



Scaling up Responsible Land Governance

ANNUAL WORLD BANK CONFERENCE ON LAND AND POVERTY
WASHINGTON DC, MARCH 14-18, 2016



Gender Equitable Land Governance in Odisha, India:

An analysis through VGGT-Gender Lens

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**Paper prepared for presentation at the
“2016 WORLD BANK CONFERENCE ON LAND AND POVERTY”
The World Bank - Washington DC, March 14-18, 2016**

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Abstract

Land reform initiatives carried out by Indian states post-independence were largely around distributive justice, without focusing on gender-equity, guaranteed by Indian constitution. Since 1980s, many Indian states have tried to ensure gender-equity in land grant programs through issue of joint titles. Initiatives of Odisha, towards gender-equity in land tenure governance, through such initiatives around homestead and other land grants programs, with an added focus on women-only titles to single women, have been acclaimed as good practices. Odisha has also attempted to increase women's participation in land policy-making and land governance institutions as well as in enhancing women's access to dispute-resolution mechanisms. This paper analyzes the state's Land Governance in terms of the five themes for administrators, technicians and professionals working in the land sector as per the gender-framework of FAO's VGGT along with an additional theme on community perspectives on women land rights, and recommends strategies for moving towards it.

Key Words: Land Rights, Land Grant, Joint title, Single-Women, Land Record, Surveying

1. Introduction

1.1 VGGT and International Initiatives

FAO's Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (VGGT), intends to ensure that women and men participate equally in their relationships to land, through both formal institutions and informal arrangements for land administration and management. It has outlined the importance of equitable and good governance of land tenure for progressive realization of poverty eradication, food security, sustainable livelihoods, social security, housing security, rural development, sustainable social and environmental development (FAO, 2012 and UN, 2014). Importance of 'Equal land rights of Women' has been acknowledged in the recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)⁵, where India is a signatory. The Indian constitution guarantees equality of women and men in the enjoyment of fundamental rights, which obliges the need of gender-sensitive legislation.

1.2 Indian Scenario

Land is a state subject⁶ in India. Through post-independence reform initiatives in the sixties states have carried out land reforms, largely based on principles of distributive justice, without adequately embedding gender justice, guaranteed through fundamental rights of equality enshrined by Indian constitution. Starting in the eighties, in response to international treaties and conventions as well as with influence of civil society, national (especially The Planning Commission) and state governments have been advocating following gender equity through joint titles to wife and husband in cases of transfer and/or distribution of agricultural land and house sites. Indian Agricultural Policy, 2000 mentions granting land rights to women wherever possible along with preferential allotment of ceiling surplus lands land to women.

1.3 Initiatives by State Governments

State Governments in India, of late, have been trying to ensure gender equity, especially in land grant programs, where government distributes public land among landless, by allocating titles in the name of women or jointly in the name of spouses. State of Bihar stipulates distribution of 50% of ceiling surplus

⁵https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/7891TRANSFORMING_percent20OUR_percent20WORLD.pdf

⁶ The seventh schedule of Indian constitution allocates powers and functions between Union and States. Union list consists of 100 items on which the parliament has exclusive power to legislate, State list consists of 61 items, out of which land is one

land accumulated by imposing land ceiling on holdings, among eligible women and allotment of Government land in the form of joint titles with the woman's name coming first. Another state, Andhra Pradesh practices distribution of Government land as well as transfer of purchased land in the name of women only. Karnataka grants Government land and transfer purchased lands through joint titles. In response to a decision taken at the Chief Ministers' Conference held in New Delhi, in 1992, West Bengal and Assam have been issuing 'Joint title' to both husband and wife in all land distribution schemes. Odisha, in 2002, issued a circular to earmark 40% of ceiling surplus land for distribution in the name of women, as a follow up to the State Revenue Secretaries' Conference held in New Delhi in October 2000,

1.4 Provisions in Religious and Customary Laws

Religious laws largely determine inheritance in India. An amendment to the Hindu Succession Act in 2005, brought about through strong advocacy by civil society organizations, treats unmarried daughters, like sons as coparceners and entitles them to receive a share of the undivided joint family property (including land) at birth. Muslim inheritance is governed by Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act of 1937, which has limited provisions for women land rights. Christian widows and daughters under the provision of Indian Succession Act, 1925 are believed to be more likely to inherit land than Hindu or Muslim women. There are multiple customary laws, which govern the *de-facto* land rights in the rural and tribal areas of Odisha, though they are not often codified and *de-jure* not recognized.

1.5 Odisha and Gender Equitable Land Governance

The homestead land grants program in Odisha, along with settling of government land, and ceiling surplus lands with landless families through joint titles, has been noted as gender-equitable good practice in enabling secure land tenure for women, with an added focus on vulnerable women. Gender-sensitive approach to land governance seemed to have come in Odisha, in the late eighties through a series of circulars issued to settle government lands and house sites in the names of both wife and husband. Similarly, forest rights recognized under the Forest Rights Act, 2006, also record names of the spouses to meet statutory requirements. The Government of Odisha has also made provisions to allot land in the name of vulnerable women like widows, unmarried women, divorced and women living below the poverty line. To address the rights of single women in land allocation programs, Government of Odisha, have established Women's Land Rights Facilitation Centres (now known as Women Support Centres) in 2010, in partnership with NGOs like Landesa and Action Aid, which are now operational in four districts.

Of late, the state has also made attempts to increase women's participation in land policy making process and institutions of land tenure governance as well as in enhancing women's access to land dispute resolution mechanisms. Beginning with this century, the state has started formulating progressive policies and ensuring participation and consultation in policy making viz. launch of Vasundhara scheme for universalization of homestead land rights through joint titles (2005), Gender sensitive Resettlement & Rehabilitation Policy (2006) and Odisha State Policy for Girls and Women, 2014 etc. During this decade, state has forged innovative partnerships with NGOs to identify and allot homestead land and to recognize Forest Rights for the vulnerable women groups (viz. widow/unmarried/divorcee).

1.6 Study Objectives

Considering the importance of GELG for Odisha and implications of the experience and best practices elsewhere to further GELG, a study has been carried out in the state with support from the World Bank in 2015. The objectives were to assess and analyze the efforts of the state towards GELG vis-à-vis the VGGT, to document the best practices and challenges and suggest recommendations for suitable orientations in policy and institutional arrangements while also delineating capacity building needs and strategies.

The study findings presented in this paper are structured around the five themes of the FAO's Technical Guide "*Governing land for women and men: A technical guide to support the achievement of responsible*

gender-equitable governance of land tenure” (FAO, 2013) that state’s are prescribed to do viz. Policy-making, Legal issues, Institutions, Technical issues and Communication strategy. We have added one more theme to share the perspectives of rural and tribal women, the target stakeholders, around women land rights.

2. Study Methodology

The study has followed a hybrid methodology comprising of desk research, thematic group consultations and fieldwork.

Field study was based on a purposive stratified sampling method. Six districts in the state were selected to represent the diversities around socio-economic and cultural contexts(coastal and tribal areas), institutional arrangements (with and without NGO collaboration), and as per type of land rights programs (homestead, agriculture and forest). From each selected districts, 1-3 blocks (sub-district administrative unit) were selected, with a total coverage 15 blocks. Within each selected block about two villages were selected for the fieldwork based on availability of local contact persons and the villagers. The study covers 26 villages in 15 blocks in these 6 districts.

