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**EMPOWERING ADOLESCENT GIRLS THROUGH LAND:
A PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP IN WEST BENGAL, INDIA**

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Abstract

In 2012, Landesa and the government of West Bengal, India, entered an innovative partnership aimed at using land to reduce risks facing rural adolescent girls, including poverty, malnutrition, lack of education, and early marriage. Landesa has piloted SABLA, a government-sponsored program focused on enabling girls through interventions on nutrition support, life skills education, and vocational education. To SABLA's curriculum, Landesa has added components focused on land rights, assets, and land-based livelihoods. Pilot features discussed include girls groups, peer leader methodologies, community engagement, a land rights and land-based livelihoods curriculum, and partnerships with government stakeholders. The strategic public-private partnership has achieved noteworthy results: girls are significantly more likely to earn income, hold economic assets, inherit land from their parents, attend school, delay marriage, hold relevant legal and life skills knowledge, and feel a sense of overall empowerment. The partnership also holds significant potential to affect millions of girls. While Landesa has so-far completed year-long pilot projects with roughly 48,000 girls, these pilots have focused on developing sustainable methods that leverage and build the government's capacity to take over the work in the long term and to scale it across many districts and states in India.

Key Words:

Adolescent girls, child marriage, community engagement, inheritance

I. Introduction

Land is a critical asset in most developing countries. It is especially critical for the rural poor, most of whom rely upon land to survive, but do not have rights to the land they farm. Secure land rights can provide families the assets they need to break generational cycles of poverty. Land serves as a source of income through agricultural production and sale, and may make owners a more attractive credit risk to lenders. Rural households' rights to land largely define access to housing, food and nutrition, as well as the ability to realize empowerment, social status within the community, and political power.

Who in the household benefits from land rights, however, depends on who within the household holds those rights. Although women are key to food production in the developing world, they often do not have secure rights to the land they farm and are denied equal rights to access, inherit, or own it. As a result, women often depend on male family members – husbands, fathers, or brothers, whom they may lose to illness, violence, divorce, or migration – as their only link to their primary source of food, income, and shelter. Lack of secure land rights puts women in a vulnerable position and can exacerbate other household and community inequalities. Conversely, when women have secure rights to land and when girls are well-positioned to realize future land rights, there can be a host of benefits, not only for themselves, but for their families and communities (Giovarelli 2009).

Research shows a range of benefits – including gender equality and women's empowerment, nutrition and food security, reduction of disease and violence, and environmental sustainability – when women have secure rights to land and related assets and resources. Such rights can lead to access to capital and productive markets and can reduce women's vulnerability in old age or in the event of divorce, abandonment by a spouse, or the death of a spouse.

Women face many obstacles to realising secure land rights, many of which begin early in life; discrimination and exploitation on the basis of gender often start from the day of birth, and most girls in the developing world will have vastly different experiences than those of their brothers and boys in their community. Positioning girls to realise secure land rights as women can increase the ability of women, their families, and whole communities to enjoy these benefits. As discussed below in this paper, it can also help girls alleviate some of the immediate risks and vulnerabilities that they face as adolescents, including early marriage, malnutrition, and lack of education.

This paper discusses an innovative partnership between Landesa and the Department of Women and Child Development (WCD) in West Bengal, India, aimed at doing just this. This partnership builds on the

Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for the Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (SABLA), a WCD programme focused on reducing girls' social and economic vulnerabilities and enabling their self-development and empowerment through multiple interventions of nutrition support, life skill education, and vocational education.

In partnership with WCD, Landesa has added to SABLA a curriculum on land rights and land-based livelihoods, working to increase girls' and communities' understanding of girls' land-related rights and helping girls to use land to create assets, demonstrate their value to their family and community, and have some control over their futures.

Landesa's evaluation of the project found that this public-private partnership has already achieved significant results: girls are significantly more likely to earn income, hold economic assets, inherit land from their parents, attend school, delay marriage, hold relevant legal and life skills knowledge, and feel a sense of overall empowerment. These results are discussed below and drawn from Landesa Security for Girls Through Land: Results from Pilot Year in Tufanganj-II, West Bengal, 2012-2013, by Vivien Savath (internal report).

Moreover, the partnership holds significant potential to affect millions of girls. While Landesa has so-far completed year-long pilot projects with roughly 48,000 girls, these pilots have focused on developing sustainable methods that build the government's capacity to take over the work in the long term and to scale it across many districts and states in India, generating broader and sustainable change.

II. Women's Land Rights: Benefits and Barriers

Benefits

Secure rights to land and other productive resources provide a foundation on which to build an equitable, secure, and sustainable world. For a vast majority of people, particularly in developing countries, the ability to access, use, own, control, or otherwise make decisions about land and related assets and resources largely determines their access to economic opportunity, standard of living, resilience to shocks, and food and nutrition security. It also shapes their social status, political power, and decision making within their communities.

While secure land rights are foundational building blocks for numerous development objectives, it is not enough that men possess such rights. To realize their full, transformative potential, women too must hold these rights. For women, secure rights to land and related resources enhance their rights to self-determination and support their well-being, as well as that of their families and communities. Research

shows benefits across development areas when women have secure rights to land: family nutrition and health improves; women become less vulnerable to contracting HIV/AIDS; HIV-positive women may be better able to cope with the consequences of AIDS; women may be less likely to be victims of domestic violence; children are more likely to receive an education and stay in school longer; women may have better access to micro-credit; and women's participation in household decision-making increases UN Women and Landesa, 2012).

