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**ENSURING AND PROTECTING THE LAND LEASING RIGHT
OF POOR WOMEN IN INDIA**

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Abstract

This paper critically examines how lease farming can be a viable livelihood option for landless rural poor, especially women in India. In the absence of land ownership and education, the majority of landless and semi-landless rural women are engaged as low wage agricultural labourers and remain trapped in poverty and indebtedness. Lease farming by landless women in Kerala and Andhra Pradesh shows a pathway for reducing their poverty and enabling upward social mobility. However, agricultural tenancy laws in most states in India either prohibit or restrict land leasing, making tenancy a concealed and less secure arrangement. Informal tenants are the most insecure, often under short duration oral leases and having to rotate plots every year. Economic forces drive the demand for land to lease, but legal bans or restrictions have reduced the amount of land available in the lease market and have forced tenants into informal arrangements. We argue that there is a need for appropriate legal and policy changes to activate the supply of leasable land and enable landless poor women to improve their livelihoods.

Key Words: Lease farming, livelihood, Kudumbashree, Joint Liability Group, Self Help Group

1. Introduction

Rural women in India are generally resource poor and marginalized. The majority do not possess the property, education or the skills needed for gainful employment, conditions that limit their economic independence and upward mobility (Haque 2012). In fact, more than 30% of women in rural areas were not in the labour force for lack of gainful employment opportunities (Government of India 2010). When they are employed, they receive lower wages than men. The average wage rate of casual women labourers in the country (as of 2007-08) was only Rs. 51.17 compared to the male wage rate of Rs. 75.30. Even when women are categorized as cultivators, their limited ownership or control over land and access to water, credit, technology, market, education and skills puts them in a disadvantageous position. According to the Eleventh Five Year Plan (Government of India 2007), the incidence of income poverty among women was higher in rural areas. In addition, about 42% scheduled caste women, 46% of scheduled tribe women and 30% of other women were malnourished.

The low wage income and high incidence of poverty among women demand that additional income opportunities be created for them. Lack of education and skills, however, often prevent them from taking up higher paid jobs in the organized non-agricultural sector.

In view of these facts, it would be useful to explore whether lease farming could provide gainful employment to unemployed and underemployed, landless rural women. The recent initiatives taken by the Governments of Andhra Pradesh and Kerala to promote lease farming by Self Help Groups (SHGs)

and Joint Liability Groups (JLGs), women as well as some NGOs and independent enterprises throw some light in this direction. This paper aims at examining the potential and viability of lease farming as a livelihood option for the rural poor, especially women and also how to ensure and protect their land leasing rights.

The study is based on both secondary and primary data. While the secondary data were collected mainly from the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) and Governments of Kerala and Andhra Pradesh, the authors undertook a field survey in three districts of Kerala and seven districts of Andhra Pradesh. The purposively selected districts for this survey were Alappuzha, Ernakulam and Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala and Adilabad, Karimnagar, Nizamabad, Kurnool, Guntur, Nalagonda and Mehboob Nagar in Andhra Pradesh. The incidence of lease farming by women groups was high in these districts. Using a duly structured questionnaire schedule, we interviewed 200 individual farmers and 50 Joint Liability Groups (JLGs) of women in Kerala and 247 individual farmers and 10 Self-help Groups (SHGs) of women in Andhra Pradesh.

2. Landholding status of women

According to the agricultural census of 2005-06, women constituted 9.6% of total individual operational holdings, covering 7.2% of the total land. Although the census did not clearly say whether land operated by women was also owned by them, it broadly indicated the same. Of course, women's share of operational holdings varied from region to region. In Andhra Pradesh, women constituted about 22.0% of the total number of individual operational holdings, covering 18.1% of area, while the corresponding figures for Kerala women were 19.4% and 15.2% respectively.

Women's access to the land market remains highly restricted. A study by the Rural Development Institute (RDI) in West Bengal indicates that women rarely purchased land on their own because of culturally constrained gender roles and lack of financial resources (Haque 2012). Moreover, women did not directly benefit from redistributive land reforms undertaken by various state governments since Independence. In fact, in Kerala, more than one fourth of those who lost land were widows (Sardamoni, 1983; Haque, 2012).

Another striking feature of the post-land reform era is that the incidence of landlessness among rural households continues to be high in several states. According to official estimates based on 59th Round of NSSO, the landless households constituted about 10.0% of the total rural households in India. Disaggregated analysis of the NSS household level data (Rawal 2008) shows that the proportion of households that did not own any land other than homestead land was as high as 41.6% across the country,

and was 68.4% in Kerala and 53.2% in Andhra Pradesh. Such high incidence of landlessness justifies the need for improving the land access of rural poor, by way of activating the land lease market as an alternative to transfer of land ownership. Access to land is critical for poverty alleviation in many areas. In this context, leasing could provide lower income people, including women with an economic opportunity for improving their livelihood.

