



## **Integrating Land Governance into the Post-2015 Agenda**

**Harnessing Synergies for Implementation and Monitoring Impact**

Annual World Bank Conference on Land and Poverty Washington DC, March 24–27, 2014

### **IMPROVING LAND GOVERNANCE THROUGH COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN ODISHA, INDIA**

**Sibabrata Choudhury & Susanta Nanda**

Landesa, India



**Paper prepared for presentation at the  
“2014 WORLD BANK CONFERENCE ON LAND AND POVERTY”  
The World Bank - Washington DC, March 24-27, 2014**

*Copyright 2014 by author(s). All rights reserved. Readers may make verbatim copies of this document for non-commercial purposes by any means, provided that this copyright notice appears on all such copies.*

## **Abstract**

Post-independence both the central and state governments in India have promulgated a number of land reform laws with focus on redistribution of land and providing “land to the tiller.” Odisha, a state on the eastern coast of India, has endeavored over the years to enact laws aimed at providing land to those cultivating it and redistributing ownership of land. Landesa designed and piloted a model where a local youth (called a Community Resource Person) identified by the community is trained to provide additional capacity to local government land administration officials to identify and provide title to the formerly landless families. This model was subsequently scaled up in collaboration with Odisha Tribal Empowerment and Livelihoods Programme (OTELP) to cover 1,042 villages in seven districts of the state. The state government has further extended the programme to another 18,000 villages to touch 1.2 million families. This paper highlights how people-centric land governance examples have improved land administration, making it more efficient and effective. This will be the key learning for similar projects around the world since it discusses the favorable factors and key features to be considered for scaling up a people-centric land allocation programme.

**Key Words:** Community Resource Persons, Land governance, Participation, Transparency, Scaling

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Rural poverty in India, as in any other parts of the world, is intricately tied, to the control and use of land. Although land legislation in post-independence India aimed to reform the exploitative and iniquitous system of land revenue assessment that had taken firm root under the colonial regime, the formal legal reforms have not been fully implemented, leaving hundreds of thousands of people in rural Odisha that are both poor and landless. Without land, these poor rural families lack the means to pull themselves out of poverty.

In the state of Odisha, land allocation programmes have failed to be fully implemented largely due to lack of capacity on the part of local land administration officials. In 2005-2006, the Government of Odisha introduced a land allocation scheme called *Vasundhara*, which aimed at allotting up to 10 decimals of land (one-tenth of an acre) to the homesteadless. Landesa conducted an assessment of the programme in 2009-2010. The assessment revealed several implementation bottlenecks and operational gaps, in which many landless were not included in the programme. Out of those who were granted title, many were ignorant of the location of the plot and could not take possession of land (Rural Development Institute, 2010).

Having identified this barrier, Landesa, in consultation with Government of Odisha, designed a model engaging local youths as Community Resource Persons (CRPs) to provide critical support to land administration officials in allocating land under the *Vasundhara* programme. In the CRP model, the state government partners with civil society in the rather complicated area of land allocation. The CRP model also introduced a household-level survey method to identify landless people and innovatively engaged the community in the process, thus bringing greater transparency to the method.

This paper describes the key features of the land allocation programme being implemented in the state of Odisha now covering nearly 18,000 habitations, presents the features of the CRP model, and highlights the measures undertaken to make the programme community-driven and inclusive. The paper is based on the reflections of government officials, Community Resource Persons and community members who have participated in the land allocation programme that is operational in Odisha. These reflections were gathered by the authors and other Landesa staff during interactions with these various stakeholders.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

Poverty and access to land are unmistakably linked as evident from empirical data and several worldwide studies. Secure, long-term rights to land are fundamental for rural development because such rights have

been linked to farmers investing in their land for the mid-to-long term. For farmers with small land holdings and near-landless groups, homestead plots can be effective for growing vegetables and fruits and rearing livestock, leading to improved household nutrition and even increased income. Examples can be found from around the world on the several benefits of secure land rights, including increased access to government services and institutional credit, improved family nutrition, and greater economic and social recognition. Additionally, unclear property rights coupled with overlapping land claims lead to intense competition, hampering investment over land by agribusiness and smallholders (Cotula, Toumin, & Quan, 2006). Secure rights over small plots offer a viable and increasingly attractive alternative against the popular perception that in order to address poverty; rights over larger parcels of land have to be assumed (Hanstad, Nielsen, & Brown, 2004).

Lack of secure tenure exacerbates poverty and has contributed to social instability and conflict in many parts of the world. It is not only that poor people lack current income, but they also lack the assets with which to generate income. Land tenure security – for both women and men – is just one step on the road to reducing rural poverty. While access and rights over land can improve the economic conditions of poor families, it can also augment economic growth generally and empower the poor in non-economic ways. Additionally, strengthening women's land rights not only contributes to gender equality, it also improves food security and reduces poverty for the whole family (International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2012).