State of Women's Land Rights in India

Women face multiple barriers to accessing and benefitting from secure land rights. Census figures from 2001 show that 49.6 million women in India work in agriculture and allied activities, and approximately 20% of rural households are women-headed due to widowhood, desertion, or out-migration of men (Saxena, 2012).

About 60 – 80% of food and nearly 90% of dairy products are produced by these women. Rural women work as labourers doing much of the pre-production, production, harvest and post-harvest activities. Increasingly, women's groups in rural India are taking up agriculture, horticulture and animal rearing as livelihoods activities of the group (Brown and Chowdhury 2002).

Despite these strong connections between women and the land they use, land continues to be heavily subject to the control of men. The Indian image of a farmer remains male, defined not by who works on the field but by who owns the field. Less than 13% rural land in India is operationally controlled by women, and that covers only about 11% of the land area ('A Land of My Own' Factsheet- Oxfam India).

In India, women have the legal right to inherit, purchase, and own land just as men have such rights. However, while country-wide figures on how many women inherit land are not available, a study conducted in 2011 in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar showed that only 12% of female respondents have inherited or believe they will inherit land from their parents (UN Women and Landesa, 2012). And when her family purchases land, a woman has no legal ownership right to the land unless her name appears on the deed or other land documents. Landesa's field studies conducted in different states of India revealed that very few women own land. In most parts of India, women are not owners of household land and many families have never considered purchasing land in the name of the daughters or other women in the family. In case of West Bengal, a study conducted by Landesa suggested that a very few rural women own either agricultural land or the homestead they live on (Brown and Chowdhury 2002).

Barriers

Globally, barriers to women's empowerment include inadequate legal standards and poor implementation of laws as well as discriminatory social norms, attitudes, customs, traditions, and government programs. With respect to land, the result of such barriers is that women are less likely than men to have secure land rights, and where women do have rights to land the area tends to be smaller and the land of poorer quality than that of men.

Cultural prohibitions against women's ownership of land can sometimes be more powerful than written laws that allow for women's ownership and can limit formal rights in practice. In India, a fairly progressive legal framework confers considerable rights to women to own and inherit land. However, gender discrimination and social stigma often thwart a woman's ability to effectively claim or exercise control over her land (Rao 2012). Women often forfeit their right to inherit land out of a fear that they will cause conflict within their family or harm their relationship with their brothers, whom they must rely upon if they are in need or if their marriage ends. In some cases, this social practice even works within the law, where families pressure women to formally sign over their inheritance rights to their brothers (Sircar 2013).

In India, a number of state-level land allocation programmes have targeted women. Among Indian states, West Bengal is recognized as a leader in implementing land reform programmes and redistributing so-called ceiling surplus land to landless families. Notably, West Bengal has taken the positive step of adopting a policy requiring government-allocated land to be titled in the name of women or jointly in the name of wife and husband. Unfortunately this policy has been largely unpublicized and unimplemented, and government programmes have often titled land solely in the name of the male head of household (Gupta 2002). The failure to apply this policy is attributable to a lack of awareness of the legal provisions calling for the joint allocation of land as well as a failure to appreciate the benefits and importance of including women's names in titles.

III. Adolescent Girls in India: Risks and Vulnerabilities

While adolescents across the world face significant challenges in their transition to adulthood, they also hold tremendous potential to change the world for the better. Girls in particular represent this possibility. Research has shown that girls are influential forces that can break the cycle of poverty in their communities, and that improving a girl's life through education, health, safety and opportunity can have a ripple effect throughout society.

In India, where adolescents constitute 21.4% of the total population, there are more than 111 million adolescent girls (UNFPA, 2003). Among this group, rural adolescent girls lead particularly disadvantaged lives, bearing the burden of poverty, patriarchal norms, unequal gender norms, and socio-cultural practices that have detrimental consequences for their well-being and impose boundaries on their thoughts, aspirations and mobility.

In India, poverty, a marked preference for sons, and a perception that girls are burdens rather than assets heighten the vulnerability of these girls to malnutrition and restrict their access to educational and work opportunities.

The path to better lives for girls lies in the girls' ability to gain access to and control over resources that they can rely upon to determine the course of their own lives, prove their value to their communities and improve their standard of living. Unfortunately, adolescent girls rarely possess rights to one of the most important assets in rural India: land. Despite relatively progressive laws in India, land and related assets are in practice usually marked for male heirs, as property must be retained within the family while a girl moves away to her husband's home after marriage. Thus, even as girls and women put in much of the labour on land, men have usually reaped the benefits of accessing, owning and controlling it.

Malnutrition. Proper food and good nutrition are essential for survival, physical growth, mental development, performance and productivity, health and wellbeing of adolescents. Malnutrition is seen in 30% of adolescent girls and 18% of adolescent boys in India (IIPS, 1998-99). While 30% of boys between the ages of 15 and 19 years are anaemic, an alarming 56% girls in the same age group suffer from this condition; and 47% of the girls in this age group are underweight (UNICEF, 2011).