In the study villages, in-depth interviews were conducted with targeted women recipients of land rights and focus group discussions (FDGs) were held with women groups. One hundred and fifteen respondents were interviewed covering different social categories of women. Besides, FGDs were conducted with eight Self Help Groups (SHGs) and two Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMC). Interviews with key stakeholders viz. revenue officials (16), PRI members (3), and NGO team members (8) were also conducted.

The study followed a deliberated process of consultations with policy makers (members of the State Legislature, land administrators etc.), legal experts (judges and advocates), researchers, civil society and academia to gather different perspectives on gender equitable land governance in Odisha and future needs.

Expert Stakeholder Consultations meetings (with 8-10 stakeholders drawn from a mix of LGAF Panel of Experts, stakeholders involved in the implementation of Women Land Rights Initiative) were organized on thematic areas⁷ for an exhaustive analysis of various issues and to arrive at policy recommendations.

3. Salient Findings of the study as per VGGT modules

3.1 Gender Equitable Participation in Land Policy Making

Gender-equitable participation in land policy-making follows directly from one of the ten core principles of implementation of FAO’s VGGT – consultation and participation. It provides for stakeholder (men and women) consultation and participation prior to decision-making; incorporation of mechanisms to access stakeholder implementation capacity and communication of gender-sensitive approaches in local languages and provision of technical and legal assistance to affected communities to participate in tenure policy formulation processes and projects.

In Odisha, the land policymaking process has largely been driven by the state legislatures with the support of bureaucrats. Non-state actors like international organizations, academia, corporate and civil society have also influenced the policy making to some extent. The formulation of the Resettlement and Rehabilitation Policy (R&R Policy) 2006, and the Odisha State Policy for Girls and Women (OSPGW), 2014, involved a wide range of stakeholders including women. OSPGW was formulated by a dedicated and women-dominated team comprising representatives from Government departments, Statutory body for women (State Resource Centre for women), United Nations Population Fund (UNFP), DFID,

⁷ Thematic areas included “Legal framework and issues around GELG” and “Institutional arrangements and options around GELG”

UNICEF, Academia, Civil Society, Subject Experts. However, it is difficult to prove that whether the participation of the affected-people was well informed and effective or not.

VGGT stresses on the need for ensuring recognition of legitimate tenure rights including customary and informal rights. It also emphasizes that the process of establishing these policies and laws should be participatory, gender sensitive and strive to make provision for technical and legal support to affected communities and individuals.

At present, Odisha has no mechanisms for legal recognition of customary tribal rights or tenures except for those under Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006. Odisha has 26% tribal population with 44% of its geographical area declared as Schedule area (tribal domain). Under the FRA, 2006, however, the government recognizes historical and often customary rights of forest dwelling communities and individuals and has made an attempt to provide maximum number of individual titles to tribal communities. The IFAD funded, Orissa Tribal Development Project (OTDP) implemented in the nineties, recognized customary rights on lands on hill slopes (above 10-degree slope) and such areas were settled in favor of tribal households in the form of joint titles.

The forest rights of Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFD) , provisioned under FRA is yet to be followed in practice. Informal tenures around non-forest common lands including community rights are not legally acknowledged in the state. Rights of unmarried women also does not find adequate place in the laws relating to land in Odisha.

Key gaps and challenges in policy making for GELG

- Nominal representation of women in land tenure governance framework in the context of policy making, except to some extent through their representation in local self-governance institutions
- Limited space for consultation and participation with land stakeholders including the affected communities and individuals
- Limited space for civil society participation in land policy making process in Odisha (except for OSPGW, 2014).
- Lack of provisions or mechanisms to involve private sector in gender equitable land governance policy making process

Capacity needs

There is need for training and sensitization on gender and land issues among men and women politicians and senior government officials for making policy-making process more inclusive, participatory and consultative, with a focus on women. This can be done through organization of workshops or consultations regularly on gender and land rights issues for government officials, politicians and other stakeholders.

For revenue officials, introducing training modules on gender and land issues will help in more inclusive policy making.

3.2 Module 2: Legal framework in Odisha and GELG

In the legal context, the VGGT outlines the need for rule based approach with more focus on communication of laws in applicable languages; fixation of accountability at every level ; non-discriminatory and gender sensitive recognition and safeguard of all tenure rights including the ones that not currently not protected; special attention to the recognition of rights of indigenous people through

participatory approach, and provisions to ensure women's equal access and participation in dispute resolution mechanisms including customary ones.

In the late eighties, state initiated schemes especially designed to realize the potential of gender-sensitive land governance. Beginning in 1989⁸, Odisha created new land rights through the allocation of Government lands (government wasteland, house sites and ceiling surplus lands) to landless people or by individualization of community tenure. These rights were usually given as joint titles in the names of the husbands and wives, providing an additional layer of legal protection for women Savath et.al (2014)⁹.

Table 1. Major Land laws governing women's land rights in Odisha

State Act	Gender equitable provisions
Orissa Land Reforms Act, 1960	Equality in access to ancestral property irrespective of the marital status ¹⁰ . After the death of a husband, the wife becomes a joint shareholder of the deceased's land, along with her children. If a family has more land than the ceiling limit set by the government, the surplus land is recorded in the name of the wife/daughter to avoid ceiling restrictions. When there is no male heir in the family, daughters get the Record of Rights (R&R) transferred to their names
Odisha Bhoodan and Gramdan Act, 1970 and ceiling surplus Act (2002 circular)	Earmarks 40 percent of ceiling surplus land for distribution among women. Of this, at least 40 percent is for women of disadvantaged groups, including ST and SC.
Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006	Provides individual and community tenure rights to all forest dwelling STs and OTFDs on all forestlands.

Source: UNDP (2008), GOO (2012 and 2013)

The state's journey towards gender sensitive land governance took a new shape after 2000 when it started formulating progressive policies or amending the existing policies viz. 40 percent reservation for women in distribution of ceiling surplus land (2002), launch of Vasundhara scheme (2005)¹¹, gender sensitive R & R policy (2006) etc. Through these initiatives, GOO ensured that women became land-owners and were considered equally important in the families. (Table 1)

⁸ In 1989, the Government observed that the Tehsildars⁸ are not issuing pattas/ intimation slips in joint names. Reiterating the earlier order, a letter⁸ was issued to emphasize the same. In case of widows or widowers, the *patta*/ intimation slip was to be issued in the name of the individual applicant. In other cases, it directed the Tehsildars to reject applications unless both husband and wife signed them.

⁹ In a recently concluded study on it was observed that in *Vasundhara* and *Gramakantha Paramboke (GKP)*, two of Odisha government's land titling programs, the emphasis on titling land jointly for husband and wife have provided an additional legal layer of protection to women

¹⁰ Section 2(21) of the Act includes widow, or an unmarried woman or a woman who is divorced or separated from her husband by a decree or order of a court or under any custom or usage having the force of law within the definition of "persons with disability". This allows all single women to lease their land whereas the Act prohibits land leasing for people not in this category.