Unfortunately, however, tenancy laws in various states in India are highly restrictive in nature (Haque 2012b). In Kerala, the Kerala Land Reform Act, 1963 as amended in 1969, prohibits future leasing without any exemption being granted even to defense personnel, the disabled or the widows, as is the case in some other states (Haque 2001). In the Andhra area of Andhra Pradesh, the Andhra Pradesh Tenancy Act, 1956, as amended in 1974, provides that leases after 1974 have to be in writing as well as registered and for a minimum period of six years, and such leases are renewable and heritable, but not transferable, except to financial institutions by way of mortgage. Also, the landlord has a continuous right of resumption provided the tenant is left with no less than one half of the area held by him under lease before such resumption. In the case of the Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh, the leasing out agricultural land is prohibited except by those whose land holding is equal to or less than three times the family holdings (Andhra Pradesh – Telangana Area Tenancy Act, 1950, Sec. 7). Minors, women and persons with physical or mental infirmity, defense personnel and those prevented by any sufficient reason from cultivating the land can lease out only with the permission of the collector (the top government officer of the district) for a period as the collector may fix. Such restrictions discourage land leasing.

Despite restrictions, tenancy exists in almost all parts of the country. According to the 59th Round of NSSO (Government of India 2006), about 11.5% rural households in India leased in land and nearly 6.5% of the total operated area was under lease farming.

3. Lease farming in Kerala

According to the 59th round of NSSO, about 6.6% operational holdings leased in land during the kharif season (June - December) and 5.35% during the rabi season (January – May). The total leased in area as percentage of total operated area was about 4%. However, these estimates are considered to be underestimated (Nair and Menon 2006). Tenancy being illegal, neither landowners nor tenants report their lease arrangements properly. In addition, the NSSO data was collected mainly for seasonal crops, while there is widespread leasing of annual and perennial crops in Kerala, especially banana, pineapple, betel vine, etc. It is not certain that leasing in all of such crops was captured by the NSSO survey. Moreover, the NSSO concentrated mainly on households, while leasing in of land by self-help groups is widespread in the state (Nair and Menon 2006).

In fact, several micro level studies conducted in the past show the incidence of land leasing in Kerala to be much higher. John's study (2004) in seven panchayats in Kottayam district, covering rice, rubber, coconut, tapioca, vegetables and banana revealed that tenant holdings accounted for 61% of the total holdings surveyed, and 46% of the tenants in the study were landless agricultural labourers. Cherian's study (2004) of three panchayats in Pathanamthitta district, covering coconut, rice, betel vine, rubber and tuber crops points out that tenant holdings constituted about 52% of total holdings and 70% of the tenants reported agricultural labour as their main occupation. The duration of lease was for one year in all cases and rents varied from crop to crop.

Thus, these studies do point out that the incidence of tenancy in Kerala was higher than what was reported by the 2003 NSSO (NSSO: 59th Round: Government of India 2006). Micro-level studies also revealed that income from lease farming of banana and vegetables was quite attractive and had helped the small tenants, in some cases, to purchase small plots of land and move up in the socio-economic ladder as owner cultivators (Nair and Menon 2006). One reason for expansion of land leasing in Kerala is that a large number of migrants who bought land through remittances do not cultivate land themselves, preferring to lease out land rather than to keep it fallow. Also the large scale entry of self-help groups in land lease market, encouraged by government, is contributing to the expansion of lease farming.

3.1. Lease farming by women in Kerala

In 1999, the Government of Kerala launched a poverty eradication programme called the Kudumbashree Mission (Kudumbashree broadly means "welfare" or "prosperity of the family"), whose main objective was to eradicate poverty through coordinated community actions. The programme initially encouraged thrift and investment, vocational training, skills upgrades for self-employment and wage employment, and later added other integrated development measures.

In 2004, the programme added a new component, collective farming by Joint Liability Groups. Under this component, the Kudumbashree Mission of the Government of Kerala assists poor women to lease in land in a group and thereby create an income source for them. Even though leasing is legally prohibited, the Government is promoting lease farming as an important livelihood activity of neighbourhood groups of women that are comprised of small and marginal women farmers and landless agricultural labourers. Joint Liability Groups (JLGs) of women farmers are formed under the collective farming initiative to help women cultivators access agricultural credit from the banking system. The guidelines issued in this regard are as follows:

Groups should consist of Kudumbashree members ranging from 4-10 who are interested in farming. Groups can be formed from the same neighbourhood groups (NHG) or different NHGs within a ward who are interested in farming. The farming area for a JLG should be a minimum of 50 cents and a maximum of 12.35 acres and can be a maximum of three plots. For vegetables and medicinal plants, the minimum area is 25 cents. The Gram Panchayat helps the JLGs by providing inputs (seed, fertilizer, manure, and pesticide), basic infrastructure, machineries, irrigation facilities, one time land development for farming, using Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) labour and also assists in marketing of the produce. The Primary Agricultural Co-operative Societies (PACs) provide interest free loans for selected crops, while nationalized banks and other private banks provide crop loan for the JLGs at 7% rate of interest, out of which 5% is provided as interest subsidy from Kudumbashree.

The lease farming by JLGs under Kudumbashree Mission is intended to help eradicate poverty, and improve food security and incomes of the poor and marginalized women through their participation in agriculture. The mission works in all 14 districts of Kerala. The JLGs are engaged in lease farming, using land of members from within the groups, government land and also land leased in from private land owners. Originally the term "lease land farming" was used for such group cultivation. Now it is called "collective farming."

