groups, all the decisions including crop selection and the use of agriculture produce are being taken by the women.

From Oxfam India's work in Bihar, with its partner organization Pragati Gramin Vikas Sansthan (PGVS), in promoting Collective Women Farmers' Groups with landless dalit and mahadalit communities, the social benefits of this initiative are quite evident. In the agricultural ladder, an agriculture labourer is below the small and marginal farmers. Women Farmers' Groups bring recognition to women as farmers and elevate them from being agricultural labourers to being farmers.

During a focus group discussion on Collective Farming Groups, Seema Devi of Devnarayan Nagar, Bhojpur district, said, "We can lease the land with our husbands but that will not give us our identity as farmers. It doesn't improve our status. Leasing land, cultivating it together, going to government offices and exposure visits to various places has certainly elevated our status in society." Another member quickly added, "They have stopped addressing us in derogatory words such as, 'Hey, you!'" . The group has tremendous potential to challenge social norms and the existing power structure, and to empower women farmers economically.

*The Land application process is difficult for illiterate women farmers and is even worse for single, divorced, separated or widowed women. Land Revenue Officers often discourage women from claiming their rights and do not have the skill to address them properly*

Seema Devi is one such example. She belongs to the Musahar community. With a population of 1.1 million, in Bihar, the Musahars are considered the 'dalits among dalits' and form the most socio-economically marginalized class in Bihar. Her journey from a landless agriculture labourer to a *panchayat* representative is exemplary. Writing her own story in *Women's Travel Journal*, she mentions some of the guiding posts of her life—being

a part of Collective Women Farmers' Group and taking decisions on everything about her plot and its produce are two of them.

Talking about land in India will not be complete without mentioning the Land Revenue Department, which controls and maintains all land data. The Land Revenue Department, like other government departments, has a poor representation of women staff. The Land application process is difficult for illiterate women farmers and is even worse for single, divorced, separated or widowed women. Land Revenue Officers often discourage women from claiming their rights and do not have the skill to address them properly.

Civil society organizations in different parts of the country such as Landesa in Odisha and Working Group for Women and Land Ownership (WGWLO) in Gujarat are working on supporting the land application process and sensitizing revenue officials and the *patwaris* on the needs and concerns of women farmers.

<sup>1</sup>Land-leasing and share-cropping has also been a prevalent practice in India for many centuries. All the states in India passed the Tenancy Reform Act during 1960–70, to provide safety and security to tenants, to eliminate intermediaries and to reduce the power of landlords. Whereas the Act, based upon the belief of 'land for tillers', was able to bring land ownership of tenants over four per cent of agricultural land, many more tenants lost their tenant rights and means of livelihood. A detailed discussion is required on this issue to understand its multi-faceted impact on farmers. The point of discussion here is that despite being termed as illegal, tenancy is prevalent in many states.

"I try to empower other women too and train them in any new technique that I learn, and collectively we fight for our rights. Rural women are more ready to fight for their rights out of economic necessity. Urban women are more complacent because their husbands have jobs and perhaps this financial safety makes them unresponsive." Preeti Devi, a women farmer from Gorakhpur.

### RURAL-URBAN DIVIDE IN WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS

Oxfam India with Women Power Connect organized street plays and other public engagement activities in Delhi for youth engagement as part of a women's property rights campaign in 2013. One apparently upper-middle class couple joined the play and began discussing their own property. The wife looked quite surprised to know that she is the actual owner of their house. She knew she had signed several documents for a bank loan but she had assumed that the house was in joint ownership. The lower registration fee for women works as an incentive to register the house in the wife's name. This is an example and may be a rare one. However, discussions about urban women's property rights are rare, barring a few studies and the work of some organizations. Perhaps urban women are not as unresponsive as Preeti Devi thinks; however, urban women's property rights certainly do not fit in the productivity narrative usually used for rural women.

### TRANSFORMATIVE WOMEN LEADERSHIP

"Earlier I had only 5 *bighas* of land; gradually, I managed to buy more. I educated my children and increased my landed property as well. Today, I have 40 *bighas* of land. The initial 5 *bighas* are in my husband's name and the rest are in my name. I have registered 2 *bighas* in the name of my widowed daughter-in-law. I am in the process of getting land registered in the names of other daughters-in-law too." Lilawati Devi, Shahjahanpur, Uttar Pradesh.

"Our men-folk do not even lift a glass of water and expect us to do all household chores besides doing hard labour in the fields. Now there is a slight change in their attitude because we have started demanding some care from them." Kalawati Devi, Kaccha, Ambedkar Nagar, Uttar Pradesh.

"I am an independent woman farmer. I do not depend upon my husband to help me. I do all the sowing of crops myself. I grow paddy, wheat, mustard, maize, millets, *til* (sesame) and vegetables on the two-and-a-half *bighas* of agricultural land, which my husband inherited. I sell my agricultural produce in the nearby market that is 1 km away and also in the *mandi* in Gorakhpur." Teeja Devi, Lakshmipur, Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh.

There was a *chak* road (a public thoroughfare on government land that cannot be sold or used for any construction) of the *gram samaj* in her village. The *gram pradhan* of the village was getting some construction done on this land for the *pradhan* of a nearby village, to whom he had probably sold that government land. When Teeja heard about this illegal construction, she

confronted the *pradhan* and threatened to go to the police station, if the construction were not stopped. She was told that the area was not marked as a *chak* road. She with other women farmers collectively pursued the case with revenue department and block office; in the end, *gram pradhan* was compelled to stop the construction process.

The land that Teeja tills is in the name of her husband; yet, he dare not sell it against her wishes. "If I want, I can get it in my name today. Once he wanted to sell some land. I told him to give half of it to me and then do whatever he wanted with his portion," she says.

With training and sensitization, revenue officials and *patwaris* can become change-makers and transform the cumbersome process into an empowering one.

### **AWARENESS BUILDING AND CHALLENGING THE SOCIAL NORMS IS THE KEY**

The existing inequity in accessing and controlling resources by women is rooted in the patriarchal social norms. Progressive policy reforms and programmatic efforts will not be sufficient to transform the power equation. Many women, who received land from the government, expressed their preference to transfer the land in the name of their sons rather than their daughters. Women, who received joint land titles under state land programmes, under the FRA, were found to be unaware about the land title, their entitlements and the significance of this in their lives.

Grass-roots mobilization for sensitizing women about their rights and entitlements is imperative. Experiences in Bihar and the Aaroh campaign of Uttar Pradesh show that sensitized women not only fight for their claims but also know how to use their entitlements. And secure land rights, with access to information, not only benefit women economically but also

help them achieve other well-being issues, both for themselves and the community.

### **CONCLUSION**

Land rights are a complex, multi-faceted subject and each aspect needs deeper understanding and exploration for ensuring secure land rights for women. Cases from various countries, including India, prove that a single policy or programmatic initiative will not bring the desired change. A holistic approach is required to address the vulnerability and the differential needs of different women groups—single, divorced, widowed, married, etc. Ensuring secure land rights for women is not a simple task; What is needed is a continuous and collective effort at various levels. The realization of women about the need for land rights and their awareness of various land laws are essential steps in securing land rights for them. To bring about change in socio-cultural norms, engagement and contribution of the entire society will be required. In addition, policy reforms such as recognizing women as farmers by changing the definition of farmers, specific allocation for women farmers on agriculture schemes and agriculture gender budgeting can be significant steps towards ensuring women's rights and access to other agriculture resources.

---

The references for this article are available on request from [newsreach@pradan.net](mailto:newsreach@pradan.net).