For millions of rural and urban poor, even when they have access to land, the formal legal system may not recognise their rights to the land (Meinzen-Dick, 2009). While legislation reform may provide more secure land tenure for the poor and thus reduce poverty, proper implementation procedures and programmatic linkages are essential to ensure the actual benefits flow to the poorest. For instance, formalising land rights to barren and unproductive land in itself may not help a family to overcome poverty. But by facilitating land development and appropriate cropping practices to make the land productive, access to credit and other government services could contribute to the family's overall well-being.

Following national independence, the central and state governments of India promulgated a number of land reform laws with the aim of bridging the gap between the landless poor and the landed rich. These progressive laws focused on redistribution of available land through the introduction of land ceiling provisions with the ultimate goal of providing "land to the tiller." The laws also sought to achieve the

more pragmatic objective of promoting proper and effective utilisation of land in an effort to increase agricultural production.

In Odisha, a state located on the eastern coast of India and home to 42 million people (including nearly 10 million belonging to indigenous communities), the government has endeavored to enact legislation aimed at redistributing land ownership and providing land to those who cultivate it. To confer ownership rights on the tenants, the state realised the need to abolish intermediaries and ensure tenure security for tenants. The Government of Odisha demonstrated its commitment to provide access to land as well as secure land tenure rights to the landless by enacting several pieces of progressive legislation, including fixed land ceilings to facilitate the redistribution of land, especially to the Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste<sup>1</sup> families. The state also introduced strong legal instruments to protect tribal land rights from being transferred to non-tribals.

For instance, the Orissa<sup>2</sup> Land Reforms Act 1960 was a watershed in giving land rights to the tenants. It was meant to go beyond the ideological goal of “land to the tiller” and achieve the more pragmatic objective of promoting proper and effective utilisation of land in an effort to increase food production in the state - and the country, by extension.

Although the Government of Odisha promulgated a number of progressive legislations after independence, their implementation remains a major concern. The Land Ceiling Act 1974 was enacted with the intention of bringing economic and social justice to the weaker sections of society. Its objective was for the government to acquire surplus land and redistribute it among landless families in an effort to improve the economy and the living standards of the poor. The ceiling surplus operation failed to yield the desired result. Although a number of beneficiaries had *pattas* (land titles) for ceiling surplus land allotted to them, the beneficiaries lacked actual physical possession of the allotted land, which was still under possession of the previous owners. Even where beneficiaries did take possession, poor land quality made it almost impossible for the beneficiaries to cultivate the land and at times, even to identify it. Additionally, records of the allotted land right have been largely unavailable (Patnaik, 2008).

Identification of the homesteadless and landless is one part of the mammoth task both in terms of enormity and complexity. The Working Group on Disadvantaged Farmers for the Twelfth Five Year Plan submitted to the Planning Commission of India estimates that about 10% of rural households are entirely

---

<sup>1</sup> Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes are recognised in the Constitution of India as historically disadvantaged groups of people.

<sup>2</sup> The English rendering of *Orissa* was officially changed to *Odisha* in 2011.

landless with a large percentage to be nearly landless (Agarwal, 2011). While 10% of the rural households were reported to be landless, in the urban sector the share was almost 49%. In absolute terms, about 15 million households were found to be landless in rural India (National Sample Survey Organisation, 2006). An enumeration by the Government of Odisha placed a figure of 236,000 landless in the state. (Department of Revenue and Disaster Management, 2012) .

Resolving complex issues, such as those related to tribal land alienation and government land allotted but not identified, require a more serious level of engagement and effort on the part of the government than has been visible so far. Notwithstanding the existence of special campaigns such as *Mo Jami Mo Diha*<sup>3</sup> and special provisions under law such as Regulation 2 of 1956<sup>4</sup>, poor tribals continue to suffer in thousands of villages, spawning several other problems in the process that the government has to then grapple with.

### **3. COMMUNITY RESOURCE PERSON MODEL**

The *Vasundhara* homestead plot allocation programme began with a list of homesteadless families created by a 2003-2004 government-led enumeration of homesteadlessness. The programme aimed to provide land to 250,000 homesteadless households in the state. Although government records indicated that by 2008 about 92% of these households had received land titles, various studies and independent reports revealed several possession-related challenges, such as families not obtaining physical possession of the land and other homesteadless families being left out of the programme entirely (Rural Development Institute, 2010).