During 2010-2011, about 59,206 acres of land was cultivated by 38,054 groups, which produced 207,694 tonnes of agricultural produce, worth Rs. 297 crores (Rs. 2.97 billion, or about US \$48 million). Women who were once just agricultural labourers today are farming for themselves. About 2.3 lakh women (230,000) have reportedly benefitted from the scheme so far.

3.2. Results of field survey in Kerala

Landesa conducted a field survey in three districts of Kerala, namely Thiruvananthapuram, Alappuzha and Ernakulam to assess joint lease farming by women. We interviewed about 200 individual farmers – who were tenant cum owner cultivators – and 50 Joint Liability Groups. Table 1.

The average area leased in by JLGs (per group) was 1.86 acres in Thiruvananthapuram, 3.58 acres in Alappuzha and 4.38 acres in Ernakulam. On a per member basis, it worked out to 0.32 acres in Thiruvananthapuram, 0.42 acres in Alappuzha and 0.96 acres in Ernakulam (Table 2). In the case of individual lessees, the average leased in area was 1.06 acres in Thiruvananthapuram, 1.74 acres in Alappuzha and 3.13 acres in Ernakulam.

The most common crops grown in women's group leased land, individually leased in land and self-operated land were banana, paddy, tapioca and vegetables. Yields and returns of crops varied from district to district. The average area of banana cultivated by JLGs was 1.83 acres in Thiruvananthapuram, 0.91 acres in Alappuzha and 2.13 acres in Ernakulam and for individually leased land. The average area of banana was 0.87 acres in Thiruvananthapuram, 1.13 acres in Alappuzha and 1.81 acres in Ernakulam, and in the case of ownership cultivation, the average area under banana was 0.62 acres in Thiruvananthapuram, 0.60 acres in Alappuzha and 1.10 acres in Ernakulam. In Thiruvananthapuram, the average yield of banana was 9,000 Kgs in group leased land by women, 8,730 Kgs in individually leased land and 8,260 Kgs in self-cultivated land. The average return per acre was Rs. 85,000 in group leased land, Rs. 40,000 in individually leased land and Rs. 55,000 in individually owned and self-cultivated land. Thus, JLGs of women cultivators did generate higher yields and higher returns per acre of banana cultivation compared to individual lessees and owner cultivators.

A similar situation could be observed in Alappuzha where the average yield and returns from banana cultivation were higher in women's group operated leased land than individually operated leased land as well as self-cultivated land (Table 3). The average returns per acre of banana cultivation were Rs. 45,000 in women's group leased land, Rs. 35,825 in individual leased land and Rs. 37,756 in self-cultivated land. In Ernakulam also, both average yields and returns were higher in women's group leased land than individually leased and self-operated land.

For tapioca, the results were mixed. In Thiruvananthapuram, the average yields and returns were slightly better in self-cultivated land than women's group operated leased land and individually operated leased land. In Alappuzha, the yields and returns of tapioca were higher in women's group operated leased land than individually operated leased land, but in Ernakulam, both yields and returns were relatively higher in self-operated land than either individually leased land or women's group leased land.

In the case of paddy, the women's group operated leased land showed better performance than both individually operated leased land and self-operated land. For vegetables, the women's group performance was better than individually leased or self-operated land in Alappuzha, while in Thiruvananthapuram, women groups' performance in terms of yields and returns were comparatively lower (Table 3).

In the surveyed villages, about 76% of the group leased land was owned by private land owners, 18% was owned by JLG members and 6% by others (Table 4). In Ernakulam about 95% group leased land was owned by private land owners, while in Alappuzha 33% of group leased land was owned by group members.

Nearly 60% leases were written but not registered and 28% lease agreements were just oral / informal. The informal leases were as high as 75.0% in Alappuzha district and as low as 5.3% in Thiruvananthapuram district (Table 7).

On average, in about 76% cases, the terms of lease was fixed cash and only about 10% were under sharecropping. In Ernakulam, about 89.5% leases were on a fixed cash basis and 10.5% were on sharecropping basis. In Alappuzha, nearly 25% leases were on sharecropping basis and in 33% cases, no rent was charged, as the land was owned by group members (Table 5). About 44% of the groups reported that they were cultivating the same leased land for the past five years, while 30% of the groups were cultivating the leased land for the first time in 2011-2012 and 26% of the groups reported that they leased in different plots from time to time. In Ernakulam, about 68.4% of the groups reported leasing and cultivating the same plots, while in Thiruvananthapuram, only 10.5% of the groups continued to lease in and cultivating the same plots (Table 6).

3.3. Individual lease farming in Kerala

In the case of individual land leasing, most of the lessees in the study areas were owner cum tenants (Table 7). About 88.6% of lessors were small and marginal landowners and only 3.5% were large farmers and 8.0% were medium land owners. These were all male cultivators. In Thiruvananthapuram, 90.8% of lessors were small landowners and 4.6% were marginal land owners. In Alappuzha district, however, a majority of the lessors were marginal landowners – nearly 91.9%, while in Ernakulam district small landowners accounted for as much as 56.5% of the total lessors (Table 7). Approximately 100.0% lease agreements in Alappuzha and 53.2% in Ernakulam were oral/ informal, while in Thiruvananthapuram 87.7% individual lease agreements were in writing (being so-called "white paper" transactions), but not registered (Table 8).