Dowry. The practice of dowry contributes to the cycle of poverty and the vulnerability of girls. Dowry can drive a girl's family into landlessness if they are forced to sell their land in order to pay the dowry. The pressures of poverty and dowry can in turn drive girls into early marriage (and then early motherhood), as families can in some cases avoid paying dowry if they marry off their daughter at an especially young age.

Early Marriage and Pregnancy. Girls who marry at a young age often find themselves in abusive or exploitative situations. Typically, they cannot return home in such situations, as they would place a significant burden on their families' limited resources. Additionally, they and their family would face the social stigma and community blame associated with a failed marriage, which would affect the marriage prospects for the family's other unmarried children. Early marriage also leads girls to lose out on educational opportunities, as they typically drop out of school once they are married. In rural West

Bengal, 45.7% of girls married below age 18 compared to 23.9% of boys married below age 21, and 11.8% of girls in rural areas between the ages of 15 and 19 have given birth (IIPS, 2007-08).

Discontinuation of Education. India's education system has made significant progress over the past few decades. According to India's Education For All Mid-Decade Assessment, in just five years between 2000 and 2005, India increased primary school enrolment by 13.7% overall and by 19.8% for girls, reaching close to universal enrolment in Grade 1 (<http://www.unicef.org/india/education.html>). Moving from primary to secondary level, school attendance for girls drops from 83% to 59%. In West Bengal, 4.3% of girls between 11 and 14 years of age and 14.2% of girls between 15 and 16 years of age are not in school (ASER, 2011).

Trafficking. Traffickers often exploit all of these vulnerabilities, luring girls with prospects of marriage, job opportunities and a path to a better life. Once trafficked, girls are often lost to poverty and abuse.

IV. The Girls Project and SABLA: A Partnership between Landesa and the Government of West Bengal for the Empowerment of Adolescent Girls

In early 2012, Landesa and the government of West Bengal embarked on an innovative collaboration to address some of the risks and vulnerabilities facing adolescent girls. Landesa partnered with the government's Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (commonly known as SABLA), which aims to improve the nutritional and health status of adolescent girls and to empower them through education on life skills, health and nutrition. Since then, Landesa has helped to pilot SABLA across hundreds of communities in West Bengal and has also integrated land-related components into the programme's curriculum..

Landesa's partnership with the Department of Women and Child Development (WCD, the government entity overseeing SABLA's implementation), followed on the heels of a study Landesa undertook in 2010 to understand the situation of adolescent girls and the feasibility of launching a programme targeted at their overall security and development in West Bengal.

In that study, conducted in October 2010, Landesa assessed the impact of Kishori Shakti Yojana (KSY)¹, a flagship government programme for adolescent girls that was subsequently replaced by the SABLA programme. Landesa's KSY study provided the basis for numerous recommendations for SABLA, including that the scheme should: (i) integrate opportunities for community involvement; (ii) create girls

¹ Implemented in 6118 blocks nationally, it focused on improving the nutritional and health status of girls between 11 and 18 years and training and equipping them with home-based and vocational skills. It also aimed at promoting their overall development including awareness about their health, personal hygiene, nutrition and family welfare and management.

groups that provide social support; (iii) include life skills education; (iv) include a focus on land rights; (v) consider the sensitisation of boys as an important aspect for facilitating a better future for the girls; (vi) select trade skills that appropriate and have accessible market linkages; (vii) provide opportunities to draw benefits from homestead-based vocations; and (viii) seek convergence with locally elected panchayats, self-help groups and NGOs to strengthen initial support for the girls.

SABLA is a national government program being piloted, with the eventual goal of a formal rollout, through the WCD's Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). Pilots have taken place in 205 districts of India, including six in West Bengal. Curriculum components are delivered by peer leaders (girls selected at the most local level) through *kishori samooch*, or “girls group” meetings.

SABLA’s main objectives are to:

- (i) Enable self-development and empowerment of adolescent girls;
- (ii) Improve their nutrition and health status;
- (iii) Spread awareness among them about health, hygiene, nutrition, Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health (ARSH), and family and child care;
- (iv) Upgrade their home-based skills, life skills and vocational skills;
- (v) Mainstream out-of-school adolescent girls into formal and non-formal education; and
- (vi) Inform and guide them about existing public services, such as Public Health Centre, Community Health Centre, post office, bank, police station, etc.

Landesa’s Security for Girls through Land Project

Landesa has conducted its partnership with SABLA through its Security for Girls Through Land Project (Girls Project), the main components of which are designed to educate girls and communities about the importance of girls’ land rights and assets, and to provide land-based livelihood trainings that help girls make the most of their land assets and demonstrate the benefits that can accrue through their access and rights to land.

The Girls Project predated Landesa’s partnership with SABLA, and was underway in February 2011 in 20 communities in Coochbehar District, where we found the condition of adolescent girls to be consistent with the picture painted in national statistics. In Coochbehar, 46.4% of marriages occur when the girl is

below age 18, the legal age of marriage. More than one third of girls in India aged 15-19 are currently, or have been, married, and only 14.3% of women have completed high school (IIPS, 1998-99).