Landesa conducted a study to assess the status of implementation of the *Vasundhara* programme in 2009-2010. The study covered 2,400 respondents in 88 villages spread over ten districts in Odisha. The assessment found that the programme suffered because of capacity constraints of the implementing officials. Due to operational limitations and inherent capacity gaps the land administration officials were unable to complete the enumeration needed to identify the landless households, carry out proper verification of the sites and mobilise the community to prepare applications and necessary paperwork. As a result of the study, Landesa postulated that with minimal training local youth could provide the much

---

<sup>3</sup> The Government of Odisha had launched *Mo Jami Mo Diha* in 2007 to protect the land rights of the poor, including restoring land to the earlier beneficiaries of land allocation.

<sup>4</sup> The Regulation 2 of 1956 was enacted to check and control transfer of immovable properties by the Scheduled Tribes in the Scheduled Areas of the state. It prohibits, among other things, transfer of immovable properties belonging to the Scheduled Tribes to non-Tribes.

needed additional capacity to the land administration officials to accomplish each of these tasks (Rural Development Institute, 2010).

Taking active inputs from land administration officials and experts, Landesa designed and piloted a model wherein a local youth (called a Community Resource Person, or CRP) was trained to provide additional capacity to the local land administration official. The model was implemented on a pilot basis in 36 villages and demonstrated that within a short span of time the CRPs could prepare an accurate list of landless families in the village. The CRP model evolved to augment the existing capacity of land administration officials at the field level in the process of accurate identification of the landless. The CRPs also worked closely with the land administration officials and helped in the application and verification processes that culminated in the granting of land title to the landless families. The CRPs are selected in a participatory process and trained on the data collection and identification process. Within a span of four to six weeks the CRPs are able to prepare a list of landless households in a village (Patnaik, Choudhury, Behara, & Sahoo, 2013).

The chief innovation of the model was its use of a simple enumeration method to identify the landless families who were previously invisible to the Government. The model introduced a household survey that could be administered by the CRP working in close collaboration with the local land administration official. The method involved a community-led beneficiary identification system in place of the existing one, which solely relied on the report submitted by the Revenue Inspector (the local-level land administration official). Because the CRP conducted the survey at the household-level, the chances of leaving out landless families were minimised. Moreover, the more transparent process demystified the perceived complications of land allocation.

Landesa continuously engaged with the government at various levels and shared the design and findings of the pilot that helped the model gain greater acceptance. This model of CRPs identifying landless families was adopted by the Odisha Tribal Empowerment and Livelihoods Programme (OTELP), a government poverty alleviation agency. OTELP agreed to scale the model to cover 1,056 villages in seven districts of the state during 2011-2013. As of January 2014, with close to 16,000 landless families having already received title to their land under possession, it is slowly becoming evident that the poor and landless are regaining their confidence in the efficiency and effectiveness of government systems, something that is very critical and essential in remote areas. The Government of Odisha has now extended the land allocation programme to cover 18,000 tribal villages over the next five years.

#### **4. TRANSPARENCY IN LAND TO THE LANDLESS**

Implementing a land allocation programme in far flung villages in Odisha has its inherent challenges, and even more so when, as there often are, only one official for every 1,000 households. In this context making the land reform process participatory, accessible to all, and transparent was a challenge. The CRP model addressed these concerns because the youth serving as CRPs are selected jointly by community members and land administration officials, thus giving credibility to the process and making it acceptable to the community and the government. The CRP model also calls for the local community, with support from the CRPs, to take the lead role in identifying the poorest and most vulnerable who are eligible for land. Through its participatory design, the programme has ensured increased transparency in the identification of landless families and an enhanced role for community members in the various steps of the land allocation process.

The CRP model has demonstrated the workability of an easy method to enumerate the landless and account for the total available land of various categories in the village. The method is more accurate and efficient since the CRP collates all relevant information and triangulates the information and prepares a list of landless in the village. Such information on landless households and land available for allocation, which was earlier confined to record books and handled by the land administration officials, became available with the community. The CRP, as a part of the process to identify landless households, brings the village Records of Rights (land records) to the community and in the process enhances the community members' access to the land records. Previously, the entire exercise of providing land to the landless was relatively secretive and opaque. The villagers rarely knew who was landless and who received land, and there was no specific system to identify the landless. The CRP model is an excellent example of decentralising knowledge over which the state has traditionally exercised monopoly. As a by-product of the enumeration process conducted by the CRP, all villagers come to know about their land holding details.