Further, at the aggregate level, about 97.5% of leases were on fixed cash basis, and only 2.5% were on sharecropping basis. However, in Ernakulam and Alappuzha, about 3.2% and 2.7% of leases respectively were on a sharecropping basis and the rest on a fixed cash basis (Table 9). About 100% of lessees in Thiruvananthapuram reported the need for additional income as the main reason for leasing in land, while in Alappuzha 54.1% and in Ernakulam nearly 27.4% of lessees reported additional income earning as the main reason. These tenantfarmers utilize their available family labour to earn additional income for family welfare.

Nearly 93.8% lessees in Thiruvananthapuram, 98.6% in Alappuzha and 74.2% in Ernakulam felt that the land leasing policy in the state should be revised for legalization of leasing and allowing leasing of land

on a long term basis. They believed that size of the land in lease market would increase if land leasing becomes legal.

4. Lease farming in Andhra Pradesh

Despite restrictions on land leasing, informal tenancy was quite high in Andhra Pradesh. According to the 59th round of National Sample Survey for 2003, about 15.9% rural households leased in land, covering about 8.9% of the total area (Government of India, 2006). As in other states, the incidence of land leasing in Andhra Pradesh could be under reported. Fixed cash was the predominant term (41.7%), followed by fixed produce (22.7%), share of produce (21.7%) and other terms (13.9%).

4.1. Lease farming by SHG women in Andhra Pradesh

The state of Andhra Pradesh is known for its strong women's self-help group (SHG) movement. Nearly 26% of India's SHGs are located in Andhra Pradesh and 40% of loans given by banks to SHGs are in Andhra Pradesh alone (Jairam Ramesh 2007). Women's sSHGs in Andhra Pradesh used microcredit to lease in land, either private fallow or Government land. The Deccan Development Society (DDS), an NGO located in Medak district of Andhra Pradesh, has been helping SHG women to use group leasing practices since 1989. Currently its group leasing programme involves 144 women's groups of five to 15 members each, in 26 villages, cultivating about 210 acres (Agarwal 2010). About 25% of the rent is paid by group members and the rest is covered by interest free loans from DDS, which is repaid by groups in installments. The poorer members who cannot repay contribute in terms of labour. After paying the rent and other costs, the harvested produce is shared equally among the members.

Prompted by DDS's success with women's group leasing experiments, the Government of Andhra Pradesh launched the Sustainable Dryland Agriculture Project by Mahila Sanghams (called Samatha Dharani), in collaboration with UNDP and Union Government. The project was started in 27 mandals and 500 villages in the Telengana region of the state, mainly in the districts of Medak, Mehboobnagar, Karimnagar, Nizamabad and Adilabad.

All 500 sanghams were provided with a revolving fund as micro capital to meet the expenses of group lease farming. About 13,745 women were involved in group farming, cultivating 3,940 acres of land. Nearly 1,650 acres of private fallow land has been brought under cultivation under the project. So far, there has been no proper external evaluation of Samatha Dharani. The present paper makes a modest attempt to analyse the functioning and benefits of lease farming by Sangham women in selected places of Karimnagar, Adilabad and Nizamabad districts of Andhra Pradesh. We used a duly structured questionnaire schedule to interview about ten groups that cultivated about 89 acres of land. In the study

villages, 100% of the land leased in was from private landowners, comprising both SHG and non-SHG members. Each sangham on average had 27 women members. About 24.3% members were landless labourers and 75.7% members were marginal farmers (Table 11). The proportion of landless members was, however, as high as 62.8% in Karim Nagar, while in Adilabad and Nizamabad, 90 - 95% of members belonged to marginal farm categories.

At the aggregate level, 80% of leases were written, but not registered. In Karimnagar and Adilabad, 100% of the lease agreements were written, but not registered. In Nizamabad, 33% of the leases were oral (Table 12). 60% of the total lease agreements were on a fixed cash basis and 40% were on a sharecropping basis. In Karimnagar and Adilabad districts, 100% of the leases were on fixed cash basis, while 66.7% of leases in Nizamabad district were on a sharecropping basis. About 60% of leased land was irrigated and 40% non-irrigated. In Nizamabad district, 83.3% of leased land was irrigated, but in Adilabad about 100% of the leased land was unirrigated dry land. In Karimnagar, the ratio of irrigated and non-irrigated leased land was 50:50.

Nearly 40% of the groups were engaged in lease cultivation on the same plots of land and 60% of the groups were cultivating different plots of land. In Adilabad, all groups were cultivating different plots of land from time to time (Table 13). The cropping pattern (Table 13) showed that about 64.3% leased area in Karimnagar and 44% area in Nizamabad was under maize (corn) cultivation. Area under paddy was 14.3% in Karimnagar and 50% in Nizamabad. In Adilabad, red gram and sorghum were the main crops (43% and 30% respectively) grown in group leased land, while soybean and green gram each accounted for 13.3% of the cropped area in Adilabad (Table 14).