¹¹ In June 2015, the ceiling of annual income of homesteadless was increased from Rs. 24,000 (369 USD) to Rs. 40,000 (616 USD) to increase the number of people eligible for land allotment.

Orissa Scheduled Areas Transfer of Immovable Property (OSATIP) (By Scheduled Tribes) Regulation, 1956), was brought in to protect lands belonging to people of the Scheduled Tribes (STs). It also regulates transfer of immovable property for a female member of the ST, who is married to a person not belonging to any ST. Under this Act¹², this shall be deemed to be a transfer made in favor of a person not belonging to a ST. Amendment brought 2001, banned land transfer to non-ST from ST households without any discrimination on gender basis.

Inheritance/Succession laws

Inheritance is largely determined by religious laws (applicable throughout the country). The Hindu Succession Act (HSA), hence, has a large influence on gender equity in land rights of dominant hindu community in India. The HSA (1956), (amended in 2005), brought through a strong advocacy by civil society organizations, provides that un-married daughters like sons, are coparceners¹³ and entitles them to receive a share of the undivided joint family property (including land) at birth. Coparceners acquire notional share in joint family property, which includes land to be realized upon inheritance. Coparcenary was limited to males in 1956 Act. (Deininger, 2013; Ramachandran 2008)

Muslim inheritance is governed by Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act of 1937, which has limited provisions for women land rights. The Christian widows and daughters under the provision of Indian Succession Act, 1925 are believed to be more likely to inherit land than Hindu or Muslim women (Obaikol, 2009).

Despite these provisions, the above three important Religious Acts suffer from criticisms on the issue of gender equity in inheritance of land. Deininger *et al.* (2012), found that though the 2005 amendment of HSA has led to an increase in girl's educational attainment in India, a substantial bias still persists in land inheritance. Further, women as "wives married into the family are still deprived of any share in the coparcenary property as a matter of right" (Datta, 2006). However, coparcenary rights envisaged by HSA (amendment), 2005 are yet to be realized, largely due to poor monitoring and facilitation by Government as well very poor awareness and continued patriarchy at the demand side. HSA (Amendment), 2005 also has the limitation of being applicable prospectively.

Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act of 1937 does not extend to agricultural land. Agricultural land is left for devolution by state law or, if state law is silent, by custom. Only some states, such as Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, extend Muslim Personal Law to agricultural land (Agarwal, 1994 and UNDP 2008). Under Indian Succession Act, 1925, the wife does not have any right over husband's property as long as her husband is alive (UNDP, 2008).

Rights of Indigenous people

Odisha has a 26 percent tribal population, consisting of 62 tribes, including 12 belonging to Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). They inhabit 44 percent of the state's geographical area (Schedule V Area). Indian Succession Act, 1925, often governs the tribal inheritance¹⁴. In the recent past (July 2015), the High Court of Himachal Pradesh has held that Hindu Succession Act would govern the inheritance rights of tribal women in the state, 1956 instead of the local customs. However, as per Section 25 of

¹² Section 3(1)

¹⁴ Section 3, part I of the act states that the State Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, either retrospectively from the sixteenth day of March, 1865, or prospectively, exempt from the operation of any of the following provisions of this Act, namely, sections 5 to 49, 58 to 191, 212, 213 and 215 to 369, the members of any race, sect or tribe in the State, or of any part of such race, sect or tribe, to whom the State Government considers it impossible or inexpedient to apply such provisions or any of them mentioned in the order.

Hindu Succession Act (Amendment) 2005, it is not applicable to tribal people, unless the Central Government makes a notification in this regard.

Odisha laws are mostly silent on recognition of rights of indigenous communities over non-forest common lands and fisheries (esp. on water bodies) in absence of formation of rules for Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act 1996 as well as implementation of Amendment of Orissa Gram Panchayat Act, 1964 in 1997. Customary rights of tribal communities face the problems of recognition as for custom to be recognized as law, it should be time immemorial, ancient and should not oppose public policy, as per the provision of Hindu Succession Act, 1956. This is often found difficult to be proved, hence often remain subject to interpretation, as commented by members from judiciary in the peer consultation process.

Access to Justice

The Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, enacted by the Parliament, came into force on 9th November 1995, with an object to establish a nationwide uniform network for providing free and competent legal services¹⁵ to the weaker sections of the society (including women) on the basis of equal opportunity. The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) has been constituted under this Act to monitor and evaluate implementation of legal services available under the Act.

GOO had launched a cadre of paralegal volunteers (with about 40 percent women), to work as mediums of communication and coordination between people and the SLSA, as well as providers of legal aid to poor and backward people. Graduates, with training by Legal Services Authority, were engaged to promote legal awareness among people in their locality and to conduct seminars on legal issues and rights. However, in the absence of any financial compensation (they got only a nominal amount for commuting) and formal office set up, their interest is dwindling. There was a reported demand for an honorarium of Rs. 1000 (15 USD) per month (UNDP, 2012).

District and Taluk level committees formed under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 require organizing Legal Literacy Camps to provide basic and essential knowledge to the vulnerable groups (includes women under the Act). Besides, the engagement of paralegals has contributed to increasing awareness among communities and a larger number of rural people approach the paralegals (UNDP, 2012).

Gaps and challenges

Odisha's attempt towards progressive and inclusive law making and gender equitable land governance face roadblocks largely due to entrenched patriarchy and inertia in land administration. Some of the specific gaps are discussed below:

1) Definition of family and single woman:

The definition of family under OLR Act, 1960 and Land Ceiling Act, 1974 often faces criticism and not uniform for easy interpretation and effective application¹⁶. However, for the first time,

¹⁵The Free Legal Services include: Payment of court fee, process fees and all other charges payable or incurred in connection with any legal proceedings; Providing Advocate in legal proceedings; Obtaining and supply of certified copies of orders and other documents in legal proceedings; Preparation of appeal, paper book including printing and translation of documents in legal proceedings.

¹⁶ OLR Act, 1960 defines family as the individual and his or her spouse and children. However, a childless widow is not considered a member of her deceased husband's family. Further, a mother is not treated as member of her son's family, although a son is a member of his mother's family. Since the family in relation to the mother would include the married daughter, it must also include widowed daughter (Maharani Bewa v. State of Orissa, 1985). Under Land Ceiling Act, 1974, a family unit comprises of husband, wife and up to three minor children.

OSGWG, 2014 included the term 'single women' to represent vulnerable groups like widow, unmarried, divorced etc.

2) **Preference of officials to allot land under Vasundhara through OPLE instead of OGLS**

Field level revenue staffs feel that allotment of land to homestead fewer families within Vasundhara scheme, as per the prescribed Orissa Government Land Settlement (OGLS) Act and Rules, is a lengthy and confusing process (viz. purchasing private land and allotting). In case of OGLS, the possession issues are mostly around non-demarcation of boundary or identification of plots. Land allotment under Orissa Prevention of Land Encroachment (OPLE) is considered easier, since this allows for regularization of permissible encroachment, but shows a high rate of non-possession. For land allotted under OPLE, the possession rate was 55 percent as against a rate of 70 percent for lands allotted under OGLS. This is largely because the allotment process followed through OPLE was often incorrect and women were usually allotted lands that they others have already encroached. This is a serious challenge for the state as it intends to provide landless women secure access, control and ownership over land.