Land administration in general and the determination of the extent of landlessness in the state, in particular, had been the exclusive responsibility of the Revenue Department. The CRPs provide the “last mile” link with government by fulfilling the capacity gaps that plagued the local land administration. With the engagement of the CRPs and involvement of the poor themselves, land allocation has become a decentralised, community-led process. Instead of waiting for the government to find them, the CRPs empower the landless poor to seek rightful title to land on which they reside. The program reaches the landless poor in a way that government programs had previously failed. During the course of implementation of the programme it transpired that due to customary biases and poor programme



administration, poor single women – including widows, deserted women, and unmarried women – were not being identified as eligible to get land. Landesa helped the government devise an enumeration process that engaged women health and nutrition workers to identify such landless single women. Land administration officials further verify which single women are eligible to receive land.

The primary objective of the CRP model was to ensure land to the landless by supporting the Revenue Department. However, during the course of implementation, with intense community interaction it also resulted in a number of additional gains, namely:

- *More effective and efficient land allocation:* The CRP model creates urgency for resolving titling issues, making the entire land allocation process time bound. Moreover, with distinct roles for the community at each step of the land allocation process, the land allocation is gradually becoming a people's programme rather than just another government programme. Active participation of the community ensures that the process of enumerating landless families is mostly error-free and transparent.
- *Settlement of agricultural land:* Initially the model addressed only homestead land allocation. But with the proven success, the model is now being used to track agricultural landless families as well. Using the step-wise allocation system, landless families are now receiving titles over the agricultural land they are currently cultivating.
- *Settlement of land under the Forest Rights Act:* The allocation process used by the CRP was also found to be helpful in settling forest land under the Forest Rights Act 2006 in the project villages. As with other types of land, the CRP was instrumental in creating awareness and mobilising people for filing claim forms, holding community meetings, and supporting the Revenue Inspectors in their field verification drives.
- *Informally serving as an Extension Services Delivery worker:* In the course of rapport building with government functionaries and village communities, the CRPs also rendered other services, such as making referrals and creating linkages with other government departments in the area of livelihoods development and allotting of individual houses. The CRPs provided critical support linking community members to government programmes that support rural housing (IAY - *Indira Awas Yojana*), employment (MGNREGS – Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee Scheme), and development of orchards under National Horticulture Mission.
- *Developing a relationship beyond land allocation:* The relationship of trust created between the CRP and Revenue Inspectors placed the CRPs in a position where they could lend support and

offer advice on issues other than their original job brief. The CRP was able to facilitate the revenue officials and communities' resolution of long-standing land disputes.

## **5. COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP AND IMPROVED GOVERNANCE**

For OTELP, working on land allocation with multiple stakeholders has been a novel experience. Prior to implementing the land allocation programme, OTELP did not work with the Revenue Department as OTELP's primary focus was on food and livelihoods security, an area in which land did not feature prominently. In implementing the land allocation programme, OTELP developed a wide range of individual and institutional capacities to work with the Revenue Department toward the common goal of ensuring land to the landless. Although access to land continues to be a critical challenge in Odisha's Scheduled Areas where OTELP is operational, it aimed to ensure that all tribal landless households had a title to the land they occupied.

In implementing a time-bound land allocation programme, OTELP redefined the concept of extension in a difficult area like land by tapping into the capacity of private individuals. The objective was to support the Revenue Department, not only by providing additional capacity, but also working as a constant companion in its project *tahasil* (an administrative division) to ensure that the human and material constraints to addressing the land allocation challenges were eliminated. The programme starts with the active involvement and engagement with the District Collector and Magistrate along with other revenue officials who are crucial in the land settlement process.

In this programme, the CRPs supported the identification of landless families and OTELP staff along with local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) facilitated and co-ordinated with the local revenue officials. Landesa designed the programme, including building capacity of staff and CRPs, and provided much needed technical support and critical inputs at vital points to keep the programme going. This is a novel example where OTELP, a poverty alleviation programme; Landesa, an NGO; and the District Administration are working closely with each other to address the issues of landlessness. As a general rule, most land reform programmes have been the exclusive domain of the Revenue Department. Revenue and land had remained a strict no-go area for outsiders. But in this case, government officials, community members and NGO personnel have worked together as a team to settle land for the landless and to be potential change makers.

Involving literate youth from the village in regularising the occupation of government land was an innovative model of land allocation because it relied on the capacity of a private individual to enumerate

landlessness. Earlier, civil society and private individuals had no direct role in such Revenue Department operations. Land allocation and settlement was not perceived as an area in which the participation of private citizens could even be possible. For the first time in the country, a partnership was formed between the state and non-state actors, in an area that was considered an exclusive reserve of the government. By accepting the increased engagement of non-Revenue Department persons in land allocation, the state government exhibited its openness to recognising the capacity within the community to provide critical support to the government. It also recognised the ability of local youth to socially mediate to reach the unreached.