4.2. Lease farming by individual lessees in Andhra Pradesh

In Karimnagar, Adilabad and Nizamabad, both SHG and non-SHG members leased land individually and also cultivated individually. In other districts, only non-SHG individuals were involved in lease farming. Women constituted hardly 10% of the total number of individual tenant farmers. The average area leased in by individual lessees ranged between 1.81 acres in Nizamabad and 5.00 acres in Adilabad (Table 15).

It may be seen from Table 14 that the average return from group leased land was Rs. 3,952 per acre, ranging from -Rs. 1,281 in Adilabad to Rs. 11,511 in Karimnagar, while the return per acre in individually leased land was Rs. 11,511 and that of individually owned and self-cultivated land was Rs. 18,705.

In Adilabad and Nizamabad the average return per acre of group leased land were Rs. -1,281 and Rs. 1,627 respectively, much lower than that in self-operated land. This was primarily because of the groups'

lower access to farm credit and input use. The institutional support system for tenants is negligible in this respect. This is true for both group leasing and individual leasing. However, in Guntur, the net returns per acre was Rs. 43,595 in individually owned and self-cultivated land and Rs. 22,625 in individually cultivated leased land. In Mehboobnagar and Nalgonda, the average returns per acre of individually leased land were Rs. 9,510 and Rs. 11,938 respectively, while in self-cultivated land, the average returns per acre were Rs. 11,320 and Rs. 15,468 respectively. In Kurnool also the individually leased in land had lower returns than self-operated land. There was no group farming in Guntur, Mehboobnagar, Nalagonda and Kurnool. It would be further seen from Table 16 that leased land had generally higher yields than self-operated land in the case of almost all crops excepting paddy in all the districts and banana and chili in Guntur. But the net returns after deducting rent and input costs remained lower in leased land. Still, marginal farmers and landless labourers got engaged in lease farming for utilization of family labour and associated additional income.

The majority of the lessors in most places were marginal and small landowners, while large landowners on average accounted for only 13% of lessors (Table 17). About 100% respondents both SHG and Non-SHGs in Karimnagar, Adilabad, Nizamabad, Kurnool and Guntur, and 53.3% in Mehboobnagar and 43.3% in Nalgonda opined that land leasing policy should be revised..

Fully 100% of the lessors in Adilabad, 80% of the lessors in Nalgonda and 53% of the lessors in Mehboobnagar expressed a view that they would lease out more land if leasing is legalized with adequate protection of the landlord's right. Also, a majority of the lessees reported that they would be able to lease in more land if land leasing was made open and legal. Lessees stated that additional income and livelihood were the main reasons for leasing in land. The tenant farmers could utilize their surplus family labour for lease cultivation for additional income. The additional income generated through land leasing also helped in improve their access to children's education and health care, and helped pay expenses related to marriage of daughters and sons.

5. Comparison of lease farming by SHG/JLG women in Andhra Pradesh and Kerala

The group leasing arrangements in Andhra Pradesh and Kerala have some commonalities as well as differences. The similarities include the following:

- (i) The members involved in lease farming by SHGs in Andhra Pradesh and JLGs in Kerala were all women.
- (ii) The majority, and in some cases all members, of the SHGs and JLGs involved in lease farming belonged either to landless or marginal farm households.

- (iii) The main objective of group lease farming in both Andhra Pradesh and Kerala was to improve the incomes and livelihood of the rural poor women and empower them socially as well as economically.
- (iv) The group leasing by SHG women in Andhra Pradesh and JLGs women in Kerala was supported by the respective governments.

Nevertheless, the systems of group lease farming in Andhra Pradesh and Kerala differed significantly in both contents and impact. First, each lease farming group had relatively more members in Andhra Pradesh than in Kerala. The average number of members per group was 27 in Andhra Pradesh against 6 in Kerala. In terms of impact, while it is easier to manage small groups for better co-operation, large membership in a group often poses a problem of some not co-operating and not contributing, thereby encouraging inefficiency.

Second, In Andhra Pradesh, a majority of the women members engaged in lease farming were Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), but in Kerala, they belonged to all castes, including general castes, Other Backward Castes (OBCs), SCs and STs.

Third, in all JLGs in Kerala members were from the same socio-economic class, but the sangham farmers in Andhra Pradesh were not always from the same socio-economic class. In some cases, two to three influential women with relatively large holdings along with landless women were members of a sangham in which case large farmers simply leased out their dry land to be cultivated with support from landless women labourers. If the crop failed, they did not have to incur the labour cost, which was a saving for them, and if a crop was harvested, they benefitted by saving the labour cost and sharing the produce with others. This was an unequal co-operative relationship, which is exploitative in nature and did not create much incentive for the landless labourers to participate effectively.

Fourth, the handholding support to groups for lease farming was significantly higher and better coordinated in Kerala, where groups leases were more successful.

Fifth, women groups in Kerala had largely undertaken the cultivation of high value crops such as banana, pineapple, betel vine and vegetables and had generated higher net returns, while women's sanghams in Andhra Pradesh under the Samata Dharni project produced mainly food crops, such as maize, jowar, red gram, etc., which no doubt added to their household food security, but did not generate enough value or income.