3) **Awareness on Inheritance and Succession Provisions in Hindu Succession Act**

The Hindu Succession Act (2005), which brought hope to many with its latest amendment, is, by itself, neither adequate nor effective in ensuring gender equitable succession and inheritance. The awareness about the new provisions is extremely low, at hardly 3 percent (Field Study). Provision of prospective partitioning and interpretations around retrospective partitioning for un-partitioned property requires more clarity. The unscrupulous people find it easy to deny the rights of daughters and sisters as per HSA (Amendment), 2005.

4) **Land Rights of Transgender**

In spite of the Supreme Court judgement¹⁷ to add a third gender, there has been no attempt so far, to incorporate land rights of transgender or third gender in the state, which constitutes more than 15000 or about 4 percent of the total transgender population in the country (SECC, 2011). Some states viz. Tamilnadu, Kerala & Karnataka have already formulated special policies for the overall welfare of transgender communities. NLRMP has provisioned inclusion of transgender as third gender under 'Gender' parameter in land records. The practice of most transgender in Odisha, of migrating out and not staying with families, makes it difficult to integrate their name into land records. Odisha has recently created a new department namely Department of Social Security and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (SSEPD) which looks into social security of vulnerable groups including transgender. Though the state government is taking up various welfare measures for them, provision of secure land rights should be given the top most priority.

5) **Grounding of Lok Adalats in rural areas**

There is lack of awareness among the rural people about the existence of lok adalats and provisions of legal aid. The present field study found that almost none (3 percent) of the women respondents had heard of legal aid services and the functioning of Lok Adalats at Taluk and District level, although it has a provision of free legal aid to women.

¹⁷ "Recognition of transgender as a third gender is not a social or medical issue but a human rights issue," Justice KS Radhakrishnan, who headed the two-judge Supreme Court bench in his ruling on 14th April 2014.

Capacity Building Needs

The state needs to strengthen capacities of all stakeholders involved in legal drafting process as well as government executives who are required to understand the importance of gender sensitive provisions under different land laws for their effective implementation at the grassroots level. Following are some of the capacity building needs the state needs to look at:

- Exposure to decision makers on importance of inclusive legal drafting and law-making
- Introduction of training module on gender in land laws and circulars for Revenue and Disaster Management (RDM) department staffs.
- Both women and men should be provided training on access to justice through collaboration with civil society under Legal Service Authority Act and other revenue laws.
- All stakeholders involved in legal drafting process should be provided training on gender equitable legal drafting, rules and procedures for the formulation of equitable land laws

3.3 Module 3: Institutional framework for GELG

Equitable inclusion of both genders in all land institutions and governance processes helps in establishing a fair and responsible land governance mechanism that provides positive gains for society as a whole (FAO, 2013). In this context, the VGGT prescribe a consultative and participatory decision making process in land institutions in accordance with national laws and legitimate tenure rights; fixation of responsibility at levels of government for effective and fair delivery of services) and provisions to address all forms of capacity gaps for timely and effective implementation of gender sensitive policies and laws.

Land governance in Odisha has undergone reform in three fairly distinct phases – first, as post-independence land reform in the sixties; second, in the 1990s, with an emphasis on local Governance of land and to encourage investments in the State; and third, in the twenty-first century, with an integration of GIS and Information Technology (IT). All these reforms require expanding the ambit of the nodal Revenue Department, thus making it imperative to create a more inclusive institutional framework.

The Revenue & Disaster Management (RDM) Department looks after all revenue administration in the state with the support and cooperation of other departments (viz. General Administration, SC ST Development, Forest & Environment, and Women & Child Development etc.). The Board of Revenue (BoR)¹⁸ is the apex authority in revenue related matters. The judicial authority has been delegated to the Revenue Development Commissioners (RDCs). Policies related to land are being implemented by the BOR. At the District level, District Collectors oversee all revenue functions and report to the RDC of their respective zones. Each district is further sub-divided into one or several sub-divisions headed by the Sub-Collectors. The next lower and important administrative unit is the tehsil which functions under a Tehsildar. Each Tehsildar supervises Revenue Inspectors (RIs, or *patwaris*) who oversee a number of villages within the revenue circle. (An RI circle covers 20-30 villages)

¹⁸ Land administration in Odisha is mandated to two, parallel government agencies: the Revenue and Disaster Management Department, responsible for policy formulation and revenue collection; and the Board of Revenue, responsible for the implementation of land policy and judicial matters. The Board of Revenue (BoR) administers all Land Rules or Acts and being assisted by Secretaries and Offices of Revenue department. The Member, BOR, heads board of Revenue (BOR). It is the apex authority in the matter of revenue administration and revenue policy implementation. It also has judicial authority. Coordination of land reforms and maintenance of land records are undertaken by the BOR. It is colonial-inherited institution, importance of which is declining with time (Mearns and Sinha, 1999 and Odisha State LGAF Report, 2014)

Despite a reservation of 33 percent for women in various position, less than 10 percent of the total posts in the RDM department are held by women. With increased in women literacy, however, there is availability of adequate human resources for such positions¹⁹.

Women in local governance institutions

Institutions such as Local Watershed Development Committee, Water user associations, and customary land administration institutions often deal with issues at the interface of land and other natural resources, such as access to water for domestic use, water rights, customary access rights to water for irrigation, and access to rangeland for pastoral grazing (FAO, 2011). Women should formally involved in these land related institutions.

There are several institutions at the local levels that have provisions for the representation of women. For example, Gram Sabhas (village assembly) have complete powers²⁰ for tribal self-rule although provide these institutions tribal women equal rights to decide over their lands, implementation of the Act is pending the formulation of supporting rules. Further, the state government has made one-third reservation for women in Forest Rights Committee, 50 percent reservation in the Executive Committee (EC) of the Joint Forest Management Committees, one third reservation for women in the Irrigation Management Committees.

Women's Access to Land Institutions

Women's access to revenue offices is very limited. Data from the field survey showed that only 37 percent of women respondents had accessed revenue offices for their problems. Women's accessibility to revenue offices varies with districts, though tribal districts show better accessibility. Fifty percent women believed that revenue officers were cooperative. This figure was higher, at 60 percent for coastal women and lower, at 44 percent, for tribal women. This may be a positive outcomes of civil society engagement around institutional framework, as most of the samples in coastal districts are from Ganjam district, where WSCs are active with the joint efforts of district administration and Landesa. Engagement of civil society institutions has helped to ensure timely and effective delivery of services, which are otherwise delayed due to constraints of manpower in the RDM department.

¹⁹ It is noteworthy to mention that the literacy rate in Odisha has increased by 4.6 times from 15.80 percent in 1951 to 72.90 percent in 2011, growing at an annual rate of 2.59 percent, as against 2.35 percent at the national level, from 18.33 percent in 1951 to 73.0 percent in 2011.. The female literacy rate has also increased by 13.5 percentage points in the last decade, while the male literacy rate increased by 6.3 percent.