The Landesa-SABLA Partnership

In January 2012, Landesa and the West Bengal WCD department agreed to a partnership, establishing that Landesa would pilot SABLA with Landesa's added land-related components for one year in 299 Anganwadi Centres (AWCs)² in the Tufanganj II block of Coochbehar District. This pilot reached more than 7,000 adolescent girls and specific impacts are discussed below.

In March 2013, following the initial year-long pilot, Landesa expanded its piloting to five additional project areas across four new blocks in Coochbehar District, reaching more than 40,000 adolescent girls.

The second pilot was not a mere expansion of the first; rather, it included a methodological shift to accommodate the increased scale and to build the government system's capacity so that the government is better poised to take on the work long term (more on this under "Key lessons" below).

Landesa partnered with SABLA with the understanding that Landesa could help to integrate land rights and land issues into the discourse on adolescent girls' empowerment and create a platform for scaling land-based interventions more broadly and sustainably. The partnership was also premised on the agreement that Landesa's land-related activities would support SABLA's core objectives.

Landesa's key contribution to the SABLA programme, in addition to the implementation of SABLA's core curriculum, is the inclusion of:

- (i) A curriculum on land and property rights, the importance of equal inheritance rights, the aspects and benefits of secure land tenure, and asset creation (integrated into SABLA's life skills component);
- (ii) Trainings on land-based vocational skills (i.e., the development of gardens) for the productive use of land (integrated into SABLA's component on vocational skill education, also benefiting nutritional status);
- (iii) Activities to engage boys and communities on land and property rights and girls' vulnerabilities, with the goal of creating an environment conducive to girls' empowerment.

² Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) are the basic unit of service delivery under the ICDS. An AWC typically covers a population of 400-800 beneficiaries.

Landesa's land-related components are intended to increase girls' economic and social empowerment and thereby help them alleviate some of their immediate vulnerability to poverty, malnutrition, lack of education, and risks associated with early marriage. Trainings on land-based vocational skills, for example, help girls to improve their nutritional status, create assets without intensive capital investment, and contribute to the family income, which brings greater familial and societal recognition.

In addition to alleviating current vulnerabilities and risks, Landesa's curriculum is also aimed at positioning girls to enjoy secure land rights as adults, laying the foundation for enduring social and economic transformation that benefits not only the girls themselves but also their families and communities. With knowledge of their land-related rights and empowerment to use land-based livelihood skills, girls are able to counter the notion that sons inherit land because they are the most productive users of land, and girls also obtain an understanding that will help them to navigate the administrative processes for realising their rights.

Major Girls Project Components

The Girls Project's primary components, and those which Landesa hopes to scale through SABLA and related government systems, are girls groups and activities to sensitise boys and communities. While Landesa's methodologies for implementing these components evolved between the 2012-2013 pilot in 299 communities and the much expanded 2013-2014 pilot, core elements have remained the same. Important changes in project methodologies are discussed below under Key Lessons.

Girls groups

The girls groups involve various activities (lessons, discussions, interactive games, puppetry, storytelling, lectures) designed to create group bonds, convey important information, and develop the values necessary for changing attitudes and behaviours. In addition to implementing SABLA's core curriculum on health, nutrition, adolescent reproductive and sexual health and life skills education, Landesa added additional curriculum components that complement and strengthen SABLA's main objectives (see Table 1).

As part of the sessions devoted to discussion of vulnerabilities, assets and property rights, groups cover issues such as dowry, equal inheritance rights, government's role in property matters, effects of early marriage, business skills, and asset creation.

In the discussion of land-based livelihood skills the girls learn skills that can improve nutrition and help them create their own assets or earn money to purchase their own assets. The full land-based livelihood curriculum covers "kitchen gardens," commercial vegetable cultivation, tree plantation, composting and

vermicomposting, mushroom cultivation, seed beds, protecting plants using locally available materials, backyard poultry and goatery, fishery and herbal gardens.

While Landesa staff led the girls groups during the earliest pilot phase, the second phase has relied upon peer leaders (volunteer girls selected at the local village level, usually 16-18 years old), whom Landesa trains on the full curriculum. For trainings on land-based livelihoods, Landesa relied first upon a specialist NGO and then on Landesa's own staff and government agricultural workers, who train the peer leader girls.

Once trained, the peer leaders then run the girls groups, usually with support from Anganwadi Workers, village-level government health workers who receive a small government stipend for field implementation of ICDS programmes. Generally, peer leaders hold their girls group meetings twice a month, but some of the more ambitious leaders hold sessions weekly. Landesa staff monitors girls groups at least once every three months, and government Agriculture Department workers who assisted during trainings on land-based livelihoods sometimes checks in on the girls in between sessions as well.

Sensitisation of boys

Landesa's activities with boys, who play key roles in the lives of their sisters and future wives and daughters, are intended to help create an environment that supports girls' empowerment.

During activities with boys, Landesa staff cover a curriculum centred on four key topics: (i) gender sensitization (i.e., understanding girls' daily activities and responsibilities, the limitations on girls' access to family resources, and their lack of control over decisions); (ii) girls' vulnerabilities (before and after marriage, including health consequences associated with early marriage); (iii) girls' rights (including how land rights, education and asset creation can mitigate vulnerability); and (iv) equal inheritance rights.