Sixth, it can be seen from Table 17 that farm efficiency as measured in terms of output-input ratio was higher in group leased land by women than either owned or self-cultivated land or individually leased land in Kerala. But in Andhra Pradesh, this was highest in the case of self-cultivated land, followed by group leased land and individually leased land.

Seventh, the group lease farming arrangement in Kerala under the Kudumbashree Mission had convergence with Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, panchayats, agricultural universities and agriculture and horticulture departments of state government. But this was not so obvious in the case of group farming in Andhra Pradesh.

Finally, the economic impact of women's group lease farming was more substantial in Kerala than in Andhra Pradesh, although in both cases women felt that they were socio-economically more empowered than without it.

5.1. Lessons learned

There are several lessons that can be learned from the group lease farming experiences in Kerala and Andhra Pradesh. First, due to legal restrictions, agricultural land leasing is mostly informal and insecure. Even though state governments have tried to give some recognition and also encourage lease cultivation by women's groups, insecurity of tenure continues.

Second, if the women's groups are socio-economically homogenous in nature and small in size, there is greater co-operation, transparency and efficiency.

Third, the initial handholding support by the government or some NGO (as was the case of Deccan Development Society Sanghams in AP) is critical for adoption of group lease farming by women. Poor women were able to make land productive only in cases where they received Government or NGO support (Rao 2005).

Fourth, group leasing on the pattern of JLGs in Kerala was as efficient as individual lease farming or individually owned self-operated farming or even more efficient in some circumstances.

Fifth, lease farming by poor and marginalized women can be an important source of livelihood or additional income for them if land leasing is made legal and consequently more land becomes available for leasing through an active land lease market. It should be remembered in this context that poor women can hardly afford to purchase land as of now, because of high and rising land prices, unless their increased income by way of lease farming as well as wage income through MGNREGS and other work help them purchase land and become land owners. Thus, land leasing can be a step on the path to land ownership.

Sixth, lease farming, if encouraged and supported, can be instrumental in providing some level of food security for the rural poor households, especially women.

Seventh, with proper leadership training and entrepreneurship skills, the poor landless women engaged in lease farming and other activities, could overcome the poverty trap and be on the growth path. In fact, there is need for an appropriate, albeit in-built capacity building programme for this.

Eighth, lease farming by SHG and JLG women can create a great sense of security among them to prevent physical violence and exploitation by people at home and outside. They can prevent injustice to them through their joint and concerted actions.

6. Conclusions

Lease farming, both individually and on group basis, can be a viable livelihood option for rural landless women, provided there is an active land lease market. However, the viability of land leasing as a livelihood option would require that law provides for tenure security and stability for both lessees and lessors. For this, tenancy laws have to be amended and leasing must be made legal and open. There is particularly a need to ensure that lease period is of longer duration to incentivize the tenants to make capital investment for productivity enhancement without thereby subjecting the landowner to the risk of losing the land because the lessee has made such improvements to the land. As a matter of fact, the success of any land leasing programme depends on an appropriate legal framework which would ensure flexibility for the landowner and security for the tenant. Leases that are strongly regulated and protective of the tenant can be unacceptable to landowners, while highly informal leasing is not in the interest of lessees. The law must provide for a balance that suits both the land owners and the tenants.

At present, the tenancy laws of both Kerala and Andhra Pradesh are lacking in this respect. Even the Andhra Pradesh Licensed Cultivator Act, 2011, which allows land leasing on year to year basis, does not provide either security of tenure to the tenants or flexibility for the landowners, and does not provide incentive for banks and insurance companies to provide institutional support to the tenant..

In addition, the Kerala mode of group lease farming under Kudumbashree Mission can be easily replicated elsewhere with proper handholding support of the government. It would help reduce rural poverty and empower the poor women both socially and economically. More particularly, the subsidized credit support and proper technological, marketing and insurance facilities would make lease farming by SHG women a viable and sustainable proposition. This would also help in much needed rural transformation through occupational mobility of the people.

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Table 1 Selected districts, sample farmers and JLGs

District	No. of JLGs interviewed	No. of Landless pure tenants interviewed	No. of Marginal farmers (owner cum tenants) interviewed
Thiruvananthapuram	19	36	28
Alappuzha	12	21	53
Ernakulam	19	20	42
Total	50	77	123

Table 2: Average area leased in and income from lease farming by lessee category in Kerala

District	Average area Leased in (acre)		
	Per JL Group	Per Member in JLG	Per Individual (individually leased land)
Thiruvananthapuram	1.86	0.32	1.06
Alappuzha	3.58	0.42	1.74
Ernakulam	4.38	0.96	3.13
Total	3.27	0.57	1.98

Source: Field Survey

Table 3: Average area, yields and returns of crops in land leased by group, individual and ownership cultivation in Kerala