²⁰ As per the provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1994 (PESA)

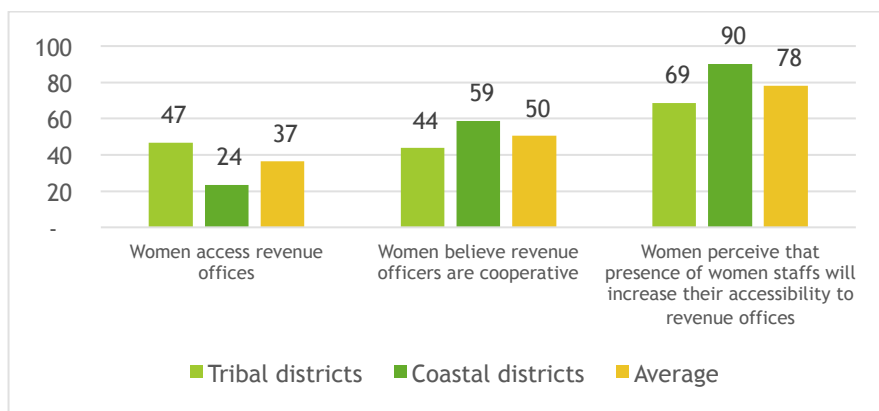


Figure 1: Women’s perception on institutional arrangements (in percent)

More than two thirds of the women were in favour of having women staff in revenue offices to feel it more accessible. Ninety percent of coastal women expressed the need for a higher number of woman revenue staff at the level revenue offices. This perception may be due to the presence of active WSCs in the coastal districts, especially in Ganjam. These centers operate at the Tehsil level, and are headed by a Woman Nodal Officer (WNO) at each tehsil. This has been a positive and productive outcome of Government-NGO partnerships in land governance.

Innovative institutions to enhance women participation

Odisha shows a distinct picture in terms of involvement of non-state actors in supporting the State Government in GELG. The support of multi-lateral agencies viz. the World Bank, IFAD etc. helps the state to overcome institutional challenges and limitations. The institutional innovations in Odisha include the Community Resources Person model²¹ (OTELP in collaboration with RDI), Women Support Centre program²² (district administration in collaboration with Landesa and Action aid), Phailin²³ Rehabilitation special scheme²⁴ for landless households” etc. Besides, some CSOs organise capacity development for PRIs, women title holders and women groups with the objective of increasing institutional participation of stakeholders. For example, Vasundhara (a local NGO), in partnership with the district administration of Kandhamal, has piloted an initiative “sambhavana” to enhance women’s access to and participation in

²¹ The program approach was based on training a local youth, the Community Resource Person, identified by the community to work as a “barefoot revenue (land) official”. He was trained by the facilitator (RDI) to assist in the identification and allotment of government land to landless families. Initially, this program was launched in seven districts (Tribal Sub Plan blocks) covering 1042 villages. Given the success of this approach, the state government further extended the CRP initiative to 17974 villages, covering 118 Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) blocks during 2012-17. As per distribution figures (January 2014), 17,050 individual land titles were distributed in 551 villages. Of these, 93 percent of homestead and farmland were jointly titled, and 2.5 percent were women-headed households.

²² It is a pioneer women centric institutionalized initiatives around homestead land allocation in Odisha. The GOO in collaboration with Landesa and Action Aid, established 76 WSCs in four districts of Odisha (Ganjam, Mayurbhanj, Koraput, and Kalahandi). WSCs aim is to ensure that single women can avail the benefits provided by several government services including land titling programs and social security entitlements. So far (till September 2015), 3000 single women have been provided land through WSCs. This program has set a target to provide secure land rights to 5 lakh single women in the state. The GOO plans to set up WSCs in other districts of Odisha.

²³ It was one of the severe cyclone to hit the east coast of Odisha in 2013 that affected over 8 million people in eastern state of Odisha.

²⁴ Soon after the devastating phailin, the state government with the support of the World Bank has initiated this scheme for the poor landless and/or homestead less people living in villages within five kilometres of the coastline of the cyclone prone Ganjam district. Under this scheme, affected families, with or without land ownership, were identified and allotted both land pattas and housing facility. As a part of this scheme, allotment of land pattas was done either jointly in the name of the husband and wife or individually in the case single women (widowed, unmarried above 30 years or divorced).

institutional processes. They aim to build resilience among women title holders through timely linkage under different social security schemes. The program focuses on organization of orientation workshops at Gram Panchayat level with women FRA title holders, PRI members, FRC members, SHG members and government officers (ITDA staff under SC ST Development Department). This has improved mutual understanding, brought about clarity to their roles in the decision making process and aided institutional collaboration in the forest rights recognition process. In Rayagada, PRADAN (a NGO), carries out training programs to enhance the capacity of WSHGs. This has increased their access to and participation in land tenure governance institutions (Field Study).

Gaps and Challenges

In spite of the considerable progress made in Odisha to promote gender-equitable land governance, land administration in general, and gender-equitable land governance in particular face several challenges.

The officials of the revenue department have multiple administrative duties apart from land governance.. In recent years, there has been a rapid increase in other responsibilities, that cover disaster relief operations, and several welfare programs related to land distribution etc. At the same time, the department suffers a shortage of manpower, with several positions lying vacant. Very few recruitments have been made especially at the field staff level.

Legacy of RDM department as a law enforcement agency, built in attitudinal barriers among its staff and perception barriers with the communities (in approaching RDM department and demanding rights) are major constraints that reduce access to and constrain service delivery of women land rights. Women constitute less than 10 percent of staff in RDM department, in spite of one third reservation for women for the position of RI and availability of sufficient qualified women graduates (about 34 percent).

Table 2: Gender Equity in land administration in Odisha

Position	No sanctioned posts	of In position	No of female staff
Tehsildars	317	228	41
Odisha Revenue Service (ORS) Officers	1180	395	20
ORS Officers as Additional Tehsildar		238	11
Total no. of staff (Assistant Section Officer (ASO)/Section Officer/Desk Officer) in RDM Department		168	6
Officers in RDM (Revenue and Disaster Management) Department @ Secretariat		28	2
RI/Assistant RI/ Amin (Field surveyors under RI) in 2 tehsils [#]		42	10

Source – FOR ALL OTHERS: Personal interview with Staff of RDM Department

[#]Ganjam & Mayurbhanj- Field Study

Capacity Needs

Policy reforms should be followed by efforts to sensitize government or local leaders, traditional leaders, and others with decision-making power over land distribution and management, so they are able to protect women's rights to land. Officers need to be sensitized to understand why it is important to protect and increase women's ownership and management of land.

Appropriate and iterative capacity building of RDM department and other stakeholders is critical to ensuring women land rights. Government should consider introducing academic modules on gender and land rights in the pre-service (entry stage) and in the refreshers' Training Programs of OAS, ORS, RIs, ARIs and Amins.

3.4 Module 4: Technical Issues in GELG

In the context of technical issues, the VGGT provides guidance on equal rights recognition in the land records; legal recognition of informal tenure through a participatory approach; safeguard of land rights of legal heirs and against infringement of legitimate tenure rights; fair registration processes, regulated spatial planning; land restitution and redistributive reforms. In addition to general administration and management issues, the VGGT emphasizes gender sensitive land survey, titling, registration, taxation and valuation and land use planning. Further, it also talks about a strong data management system to maintain transparency and ensuring social and gender equity.