While Landesa staff runs the sensitisation activities with boys, the 2013-2014 pilot phase included a shift to host the activities within schools. Whereas the initial pilot phase reached roughly 500 boys, the next phase will reach about 5,000.

The sessions mostly take the form of presentation, but include puppet shows, which were a popular component of the initial pilot. In addition, the boys receive a one-pager explaining key issues.

Sensitisation of communities

Like the activities with boys, programme activities with communities aim to help create an environment conducive to girls' empowerment. Landesa has tested two models of community engagement, both tailored to fit the local practice of social gatherings.

The first model, "community conversations" (tested only during the first pilot phase), involves a series of interactive, facilitated dialogues led by Landesa staff. These provide a forum for discussion that empowers communities to make decisions from within, in contrast to traditional lectures, pamphlets, and posters that provide only prescriptive messages and do not allow for dialogue with the presenter. As a part of the community conversation process, participants develop "action plans" to address the causes and effects of girls' vulnerabilities. Topics for discussion include girls' vulnerabilities, the need for girls to have assets in their name, and the negative effects of early marriage.

The second model, "community meetings," is less intensive than the community conversations. Rather than facilitating a community's in-depth discussion and exploration of sensitive topics, Landesa staff conveys information through a presentation to the community. The ensuing discussions at the community meetings does not drive towards formulating action plans, but the discussions do provide a platform for community members to reflect upon and explore issues and practices.

During the first pilot phase, Landesa held community conversations and meetings monthly. During the second phase, only community meetings continued, and these were scheduled on a bi-annual basis. Generally, community meetings and conversations run one to two hours and draw 70-120 participants.

Key Lessons

The section below discusses lessons that Landesa learned while piloting SABLA along with land components. These lessons related to methodology and the partnership with the government. Findings related to project impact are discussed further below under section V.

Girls groups

As the delivery mechanism for girls groups, peer leaders and Anganwadi Workers are the backbone to scalable and sustainable groups. After months of implementation, Landesa found that several factors contributed to the success of groups, including selection of talented peer leaders (proactive, confident, older), the participation of Anganwadi Workers and past peer leaders, regular follow-up by ICDS Supervisors, and support from parents.

To encourage quality participation by peer leaders and Anganwadi Workers, both must be incentivized. Many are already motivated based simply on their belief in the importance of SABLA's goals.

Anganwadi Workers in particular report strong motivation to see the program through to fruition. Often, they have known the girls in their villages since birth, have helped to raise them, and view them as their daughters.

Nevertheless, some Anganwadi Workers and some peer leaders lack sufficient drive or capacity to implement the program. It may be that additional pressure and monitoring from the Panchayat level or ICDS functionaries (Child Development Project Officers, District Project Officers, Supervisors) could further motivate Anganwadi Workers. In addition, something as simple as the award of certificates could further inspire the peer leaders and girls. Landesa hopes to test these approaches during future piloting and scaling activities.

Sensitisation of boys

Landesa learned lessons early on in the first pilot phase that shaped the approach for sensitising boys. Many of these related to the boys' availability at certain times of day and their disinterest in participating in sit-down discussions. As a result, the earlier pilot included stimulating and interactive activities such as theatre productions (staged by the boys), puppet shows, monthly workshops, and community theatre and songs.

As mentioned above, the second pilot phase included a methodological shift towards more scalable activities. With the goal of leveraging already-existing infrastructure for project activities, Landesa conducted boys' activities through secondary schools rather than groups run through Landesa alone during the second pilot phase. Sufficient relationship building and outreach to government and school officials was critical for ensuring the success of this activity, as these stakeholders' initial perceptions or assumptions about Landesa's approach and activities were often inaccurate.

In most of the schools, Landesa conducted sensitizing activities immediately after the boys' lunch break. Unfortunately, many boys head home for the day after lunch, meaning attendance was lower than expected. Close engagement and relationship building with teachers, rather than only higher-level school officials, could help increase boys' attendance, as supportive teachers could help encourage students to participate in the sensitisation activities.

Sensitisation of communities

The community conversation model comes with some challenges. Landesa found that the activity is especially resource intensive and requires highly skilled facilitators, and may therefore not be scalable through SABLA and government infrastructure.

The community meeting model appears to be a promising alternative. Not only is it less resource intensive, but it has overwhelmingly enjoyed strong support from local government functionaries. In some cases, local officials have requested that Landesa hold community meetings in all village areas and have suggested that Landesa coordinate with the Panchayat's standing committee on women and child welfare.

Efforts to engage community functionaries were key to gaining such support during the second pilot phase. Landesa's team made a concerted effort to ensure that influential people attend meetings, providing validation and a sense of legitimacy to the activity. These include Anganwadi Workers; ICDS Supervisors; teachers; elected Panchayat members; ASHA (health) workers, who explain the health hazards of early pregnancy; and senior community members, all of whom are invited to give their views at the meetings and to encourage others.