District	Crop	Average yield (Kg/acre)			Average returns (Rs / acre)		
		Group leased land by women	Individually leased land	Individually own self cultivated land	Group leased land by women	Individual leased land	Individually own and self cultivated land
Thiruvananthapuram	Banana	9000	8729	8259	85000	40000	55000
	Paddy		1363	1321		15000	20000
	Tapioca	9500	9471	9667	9150	8710	10000
	Vegetables	3000	3980	4391	10000	9000	13000
Alappuzha	Banana	8300	8200	8259	45000	35825	37756
	Flower		360	359		15000	20000
	Green gram	300			3500		
	Paddy	2313	1873	1937	18000	15241	17728
	Spices			59			12000
	Tapioca	6000	4000		10000	8000	
	Vegetables	3500	3167	3108	10000	9200	8550
Ernakulam	Banana	8500	7505	7185	58000	56000	57000
	Coconut			22857			10000
	Paddy	2200	2088	1960	8000	12000	15000
	Pineapple	9500	6357	7512	60000	70000	100000
	Tapioca	8500	6333	8571	9000	10000	13000
	Vegetables		4922	7512		10000	14000

Source: Field Survey

Table 4: Ownership pattern of the leased land in Kerala

District	Total No. of Groups	Ownership of leased Land					
		Group Members		Private Land Owner		Private land owner + Group Member	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Thiruvananthapuram	19	5	26.32	13	68.42	1	5.26
Alappuzha	12	4	33.33	7	58.33	1	8.33
Ernakulam	19	0	0.00	18	94.74	1	5.26
Total	50	9	18.00	38	76.00	3	6.00

*Source: Field Survey***Table 5: Type of lease agreement and terms of lease of group leased land in Kerala**

Districts			Thiruvananthapuram	Alappuzha	Ernakulam	Total
Total No. of Groups			19	12	19	50
Types of lease agreement	Written	Number	14	2	14	30
		Percentage	73.68	16.67	73.68	60.00
	Registered	Number	4	1	1	6
		Percentage	21.05	8.33	5.26	12.00
	Oral	Number	1	9	4	14
		Percentage	5.26	75.00	21.05	28.00
Terms of lease	Fixed Cost	Number	16	5	17	38
		Percentage	84.21	41.67	89.47	76.00
	Share Cropping	Number	0	3	2	5
		Percentage	0.00	25.00	10.53	10.00
	Not Charging	Number	3	4	0	7
		Percentage	15.79	33.33	0.00	14.00

Source: Field Survey

Table 6: Tenure status of group leased land in Kerala

District	Total No. of Groups	Percent of lessees leasing in the same land		Percent of lessees leasing another land		Lessees for the first time	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Thiruvananthapuram	19	2	10.53	6	31.58	11	57.89
Alappuzha	12	7	58.33	1	8.33	4	33.33
Ernakulam	19	13	68.42	6	31.58	0	0.00
Total	50	22	44.00	13	26.00	15	30.00

*Source: Field Survey***Table 7: Distribution of lessors by size class of land in Kerala**

Type of land ownership/ farmer	Districts	Thiruvananthapuram	Alappuzha	Ernakulam	Total
Large	Number	2	0	5	7
	Percentage	3.1	0.0	8.1	3.5
Medium	Number	1	3	12	16
	Percentage	1.5	4.1	19.4	8.0
Marginal	Number	3	68	10	81
	Percentage	4.6	91.9	16.1	40.3
Small	Number	59	3	35	97
	Percentage	90.8	4.1	56.5	48.3
Total	Number	65	74	62	201
	Percentage	100	100	100	100

Source: Field Survey

Table 8: Nature of individual lease contract in Kerala

Districts	Total No of Lessees	Type of contract					
		Verbal		Written on White Paper		Written on Stamp Paper	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Thiruvananthapuram	65	8	12.31	57	87.69	0	0.00
Alappuzha	74	74	100.00	0	0.00	0	0.0
Ernakulam	62	33	53.23	26	41.94	3	4.8
Total	201	115	57.21	83	41.29	3	1.5

*Source: Field Survey***Table 9: Terms of individual lease agreement in Kerala**

District	Total No of Lessees	Terms of lease (cost)			
		Fixed Cost		Share cropping	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Thiruvananthapuram	65	64	98.46	1	1.54
Alappuzha	74	72	97.30	2	2.70
Ernakulam	62	60	96.77	2	3.23
Total	201	196	97.51	5	2.49

Source: Field Survey

Table 10: Coverage under Samatha Dharani Project

District	No. of Mandals	No. of Villages under Samatha Dharani
Medak	7	125
Mehboobnagar	7	180
Karimnagar	7	115
Nizamabad	3	40
Adilabad	3	40
Total	27	500

Source: AP Mahila Samatha Society

Table 11: Distribution of women group members leased in land in Andhra Pradesh

Districts	No. of members	Average No. of Members in SHGs	Landless members		Marginal and small farmers in the SHG	
			Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Karim Nagar	78	39	49	62.82	29	37.18
Adilabad	41	20.5	2	4.88	39	95.12
Nizamabad	153	25.5	15	9.80	138	90.20
Total	272	27.2	66	24.26	206	75.74

Source: Field Survey

Table 12: Type and terms of lease agreement under group farming in Andhra Pradesh