Land Survey

In Odisha, surveys are being taken up through private vendors; ensuring involvement of women as per stipulated one-third reservation may not be possible.

Public consultation and participation in the survey process has not been clearly spelt out. Experiences of WSCs as well as rights recognition through FRA, have demonstrated the usefulness of involving Community Institutions/PRI (as in FRA implementation) and CSOs (as in OTELP, CRP and WSC) in making enumeration inclusive, effective and transparent through such participatory process. Absence of such participatory survey of land and updating of textual and spatial records as per actual field status, have led to limited possession, defeating the objective of land allotment.

Land Titling

Odisha had introduced joint titling of land records uniformly across the state in 1989, following which, all newly allotted rights on government lands are recorded in the name of both spouse. An analysis of land records²⁵ of four districts of Odisha (Jagatsinghpur, Baragarh, Koraput and Sambalpur consisting of about 1.5 million records), indicate that about 9 percent of the records were in the name of only women. In terms of joint title, the land records are almost double (18 percent) than the 'women only' records. Koraput, a tribal district has the highest share of joint-titled land records, followed by Jagatsinghpur (Coastal district). Koraput also has the highest share in terms of land recorded in the name of women or jointly.

²⁵ The data pertains to all land records downloaded from Bhulekh website (online land record portal) in Apr-June, 2014.

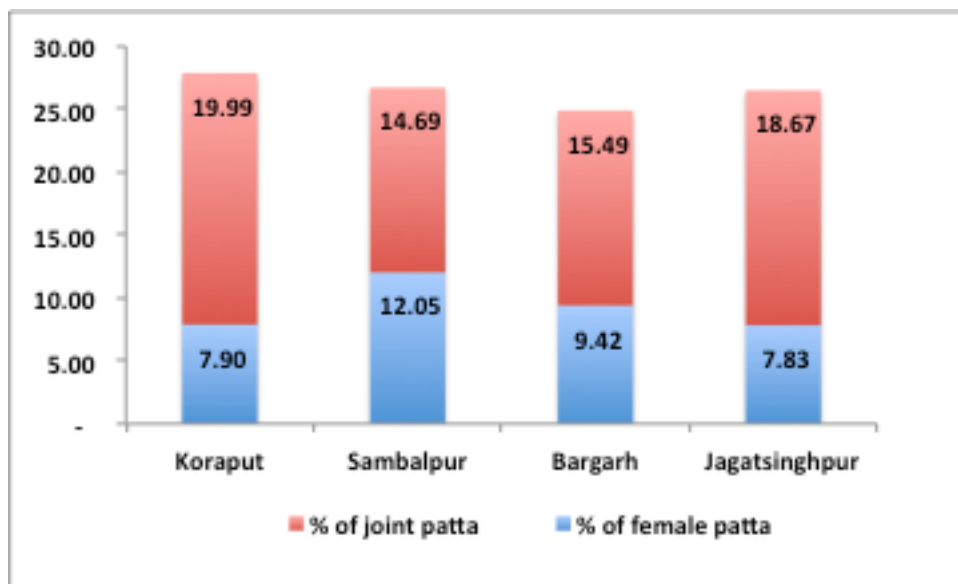


Figure 2: Gender wise status of land records in 4 districts of Odisha (Bhulekh Records, April 2014)

Together (either singly or jointly), a little more than one fourth of the records (26.5 percent) are in the names of women in these districts. When segregated across agricultural and homestead lands, one can find more homesteads are recorded in the name of women, especially with more ‘joint patta’ which confirms to the Government’s gender-equitable initiative around homestead land. However considering the percentage under homestead and other lands as well as smaller size of homestead plots, there is a long way to go, to achieve gender equitable outcomes.

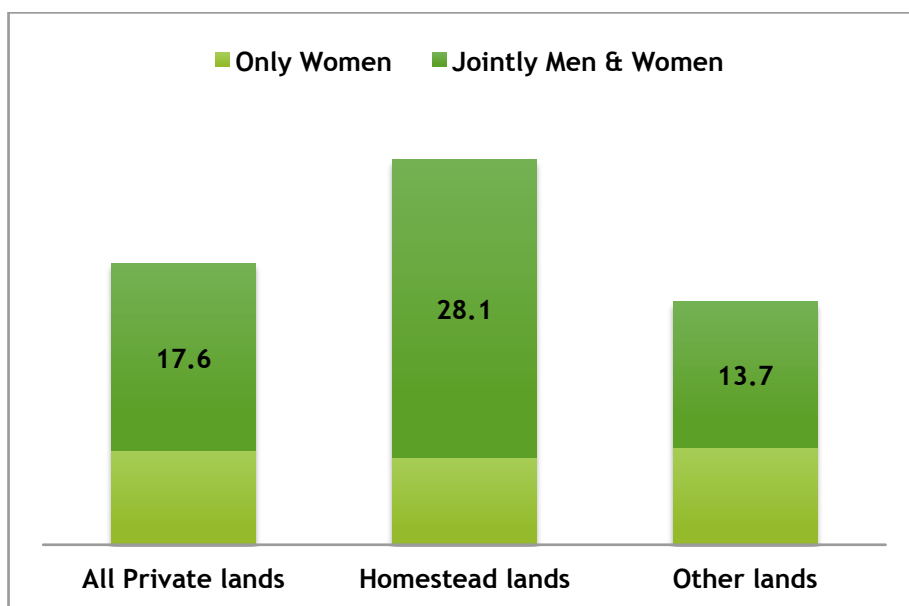


Figure 3: Gender wise disaggregated land records around homestead and other lands in 4 districts of Odisha in percentage (Bhulekh Records, April 2014)

Analysis of field study data collected on homestead title holders (includes GKP and land allotments under other schemes like Vasundhara) in four random villages, (in Ganjam, Rayagada, Koraput and Balasore districts), indicates that 74 percent of total homestead titles were joint, 12 percent were in the names of women and 14 percent were in men's names.

Government of Odisha in 2008, increased the size of homestead land under land grant schemes up to 10 decimal (0.04 ha) from earlier limit of 4 decimal (0.016 ha) to homesteadless households including women. An analysis of homestead titleholders of three villages (in Ganjam, Rayagada and Koraput districts) indicates that the average size of homestead holdings was around 2 decimal. Average holding size for men was 2.3 decimals, more than the average for women (2 decimal) and for joint titles (less than 2 decimal). This suggests that there was discrimination in the practice of allotment of plots, the smaller plots being given to women. Therefore, while land rights for women are stressed upon in policy and in secondary legal documents, in reality, there continue to be problems and constraints for women in exercising these rights.

Gender responsive land record management

Following a recent order²⁶ of Department of Land Resources, GoI, Odisha has started including 'gender' in land records. However, as per interview with NIC officials responsible for maintaining the website, the addition will be applicable prospectively to new records, without changing the existing 14 million land records. There is no gender-based differentiation in providing access to the registration process, and the stamp duty is the same, at five percent for both men and women. However, the OSPGW, 2014, envisions a positive discrimination in favor of women, with a reduced stamp duty. Government is considering its implementation.