Further, the CRPs could also re-establish the link between the people and government by delivering results in record time. Implementing the land allocation programme offers a unique experience of a workable and successful model in which government partners and civil society jointly carved out distinct roles and responsibilities for each player in the rather complicated area of land allocation. The CRP model not only ensures people's participation in identifying landless families, but also ensures that they take part and provide vital information regarding land holding to revenue officials. The operation of the CRP model demonstrates a public-private-community partnership at each step of the allocation process:

- The Revenue Inspector in consultation with the community, selects a private individual to serve as a CRP;
- The resource NGO and the revenue officials jointly train the CRPs;
- The CRPs work with the community and the Revenue Inspector to prepare the final landless list; and
- The CRPs organise the community and claimants to support field verification, which is then undertaken by the Revenue Inspector.

The benefits of such a partnership model are that it is unlikely that a single landless case is not enumerated, it minimises the possibility of bogus identification and it allows public identification of households encroaching on government land. The nature of identifying the landless is such that everything related to land becomes public knowledge. The philosophy behind the CRP model is to create a “friend of the people” figure who can help initiate social mediation between communities and the government to resolve land issues. Throughout the pilot project and OTELP scaling, the CRP proved to be particularly useful in helping people, especially the landless, realise that getting a piece of homestead land was their right, thus generating demand that had been missing.

## **6. LAND ALLOCATION BECOMES COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY**

The land allocation programme was designed as a collective exercise with each team member having specific responsibilities and deliverables. At every step of the land allocation programme, there was an inbuilt mechanism for joint planning, monitoring and review by concerned players. Such a joint exercise brought transparency to the way in which the land allocation process progressed. Earlier, land allocation was a private exercise between the Revenue Inspector and the landless – the community had virtually no role. By diffusing the decision making, the Revenue Inspector's discretion was greatly reduced. Team work also allowed each stakeholder to recognise the constraints and limitations affecting others and to overcome the limitations by complementing each other's work.

The constraints of the government officials were taken into account as OTELP plugged gaps and strengthened governance and implementation structures of the land allocation process. This helped revenue officials to obtain additional human resource support through retired revenue officials to quickly prepare and process land records, resulting in speedy disposal of cases. Since the CRP model calls for division of labor with each player holding specific responsibilities, it has generated a sense of joint ownership regarding the distinct deliverables of the programme at each step. The collective effort to complete field verification to jointly decide on the extent of landlessness and ensure the settlement of the site was one such example. During the field verification, all players gave their best, knowing this was the most critical step of the land allocation process and an extra bit of work and sincerity would move them closer to their common goal, namely ensuring land to the landless.

During the inception of the programme, revenue officials were skeptical about the use of CRPs to identify landless families. As discussed earlier, the apprehensions were based on a perceived lack of capacity of the CRPs to complete their assigned tasks and the revenue officials' fear of being replaced by the CRPs. Both of these apprehensions were proven wrong through the CRPs' efficiency in identifying the landless, and the relationship between the revenue officials and the CRPs changed.

By socially mediating between the community and government, the CRPs also helped to break the age old negative perceptions that community members had about revenue officers. The CRPs helped create a conducive environment in which people got to know about and became sensitive to the revenue officers' work burden and other limitations. Through the CRPs, the revenue officers found it easier to reach people than they had previously. Therefore, the association between the revenue officers and CRPs slowly became more sustainable as the officers looked to CRPs to take up more revenue responsibilities than just providing a landless list.

The cooperation of the field-level revenue officials was a clear indicator of their acceptance and appreciation for the CRP model. During a 2013 *tahasil*-level review meeting, one Revenue Inspector remarked, “We were not used to working with communities the way the programme expected us to work. Community mobilisation and convergence was the last thing that the Revenue Department expected to work, being a regulatory outfit. The OTELP land allocation programme turned out to be a great eye opener for all of us.”

## **7. GOVERNANCE REFORM THROUGH LAND ALLOCATION**

As the canvas of development evolves, government institutions need enhanced capacity to respond effectively to complex development challenges. Land to the landless is one such complex and difficult state mandate that is hard to achieve unless a mutually complementing partnership is established by creatively juxtaposing multiple capacities. The CRP model is one such partnership platform where the native and traditional knowledge of local communities is recognised as a crucial input to the government's landless enumeration process, thereby cementing local participation in land governance.

Being local youth, CRPs have a better understanding of the community dynamics and are generally more responsive to the villagers, especially the poor and the landless. This made it easier for them to gather information on homesteadless and landless households and also support the efforts of revenue officials. An allocation plan was developed in consultation with revenue officials and experts. The allocation plan included a specific timeline for each step in the allocation process, making it a strictly time-bound exercise. The step-wise allocation plan had both technical and non-technical steps. The CRPs contribute in both non-technical and technical ways to reduce the Revenue Inspector's workload.