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)³ present a possible platform for scaling community meetings broadly. Already, Panchayat members hold Gram Sansad and Gram Sabha meetings at village or multi-village levels, during which they discuss development, infrastructure, and planning issues. If provided some orientation and political pressure from above, they could be motivated to include additional topics during those sessions. PRIs also include a Karmadakhya, a member tasked with looking after issues relating to women and child welfare. This counterpoint may provide a natural link for coordination on SABLA and girls' vulnerabilities, as some Panchayats have themselves suggested.

Government partnership

Government partnerships have been crucial to the success of both pilots. Particularly during Landesa's second and larger pilot, the programme team maintained close communication with the Child Development Project Officer, who heads the ICDS at the block level; the Block Development Officer, who is the administrative head of a block; Panchayat Pradhans, government heads at the Gram Panchayat

³ A PRI is comprised of elected representatives at the Gram Panchayat (GP) level. Districts are comprised of Blocks, which have multiple GPs, which are in turn comprised of numerous villages. Each village elects a representative to the PRI, which in turn elects a Pradhan.

level⁴; the District Programme Officer, ICDS; and the Additional District Magistrate, who is responsible for development issues in the district.

Outreach to these parties has ensured an understanding of the value that Landesa's land-related components add to SABLA's curriculum. It has been essential to Landesa's ability to expand the scale of its pilot and rely upon existing infrastructure for its functioning. For example, outreach to the Additional Directors of Agriculture, who head the Agriculture Department at the block level, resulted in the Agriculture Department's cooperation in facilitating land-based livelihoods trainings for the girls groups.

During the second pilot period Landesa's team also focused on engaging the project areas 967 Anganwadi Workers. As Anganwadi Worker participation is critical to the scalability of the Landesa-SABLA model, Landesa sought their buy-in as stakeholders through 3-5 hour orientation sessions with groups of 25-30 at the Gram Panchayat level. The goal of the orientations was to establish a working relationship with AWWs and their respective ICDS Supervisors; explain the purpose and methodology of the program; orient them on the SABLA-Landesa curriculum, so that they can assist peer leaders in instructing the girls groups; and discuss the approach for selecting and training peer leaders.

In addition to seeking buy-in from Anganwadi Workers, Landesa, with an eye towards scaling, sought to leverage their capacity for helping implement the Landesa-SABLA model. One key innovation during the second pilot phase was to task Anganwadi Workers with selecting peer leaders from their areas. As the delivery mechanism for the program's curriculum and girls groups, peer leaders are essential to the program's functioning. While Landesa staff selected peer leaders during the initial pilot, this approach was not scalable. Instead, knowing that AWWs must play a key role in supporting peer leaders upon scaling, Landesa provided them with guidance on the criteria for effective peer leaders and asked them to take up the task in their own areas.

Another innovation was to secure the participation of ICDS Supervisors in the Anganwadi Worker orientations. This has enabled the programme to work with more efficiency from the top down. For example, if a spot-check reveals that girls are failing to attend a particular group, the Supervisor does the work of ensuring that an AWW gets girls to attend. Likewise, the programme can work through the Child Development Project Officer to ensure cooperation from Supervisors.

⁴ Districts are comprised of Blocks, which have multiple Gram Panchayats, local self-government institutions that operate at the village or small town level.

V. Research Methods and Findings

Monitoring and Evaluation

Landesa's evaluation of pilot activities has drawn on a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data sources that employed a range of monitoring and evaluation methods. These methods allowed Landesa to capture the perspectives of diverse stakeholders, and included simple tools designed for mid-course program corrections, as well as more comprehensive tools designed to allow rigorous evaluation of key outcomes. The findings shared below are drawn from Landesa Security for Girls Through Land: Results from Pilot Year in Tufanganj-II, West Benal, 2012-2013, by Vivien Savath (internal report). Quantitative tools included baseline and endline studies; self-administered questionnaires (SAQs) for participating girls; and government-sponsored data cards on nutrition, health, and other indicators. Qualitative tools included ethnographic research and behaviour change studies; individual, open-ended interviews with adolescent girls, boys, parents and peer educators; diaries kept by the girls; field notes; and transcripts from community conversations, girls groups, and activities with boys.

The range of data collection techniques allowed Landesa to compare participating girls with girls in three control groups: (i) girls' sisters in the same project area; (ii) girls in a district where a different NGO was piloting the traditional SABLA program; and (iii) girls in districts where there was not yet any intervention for the empowerment of adolescent girls.

The results discussed below relate only to the 2012-2013 pilot year, during which Landesa first piloted the SABLA and land-related curriculum in 299 communities. During that pilot, Landesa implemented three versions of the model for the sake of comparing the effects of different levels and types of activities:

- 20 "Intense" sites included twice-weekly girls groups as well as community conversations and activities with boys.
- 55 "Light" sites included weekly girls groups as well as the community meeting activity.
- 224 "Basic" sites held weekly girls groups.

Unless a result specifically mentions a version of intervention, the remainder of the report uses the term "participating girl" to refer to an adolescent girl who participated in any of these three versions of Landesa's SABLA pilot.

VII. Findings and Impacts

Upon completing the Landesa-SABLA pilot in the Tufanganj II block of Coochbehar District of West Bengal in 2012-2013, Landesa's research revealed changes which, although small, were powerful and

may trigger encouraging effects in years to come. The results are especially promising given the context: an experimental, year-long effort to change deep-seated mind-sets and practices.