Challenges

The following are some of the gaps or challenges the state needs to address:

- Gender disaggregated data on land records are not available in Bhulekh (land record portal of Odisha Revenue Department, hosted through NLRMP); proposed inclusion of gender parameter being planned prospectively may ignore changes in existing 14 million land records; online spatial database Bhu-naksha is not updated;
- Land distribution, redistribution and restitution schemes not maintaining and reporting gender-disaggregated information;
- Few women in technical positions viz. survey and mapping and lesser capacity around technical aspects of gender equitable land governance despite availability of sufficient number of female technical graduates (as per census 2011, more than 35 percent of total technical graduates are female in the state);
- Absence of consultative and participatory processes around survey and mapping and spatial planning;
- Lack of mechanism to ensure allocation of right and equal size of land to men and women under homestead land grant schemes.

Capacity Needs

²⁶ In April 2015, Department of Land Resources, GoI, has advised the states to introduce a "gender" field for landowners in their property records, as part of NLRMP. West Bengal (has already notified), Andhra Pradesh (started following the practice) and Odisha (NIC is creating the attribute for prospective recording) are the three states which have started the process of complying with the directive. However, updating of the records with gender attributes will happen prospectively.

http://articles.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/2015-04-18/news/61278888_1_land-ownership-women-workforce-property-records

Government should consider introducing course on technical issues around gender and land rights in the pre-service (entry stage) and refresher's Training Programs of OAS, ORS, RIs, ARIs and Amin.

Training topics would include:

- Gender inclusive land survey and record management (by ensuring women's equitable participation in surveying processes and record updating/management and enhancing women's easy access to land records)
- Monitoring of GELG with the use of modern technology

3.5 Module 5: Getting the message across

Communication and awareness raising are crucial to changing values and attitudes, including those about gender and land tenure governance. Communication can mobilize people for development actions, such as claiming their land rights, while helping to build consensus on problems and their possible solutions through the participation of all stakeholders (FAO/GTZ, 2006). In the context of communication, the VGGT prescribes transparency, availability and accessibility of land-information in applicable languages in a gender sensitive manner especially to indigenous peoples and other communities with customary tenure systems and implementation of redistributive reforms by ensuring receipt of full and clear information by affected parties.

Gender Sensitization and Legal Literacy

Nearly, eighty five percent of people in Odisha live in rural areas. Rural people in general and rural women in particular have very limited access to information about land related issues, schemes and their roles in the land governance process.

In Odisha, the District Legal Service Authority (DLSA) and Taluk Legal Services Committees are required²⁷ to organize Legal Literacy Camps²⁸ to provide basic and essential knowledge to the vulnerable groups (includes women under the Act) so that they understand the law, their rights under the law and that they can eventually assert their rights. It also aims to educate the weaker sections of the society on their rights and to encourage them to settle their disputes through Alternate Dispute Redressal (ADR) Mechanism. Publicity is done through hoardings, wall posters, leaflets, banners etc. to spread legal literacy.

Further, to widen the network of *Lok Adalat* and other legal services, the SLSA has introduced Mobile Legal Services²⁹ as per the guidelines received from the Central Legal Services Authority. The objective of this program is to approach the poor and marginal sections of the society (including women) living in remote rural areas who are otherwise unable to approach the Legal Services Authorities.

Under the aegis of the State Legal Service Authority, a Legal Aid and Mediation Publicity Centre was established in 2009, to spread awareness about various legal services, provision of free and competent legal aid, mediation mechanisms, and other welfare schemes.

The state has engaged paralegals³⁰ (about 6 per Tehsil) to promote legal awareness among the people in their locality and to conduct seminars on legal issues and rights. This has contributed in increasing

²⁷ As per the provisions of Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 and Orissa State Legal Services Authority Regulation, 1996

²⁸ These camps are organized by District & Taluk Legal Services Committees to create legal awareness about the existing laws or policies and also guide the community for the settlement of disputes through Alternate Dispute Resolution mechanisms.

²⁹ The objective of this program is to approach the poor and marginal sections of the society (including women) living in rural areas who are unable to approach the Legal Services Authority to get the service provided under the Legal Services Authorities Act and to enforce their legal rights.

³⁰ The educated local youths are trained as para legal to promote legal awareness.

awareness among communities and a larger number of people now approach the paralegals for assistance (UNDP, 2012).

However, RDM department has so far not put in place any such mechanism for organizing communication about land policies, laws and programs.

Apart from government initiatives, some CSOs are also involved in land literacy programmes. For example, Landesa, in collaboration with CARE India, has implemented a “Land Literacy Program” in CARE-Pathway project villages of Kalahandi and Kandhamal districts of Odisha. In Mayurbhanj district, this program has been piloted in partnership with Odisha Watershed Mission (OWM) and is presently limited to only two blocks, with 50 women groups. Land based training has been integrated to their existing training module of OWM. Landesa aims at bringing all 8000 such groups under the umbrella of Land Literacy Program.

Similarly, In Rayagada, PRADAN imparted training on gender and land rights to 200 SHG members, mostly landless and single women (widow/divorcee/separated). The program discussed land rights including both formal and customary land tenure. This program has increased community awareness about land rights including rights under government schemes, inheritance/succession rights, mutation etc. Besides, this has also increased their bargaining power in the society, access to revenue offices, participation in local land governance institutions and household decision making process etc. (as observed during field study).

Data gathered from the primary survey suggests that the efforts towards legal awareness have not reached the women in tribal and rural areas adequately. As per the study, only 3 percent of the women respondents reported to have heard about legal aid services and functioning of Lok Adalats at Taluk and District level or about the provision of free legal aid for women. (Field Study)

Awareness about Inheritance/Mutation/Partition

The findings of field study indicate that women in general have limited awareness about inheritance laws and rights. Awareness levels on regional and caste basis are as follows:

- Women of the tribal districts have higher awareness (60 percent) about inheritance rights than women from coastal districts (51 percent).
- Tribal women (74 percent) also found to be more aware than SC (20 percent) and other caste (36percent) women.
- Married women (65 percent) are more aware about inheritance rights than single women: widows (38percent), divorced (40 percent) and unmarried (36 percent).

Challenges

Two key reasons for poor access are physical remoteness and low level of literacy. Community awareness and demand for land allotment schemes are limited in comparison to awareness about and demand for other developmental entitlements. Low land literacy is often cited as the reasons for landlessness, especially landlessness among women and tribal (field study and stakeholder interviews).

Some of the main gaps and challenges for increasing legal literacy in the state are

- Lack of initiatives and efforts by concerned departments for effective communication and gender-messaging, largely due to resource and capacity limitations;

- Lack of coordination and convergence among Government and Civil Society in awareness generation activities or approach;
- Very limited efforts around making available information on legal provisions, rights and processes around tenure governance in applicable local languages including tribal dialects and making that gender-accessible;
- Lack of provisions for office & financial assistance to paralegal volunteers for better service delivery;

Capacity Needs

Government should consider introducing course on gender-equitable and inclusive communications strategies around land tenure governance in the pre-service (entry stage) and refreshers' Training Programs of OAS, ORS, RIs, ARIs and Amin.