To create a step-wise allocation plan, the CRP model divides the entire process of providing land to the landless into several components. The plan, in each step, enables the planners to identify what kind of capacity assistance would be required for each deliverable. For instance, to accurately identify landless households, a literate person who is familiar with the basics of reading, writing and counting is required. Moreover, during the Revenue Inspector's field verification undertaken, the participation of multiple players—including OTELP staff members; facilitating NGOs; and community members, including local elected representatives<sup>5</sup>, identified landless households, and the CRP—helps to establish high accountability standards. In the presence of so many players, chances of error with regard to authenticity of the claim and proper demarcation of the plot is minimised to almost zero.

---

<sup>5</sup> Elected representatives of local-governance units are known as *Panchayat* representatives.

The project villages offer examples of the villagers taking up settlement of land after the initial support provided by the CRP. In Chamundarasi village of Malkangiri district, when part of the identified homesteadless households faced problems in receiving *pattas* for their current house sites because the land they occupied was of a category not easily allocated for private ownership, the villagers did not sit back passively. Instead, they themselves pushed the Revenue Inspector and ensured the rest of the homesteadless families were settled on the forestland they were occupying.

The CRP model is an excellent example of decentralising knowledge to enable enhanced access to basic information on ownership of land. A number of activities are undertaken as part of this decentralisation of knowledge:

- The CRP, as part of the process to identify landless households, brings the village Record of Rights to the community and educates the community members on the use of land records. The practice of keeping records at the community level has enhanced community members' access to information and creates transparency about landholding status in the village. With the CRP working closely with the community and the Revenue Inspector, people can easily access revenue records, especially the village land records.
- To help descendants ascertain their share of land, the CRP prepares a genealogy (showing family shares of ancestral land) in the presence of family members and the Revenue Inspector. In a joint family situation, the father is typically regarded as head of the family and therefore eligible to get the land. Thus, Revenue Inspectors usually overlook the process of ascertaining family land share. But with the CRP working with the Revenue Inspector, descendants having less than two decimals (one-fiftieth of an acre) may also be considered homesteadless. By using a transparent process to prepare the genealogy to establish the exact shares of family land, the CRPs help to avoid future conflicts among descendants, especially conflicts caused by ignorance of respective individual land shares.
- The CRP prepares and shares the final list of landless families with the community in a village meeting. This open process of reading out names in a village meeting helps villagers know which households are homesteadless and landless and what criteria has been used to identify the household as homesteadless, landless or both.
- During field verification by revenue officials, families identified as landless have an opportunity to actively participate in identifying and demarcating the government land they are occupying. This helps avoid future conflict over area and possession. The entire exercise of providing land to the landless used to be an activity limited to the Revenue Department and Revenue Inspector's

office, with barely any role for the community. The villagers rarely knew who was landless and who had received land or what land they had received. Moreover, with support from the CRP, the Revenue Inspectors undertook field verification in each village. This had not been the practice previously due to multiple demands on the Revenue Inspectors' time.

The CRP also helped the Revenue Inspector to locate families (not always landless) who had encroached onto government land by placing the Record of Rights before them and involving them in field verification. By bringing such unauthorised occupation to public notice, the CRP provided able support to the Revenue Inspector. This helped the CRP to gain the confidence and trust of villagers, who could then sort out their problems with the Revenue Inspector mediating with other villagers and advocating on behalf of the poor.

For example, the village youth club in Sindiguda village of Malkangiri district was using *Rakhita*<sup>6</sup> land for the purpose of a playground for almost a decade. During field verification this was pointed out by the CRP, and soon the community members had a series of discussions with the revenue officials and the members of the community club. As part of the negotiation, the youth club agreed to vacate the piece of land following which the land was allotted to the identified homesteadless households. Earlier, since the entire community was not involved in the process, such unauthorised occupation of government land went unnoticed, and the Revenue Inspector was not motivated to initiate eviction on his own accord.

The CRP model has been instrumental to productively channel the energy of the village youth by training them as CRPs, giving them a sense of purpose as they contribute to their village's development. Seeing CRPs' drive and results on the ground, the government is considering engaging them in other post-land allocation programmes such as helping families in planning for homestead development, enrolment in backyard plantation and seed mini-kit programmes, and applying for rural housing. By virtue of their active involvement in land allocation, the CRPs have become critical partners in the development process of the village, making them more confident and nurturing their leadership qualities. Their constant interactions with government officials and knowledge of government programmes and targets have greatly impacted their professional skills.