Age of Marriage

- *The average participating girl married or will marry approximately 1.5 years later*

While it is notoriously difficult to obtain reliable data on age of marriage, Landesa found that girls at all three levels of intervention married or will marry approximately one-and-a-half years later than their peers in control areas, at an average predicted age of 21.5. The project was also intended to spread awareness about the legal age of marriage, which might have biased these results, and qualitative data and self-administered questionnaires verify high rates of awareness.

Land Assets

- *Participating girls are 24% more likely to inherit land*

The parents of more than 60% of participating girls said that their daughter would inherit land from them. According to their parents, participating girls are 24% more likely to inherit land. Somewhat surprisingly, girls in Intense sites were less likely to inherit land than in the other levels of intervention. This encouraging result is not concrete, as these inheritances are yet to be realized. Moreover, qualitative research reveals that while community members acknowledge that land assets would provide the strongest security for girls, it is financially difficult for parents to pass scarce land to daughters.

Formal Schooling

- *During the critical transition to secondary school, participating girls are 13% less likely to be school dropouts*

Landesa found that participating girls in the secondary school age range were 13% less likely to discontinue schooling, though this finding does not necessarily imply causality.

Qualitatively, education was widely recognized as an important asset for adolescent girls. In the Intense sites, seven of twelve community action plans (a part of the community conversation activity) detailed a commitment to educating girls until they reached 18 years of age or the 10th Standard, and/or for as long as the girl wanted to continue. Trends indicate that girls in the Intense sites, where the parents were engaged, were slightly more likely to have regular school attendance than girls in the Basic and Light

⁵ Since most of the girls are as yet unmarried, the predicted marriage age of 21 is a statistical based on other factors like education, caste, and location.

sites. A small minority of parents disagreed with the need to educate girls, feeling it is useless or that it will increase dowry payments.

Even in the brief, one-year pilot term, Landesa detected statistically significant improvement in school attendance for participating girls and a number of anecdotes of re-enrolment of previously out-of-school adolescent girls.

Economic Assets

- *Participating girls are 15% more likely to have a financial asset (fixed deposit, savings account, recurring deposit, life insurance policy) in their name*

The pilot emphasized the creation of economic assets for girls outside of the context of a marriage bequest or the death of a parent. During community conversations and meetings, Landesa's facilitators encouraged parents to create assets for their daughters to ensure their security. During girls groups, the girls themselves were also encouraged to find means to save their incomes, however small, and understand the value of assets. In many ways, this message was much more easily received because it did not tap the cultural controversy associated with dowry and inheritance.

Landesa found that participating girls had an improved basic knowledge of what an asset is and how it can benefit their lives, as well as an understanding of the distinction between economic, social, tangible, and intangible assets. Girls from control groups were unable to define or explain the significance of such assets. By program end, approximately 22% of participating girls reported having created assets for themselves, usually through piggy banks or money purses. A few girls reported investing in other economic assets such as a life insurance policies, poultry, and jewellery. While the purchase of jewellery reflects immediate consumption, girls also demonstrated a clear understanding that a jewellery purchase was also an investment in an asset.

Parents, too, showed awareness of the financial and empowerment benefits of assets. Interestingly, all community action plans that were developed following community conversations at Intense sites provided explicitly that parents would create economic assets for their girls. Girls participating in Intense sites were 27% more likely than girls in control areas to have financial assets created in their name by their parents.

Dowry Practices

- *Parents of participating girls anticipate paying an average of 2,770 rupees less in cash dowry (representing on average a reduction of about 9%) to the groom's family*
- *Parents of participating girls are on average 7% more likely to make a bequest directly to the girl at the time of marriage*

Landesa's pilot activities encouraged communities to consider lowering the cash amount of dowry and redirecting resources to create assets for girls that parents could either bequeath directly at the time of marriage or that girls could maintain throughout their lifetime. As expected, dowry remained a prevalent practice in pilot sites; parents had either paid dowry or expected to do so for 96% of the girls. However, the nature of dowry practice varied significantly according to whether the girl participated in the pilot. Anticipated cash dowry for participating girls was 3,016 rupees lower in Basic sites and 3,735 rupees lower in Intense sites. Further, girls in Light and Basic sites were 10% and 12% more likely to receive a direct bequest at the time of their marriage.

Legal Knowledge, Personal Empowerment and Exposure to Public Institutions

- *Participating girls demonstrated significantly higher levels of relevant legal knowledge and higher levels of personal empowerment and exposure to public institutions*

Specifically, participating girls are on average 42% more likely than the control group to answer correctly that a daughter's legal share of land inheritance is equal to a son's and 49% more likely answer correctly that the exchange of dowry is always illegal. Girls in the areas where another NGO implemented SABLA were statistically indistinguishable from girls who had no intervention at all, suggesting that Landesa's approach has particular advantages.