Training topics would include

- Gender inclusive IEC (Information Education Communication) Strategy
- Effective communication, networking and GO-NGO coordination

3.6 Module 6: Community perspectives on GELG

The present study gathered perceptions of women on secure land rights, constraints to fair and equitable access to and control over land, implications of secure land rights, perceptions around future inheritance of land and participation in household decision making process.

Perception on importance of land rights

Almost two-third of women interviewed for this study felt the need of having a secure land rights as an insurance and security against threats of illegal possession, displacement and future landlessness etc. Land right was perceived to provide livelihood for 45 percent of rural women respondents (Figure 4)

Implications of land rights on women

Majority of women believe that secure land rights have productive implications on their self-esteem (53 percent) and dignity, followed by better food and nutritional security (37 percent) at household level (Figure 3).

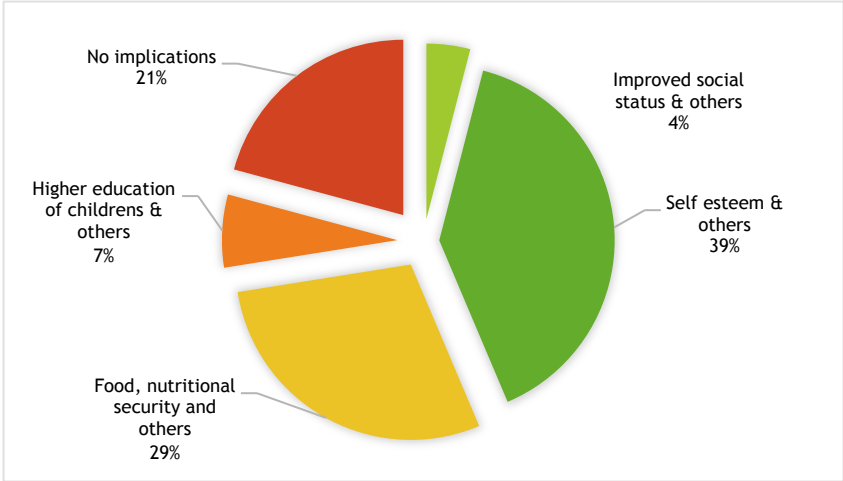
On the other hand, the women who are still fighting for possession over the allotted land, mostly single women, perceive that homestead land rights will have no impact on their socio-economic status.

Possession of land allotted

Secure and timely possession of land allotted is imperative for productive use of land by landless women. The good intention, pioneering initiatives and land grant-achievements of the state seem to be defeated to some extent by limited possession of the land allotted to the women. Field investigation revealed possession in two out of every three-homestead allotment.

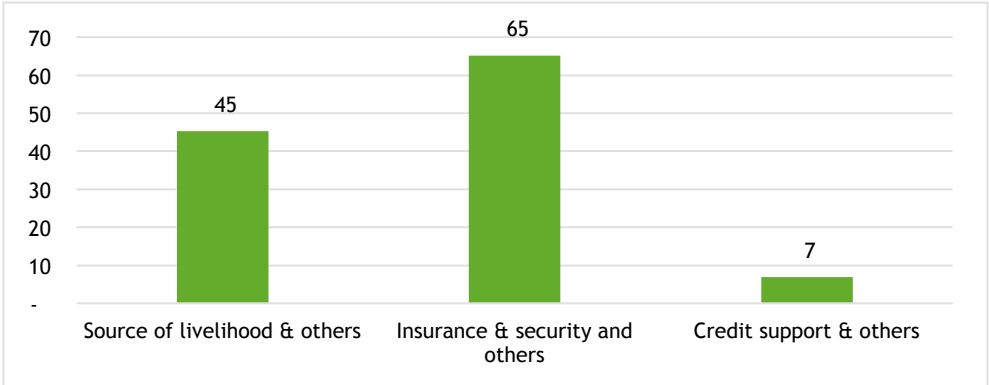
Ironically, the percentage of possession is low in the state and mostly single women are the victims of non-possession (42 percent), in comparison to married women (18 percent), thus continuing in the spiral of insecurity and landlessness.

Unsuitable location of land (29 percent) and no demarcation of boundary (29 percent) seem to be major causes of non-possession of land. Forceful possession by others (24 percent) and lack of proper



identification of the plot (18 percent) also influence possession.

Figure 4: Women’s perception on importance of land rights



Impacts of land rights on women

The survey responses suggest that land rights have a big impact on the lives of women, especially for single women. Due to the improved self-esteem and economic condition, they are better settled in life and have also reported more proposals for marriage or re-marriage. The responses also highlight the predominant rural perspective that marriage provides a social security that is not available in the same measure to single women. There is a strong attitudinal bias against single women, in rural areas. Land ownership seems to change that bias and command them respect and higher social status.

Figure 5: Implications of land rights on women

Future inheritance of land

Almost half of the women interviewed wanted their son/s to inherit the land. However, it seems to have a caste effect with more SC (80 percent) favoring son followed by ST (65 percent) and other caste (29 percent). Only one in seven women, was willing to pass on the land to daughters, while about 17 percent wanted both sons and daughters to inherit.

Decision making on land

Decision-making is one of the three core principles of good governance. Participation in decision-making process elevates the confidence level as well as societal position of women. The study found that any decision on land is either joint in case of married women or self in case of single women. Almost all (52 out of 54) married women interviewed, informed that the decisions on land are being taken jointly. Joint decisions were also more common among STs.

4. Way forward

Providing land or homestead land to landless women is only the first step forward for GELG. Having laid the foundation for this, GOO now needs to work towards an enabling environment for and engendering access to the decision-making process. This study suggests a set of context specific actions for operationalization of GELG in the state. Following are 6 broad recommendations made towards gender equitable land governance in Odisha, which is bigger in scope, than just making land records in the name of women. Each recommendation is substantiated with rationale and translated into action points, suggesting the potential implementer (as many action points envisage role of other departments apart from RDM Department) along with a priority, easiness and time frame for implementation.

- Ensure Inclusive identification of single women and women headed households in the surveys³¹ undertaken to identify landless and homestead less
- Enhance Land Literacy among Women and increase their access to entitled land services³² and information about schemes and applicable laws
- Strengthen RDM department and Build Capacity of Staff to make it gender sensitive; ensure that the office environment and service delivery process are gender accessible and equitable
- Monitor and Report the status of Women Land Rights, annually, in line with the indicators finalized under the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal³³
- Undertake a review of the existing legal framework around land in the state and carry out refinement/amendment to ensure gender-equitable land governance
- Arrange convergence of land allotment programs with other eligible public services entitlements for women for holistic livelihoods improvement

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³¹ Viz. the recently taken up Survey as per circular no Ag-1/2015/17959/R&DM, 19 June 2015, following enhancement of income limit to Rs 40,000 per year

³² Including those defined under Odisha Right to Public Services Act 2012

³³ percentage of women, men, indigenous peoples, and local communities with secure rights to land, property, and natural resources, measured by (i) percentage with documented or recognized evidence of tenure, and (ii) percentage who perceive their rights are recognized and protected.

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