There are a number of examples of skill development through public work enabling CRPs to avail other economic and community leadership opportunities. Their work has been recognised and their

---

<sup>6</sup> As per Government land records, *Rakhita* land is reserved for communal use and includes land for grazing, pasture land and other community uses.

employability has increased. With opportunities for regular capacity building and interaction with different officials and forums, the village youth becomes a skilled hand who can provide support in implementing various government programmes. With an enhanced skill and information base, the CRP can become a point person to generate demand and operationalise various development and extension projects. For instance the CRP can be helpful in addressing other land-related issues such as resolving land disputes, measuring land, helping the Revenue Inspector issue certificates or distribute compensations, demarcating community land, and other tasks. Similarly, other departments, such as Animal Resource Development, Horticulture and Agriculture, can use the expertise of CRPs in providing essential inputs and services in the villages. With the CRP becoming a trained hand, government departments can address the problem of "last-mile" connectivity with the village.

## **8. COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT THROUGH DECENTRALISED LAND GOVERNANCE**

By virtue of its decentralised operation, the CRP programme has successfully garnered support of *Panchayati Raj* functionaries (local elected representatives), local development actors, and civil society to demystify perceived technicalities and complexities around land administration and to make the process people-friendly and uncomplicated. Using CRPs to expedite land allocation motivated revenue officials to prioritise land allocation that they earlier could not accomplish because of staff shortages. Many Revenue Inspectors have said that since they did not follow a standardised method of landless identification, the numbers they were offering were inaccurate. However, within the previously existing circumstances, they felt they had no other option. Some Revenue Inspectors also said that since they did not have additional support, they hardly ever undertook field verification before providing land (Patnaik, Choudhury, Behara, & Sahoo, 2013).

The process of keeping data at the community level and periodically sharing it creates a proactive engagement of communities in land allocation issues. Increased access to land records and the presence of CRPs appears to have brought about a visible increase in the frequency and the number of people visiting the Revenue Circle offices. The CRP programme, to a large extent, empowered and motivated community members to get involved in land allocation work. Because of the CRP's close proximity to the community and the Revenue Inspector, the CRP has also been able to help people with regard to land disputes that were not strictly under the CRP's purview.

The CRP programme has experienced increased participation of women in land allocation for the land being jointly titled in the name of both spouses. As per distribution figures collected as of January 2014, 93% of homestead and farmland titles distributed in the project villages were jointly titled, and 2.5% went



to women-headed households. After land allocation, the women exhibited keen interest and zeal to productively use the homestead plots by accessing government schemes and programmes. There were instances in which women landholders, on their own, formed user groups to access government services. With regard to women-headed households, the title was instrumental in getting residential proof to ensure their children's education because such documents are required for enrolling children in schools (Landesa, 2013).

### ***A people's programme that serves to build trust and confidence***

Being a community-driven exercise, the CRP model creates urgency for resolving titling issues, making the entire land allocation process time-bound. When a group of landless individuals gets land within a specific time frame, the poor and landless are likely to regain their confidence on the efficiency and effectiveness of government systems, something that is critical and essential in remote tribal areas of the state. Moreover, with distinct roles for the community at each step of the land allocation process, people's ownership of the land allocation programme has been exemplary, and it is gradually turning out to be a true people's programme.

Because the CRP model requires that the Revenue Inspector work in collaboration with the communities for land allocation in a time-bound manner, people also start to regain trust and confidence in the government's handling of their land-related issues. Whereas the government conducted earlier enumerations in which a large number of people were left out, the transparent process that CRPs used to identify households resulted in distribution of *pattas*, providing a tangible benefit that restored people's confidence in the revenue operations.

With increased community support, the CRP was able to enhance the reach of government officials, who could now gain access to previously inaccessible pockets in the interiors. The CRPs took field-level revenue officials to areas that they could not enter earlier. In difficult terrains, community support was ensured, helping the Revenue Inspector to initiate the process for land allocation. The most critical feature of the CRP model is that it reinforces confidence on people's abilities to bring about change, thereby becoming drivers of their own destinies.

Village development, being a collective process, requires that the entire village come together. But the success of the CRP model proves that with a little facilitation, communities are ready to come together to move the mountain. If government has exhibited the necessary openness, communities have

constructively responded to bridge the capacity gaps within government, so that the partnership delivers desirable outcomes.

The model has turned out to be an excellent example of a community-led planning and monitoring process where self-help has transcended from individual dividends to community gain. Participatory development, as understood in common parlance, is a system of development intervention in which the community supports government machinery to achieve certain objectives. But the CRP model creates the space so that the community, by shouldering the responsibility of identifying the extent of landlessness that subsequently is validated by the government, successfully graduates itself to a decision-making role, thereby redefining the existing definitions of participatory development and rearranging the leadership role in it.