Participating girls also demonstrated improvements in empowerment and greater confidence in their ability to access public offices. These improvements were driven mainly by girls in the Intense sites, where a key factor was their willingness to report harassment to the police. Of girls from Intense sites, 82% said that a girl can report harassment to the police any time she needs to, whereas others were much more likely to impose conditions. Only about 28% of the girls in the Landesa groups had an exposure visit to a police station, suggesting that their higher positive response was driven not by exposure, but by a sense of confidence and empowerment present in the Intense sites. Participating girls also expressed that they better understood the functioning of and were more comfortable accessing important institutions like the Gram Panchayat (local-level government, sometimes relevant for land issues), the Office of the Revenue Inspector (which administers land and property), the post office, and banks.

Earning Income

- *Participating girls are 24% more likely to be earning their own income*

Participating girls at all three levels of intervention are on average 24% more likely to be earning their own income. Overall, however, the rate of earning is relatively low, with only 17% of girls in the treatment and control groups earning income.

Anecdotally, Landesa found that the addition of even a small amount of income is sufficient to pay school fees and enable a girl who has dropped out to re-enrol. Other stories show that some income, however small, can have a profound impact for the most destitute families. Qualitative information from mothers suggests that even after marriage, a girl can usually spend self-earned petty cash at her own discretion, and that the ability to earn something is tied to feelings of self-sufficiency, independence, and self-worth.

Land-based Livelihoods

- *Participating girls are 18% more likely to help their households cultivate at home*
- *Among girls who help cultivate at home, participating girls are 26% more likely to be able to keep some income from production as their own*
- *Participating girls reported greater increases in the consumption of vegetables they tended*

Girls in Landesa's sites are 18% more likely to help with home cultivation and their cultivation work is much more likely to include improved agricultural techniques, such as manure composting and mulching.

Participating girls also reported a greater increase in the consumption or sale of the vegetables they tended. Of the girls who help cultivate at home, they are 26% more likely to be able to keep some of the income from production for themselves. While average earnings were nominally quite low, even a small amount can have a profound impact on a girls' sense of economic agency, and in some families, can mean the difference between attending school and not attending. Direct reports from parents imply that the land-based livelihoods trainings were overwhelmingly very popular, especially for the additional income earning potential.

Community Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices Towards Adolescent Girls

- *Landesa's evaluation has yet to detect any systemic changes in parents' and boys' attitudes and behaviours, though seeds of change were observed*

The majority of boys interviewed understood the law on property inheritance with respect to sons and daughters. They typically answered that brothers and sisters have equal rights over family land under the

law. When probed further, however, it appeared that their stances would change under various situations. Some felt that their sisters' right to land was an unequivocal right and were happy to share, while some felt that she should claim her share only if she were under some kind of duress, and still others felt that the law was wrong because daughters leave their natal households after marriage and become part of her in-laws' household.

Boys also had mixed feelings regarding dowry. While boys almost uniformly disparaged the practice of dowry as a concept, they expressed mixed opinions on whether they would accept dowry as grooms themselves. For the most part, they felt that important inheritance and dowry decisions were in their parents' hands.

Parents and community members explicitly credited the community conversations with surfacing opinions and creating momentum for positive action within the community. Most facilitators noticed that community members were recruiting other community members to join the conversations.

Although men attended community conversations in lower numbers than women, as a whole their opinions tended to be more progressive and action-oriented than women's. This could be because their greater mobility exposes them to more new ideas or because they tend to be more educated or empowered, and therefore more able to envision taking action.

VI. The Road Ahead

At its earliest stage, the Landesa-SABLA partnership represented a small-scale, experimental pilot. With proven results, several years of lessons learned, and a phase of considerable expansion behind it, the approach is poised for significant scaling. Whereas Landesa was involved in resource-intensive implementation activities early on, current work now focuses on working closely with the government to leverage and build its systems' capacity and to encourage its ownership and sustainable, long-term adoption of activities.

Landesa is encouraged by government interest in integrating Landesa's land-related curriculum into the post-pilot SABLA program, and is exploring options for assisting the West Bengal WCD with official state scaling. The potential for scaling in West Bengal state represents a tremendous opportunity to reach more than a million girls. Following the conclusion of 2013-2014 pilot activities, Landesa hopes to provide technical assistance to the government to support the scaling of a SABLA model that includes Landesa's land-related curriculum components. Such assistance would include trainings for government departments on the curriculum and implementation methodologies; monitoring and evaluation activities;

and ongoing advocacy to promote nation-wide adoption of a SABLA program that includes a land-related curriculum.

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Table

Table 1. List of Girls Groups Study Subjects.

Introductory sessions
Nutrition and health, with special reference to adolescent nutrition
Physical exercises
Adolescent reproductive and sexual health (ARSH)
Home management
Family welfare
Care of pregnant mothers with special reference to nutrition
Child care
First aid
HIV
Vulnerabilities of a girl *
Self-dependency *
Asset types, creation and access *
Land-based livelihood options *
Land-based livelihood skills trainings in the field *
Trade literacy *
Access to and ownership of land *
Property rights & equal inheritance rights *
Role of the panchayat *
Role of the Land Department in property matters *
Legal literacy +
Life skills education (LSE) +
Exposure to public offices (Revenue Inspector office visit) +
* Topic added by Landesa, + Topic to which Landesa added additional elements,

Source: SABLA curriculum and additional inputs agreed between WCD and Landesa.