District	Total No. of Groups	Type of Lease agreement				Terms of Lease			
		Written		Oral		Fixed Cost		Share Cropping	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Karim Nagar	2	2	100.0	0	0.0	2	100.00	0	0.00
Adilabad	2	2	100.0	0	0.0	2	100.00	0	0.00
Nizamabad	6	4	66.67	2.00	33.33	2	33.33	4	66.67
Total	10	8	80.0	2	20.0	6	60.00	4	40.00

*Source: Field Survey***Table 13: Land tenure status of the women's group leased land in Andhra Pradesh**

District	Total No. of Groups	Groups Cultivating in			
		Same plot		Another plot	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Karim Nagar	2	1	50.00	1	50.00
Adilabad	2	0	0.00	2	100.00
Nizamabad	6	3	50.00	3	50.00
Total	10	4	40.00	6	60.00

*Source: Field Survey***Table 14: Cropping pattern in women's group leased land in Andhra Pradesh – Area under various crops**

Crops	Karim Nagar		Adilabad		Nizamabad		AP (All 3 districts)	
	In Acres	Percentage	In Acres	Percentage	In Acres	Percentage	In Acres	Percentage
Paddy	1	14.29			35	50	36	40.45
Maize	4.5	64.29			31	44.29	35.5	39.89
Vegetables	0.5	7.14					0.5	0.56
Red gram	1	14.29	3.6	30			4.6	5.17

Jowar			3.6	30			3.6	4.04
Soya			1.6	13.33	2	2.86	3.6	4.04
Green gram			1.6	13.33	2	2.86	3.6	4.04
Tur dal			1.6	13.33			1.6	1.80
Total Leased Land	7	100	12	100	70	100	89	100

Source: Field Survey

Table 15: Average area leased in and Income from group farming and individual farming in Andhra Pradesh

District	Average area Leased in (acre)			Average Income (Rs.)			Average returns per acre from group leased land	Average returns per acre from individually leased land	Average returns per acre from individually owned and self-cultivated land
	Per Group	Per Member	Per Individual (individually leased land)	Per Group	Per Member	Per Individual (individually leased land)			
Karim Nagar	3.50	0.10	3.57	40288	1486	138579	11511	- 18705	
Adilabad	6.00	0.43	5.00	-9250	-783	90103	-1281	- 4838	
Nizamabad	11.67	0.65	1.81	10473	2598	73135	1627	- 7118	
Kurnool			3.53			97348		5194	16854
Guntur			3.35			150880		22625	43595
Mahboob Nagar			3.04			30994		9510	11320
Nalagonda			3.53			42081		11938	15468
Total	7.06	0.39	3.40	13837	1100	89017	3952	11418	16842

Source: Field Survey

Table 16: Crop yields in leased and self-operated lands in various districts

Districts	Crops	Yields (Kgs/acre)	
		Leased Land	Self-Operated land
Karimnagar	Cotton	804	763
	Paddy	1495	2024
Adilabad	Cotton	413	384
	Red gram	446	136
	Jowar	109	99
Nizamabad	Maize	1551	1376
	Paddy	1723	1464
Kurnool	Castor	760	450
	Red gram	447	447
Mehboobnagar	Paddy	1056	1227
	Cotton	910	944
	Maize	483	742
Nalagonda	Cotton	393	304
	Paddy	1251	1497
Guntur	Chilly	2350	2542
	Maize	3090	3000
	Cotton	1177	1243
	Paddy	2028	1992
	Banana	27400	28000

Source: Field Study

Table 17: Distribution of lessors by size class in Andhra Pradesh

Type of land ownership / farmer	Districts	Karim Nagar	Adilabad	Nizamabad	Kurnool	Guntur	Mahboob Nagar	Nalagonda	Total
Large	Number	3	2	5	10	10	1	2	33
	Percentage	21.43	28.57	20.83	13.33	14.93	3.33	6.67	13.36
Medium	Number	3	4	9	9	8	5	5	43
	Percentage	21.43	57.14	37.50	12.00	11.94	16.67	16.67	17.41

Marginal	Number	3	1	5	23	4	1	1	38
	Percentage	21.43	14.29	20.83	30.67	5.97	3.33	3.33	15.38
Small	Number	5	0	5	33	45	23	22	133
	Percentage	35.71	0.00	20.83	44.00	67.16	76.67	73.33	53.85
Total	Number	14	7	24	75	67	30	30	247
	Percentage	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100

Source: Field Survey

Table 18: Output – input ratio in group leased, individually leased and self-operated land

Districts	Output-Input Ratio		
	Individual Lessee	Owner and doing Self Cultivation	Group lessees (Women)
Thiruvananthapuram	1.15	1.16	1.59
Eranakulam	1.42	1.45	2.45
Alappuzha	1.99	2.03	2.44
Kerala Average	1.37	1.40	1.90
Karim Nagar	0.96	2.01	2.06
Adilabad	0.62	1.21	0.49
Nizamabad	0.67	2.48	1.11
Kurnool	1.12	1.66	No group farming
Guntur	1.09	1.68	
Mahboob Nagar	0.62	1.12	
Nalagonda	1.09	1.42	
Andhra Pradesh Average	0.96	1.59	1.42

Source: Field Study