## **9. CONCLUSIONS**

Several policy- and practice-related issues and contributions cropped up during programme implementation, reiterating the power of village communities in making an intervention transparent and effective for large-scale implementation. The CRP model serves as a useful learning that can be applied to similar development programmes, at the state level and elsewhere in the country.

The success of any development intervention depends on correct identification of the target group. For any development programme to achieve optimum benefits, it is important to identify the intended beneficiaries within the appropriate systems. The land allocation programme established a unique method of empowering local communities to identify the extent of landlessness. The success of the programme should encourage policy makers and development thinkers to expand the use of the model beyond land programmes.

### ***Community as a service provider***

Traditionally, demand for services has depended on external stimuli. Normally, local communities do not have a specific role in deciding who should be eligible for government programmes. In most government programmes, including land distribution, enumeration of eligible households has been the responsibility of field-level officials. Local communities largely remain outside the process.

Looking at the success of the CRP model, adopting a decentralised and community-based method of beneficiary identification can have multiple advantages, including transparency in identification, increased ownership of the programme, and reduced discretion of government officials in identifying

beneficiaries. Allowing communities to identify beneficiaries is a good practice as established by the CRP model and can therefore be adopted in other government programmes. Moreover, since field-level government officials with the requisite authority are supposed to cross verify the numbers provided by the community, it reduces the chance of inclusion of ineligible families in the programme.

### ***Developing a sustainable village resource***

The CRP has proven to be a useful village resource and an efficient service provider by delivering results in record time. This unique feature of local assistance proved effective in providing reliable and accurate information to the relevant government officials that eventually resulted in the settlement of land to the landless. The CRP provided assistance in the collection of information as well as creating demand, which resulted in tangible benefits. The same approach of partnership and assistance can be adopted by other government projects that target the most vulnerable and needy communities. With requisite capacity building and facilitation of the different officials involved in the process, it is likely to ensure effective programme delivery and improved outreach.

### ***Opportunity for government to enhance reach and delivery***

Reaching out to the remotest villages of the country has been a constant challenge for extension service providers while ensuring services and entitlements to citizens. As a trained volunteer, the CRP who comes from the community is uniquely placed to serve as a critical link between the community and government. With growing development challenges, there is a requirement for varied extension services for the rural population. The CRP who could be a multi-skilled barefoot service provider can be effective in enhancing timely delivery and outreach by bridging the last mile connectivity. Engaging and involving community members in selection of beneficiaries, delivery of inputs and services, and adopting a participatory method can result in measurable results and enhanced impact.

### ***Land answers the poverty question***

Access to land and its productive use has the potential to ensure that people are secure in their villages. People often migrate to urban and semi-urban locations for better opportunities, because there is no viable livelihoods option in the village. Land tenure security not only recognises rights of people, it combines other development interventions in a rights framework as a model of economic and social empowerment. Land provides identity and security leading to improved access to education, better say in village development, access to credit and other services. With increased access to government programmes, the new land owners are able to ensure food and nutrition security for themselves not only in tribal sub-plan areas but also in other difficult areas of the state. Secure land tenure for the poor and the marginalised

should, therefore, be the entry point of all development interventions and the hub for livelihoods convergence initiatives.

## References

- Agarwal, B. (Chairperson). (2011). *Twelfth plan working group on disadvantaged farmers, including women*. New Delhi: Planning Commission, Government of India.
- Cotula, L., Toumin, C., & Quan, J. (2006). *Better land access for the poor. Lessons from experiences and challenges ahead*. International Institute for Environment and Development & FAO.
- Department of Revenue and Disaster Management. (2012). *Annual Activity Report, 2011-12*. Bhubaneswar: Government of Odisha.
- Hanstad, T., Nielsen, R., & Brown, J. (2004). *Making land rights real for India's rural poor*. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations.
- International Fund for Agricultural Development. (2012). *Land Tenure security and poverty reduction*. Rome: IFAD.
- Landesa. (2013). Bhubaneswar: Landesa.
- Meinzen-Dick, R. (2009). *Property Rights for Poverty Reduction?* New York: United Nations.
- National Sample Survey Organisation. (2006). *Household Ownership Holding in India, 2003*. New Delhi: National Sample Survey Organisation, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
- Patnaik, S. (2008). *Land Rights and Ownership in Orissa*. New Delhi: United Nations Development Programme.
- Patnaik, S., Choudhury, S., Behara, K., & Sahoo, S. S. (2013). *Empowering People Through Land Rights*. Bhubaneswar: Odisha Tribal Empowerment and Livelihoods Programme.
- Rural Development Institute. (2010). *Report on possession status of land distributed under Vasundhara scheme as well as land recognized under Forest Rights Act in selected OTELP villages*. Bhubaneswar: RDI.