

IN RURAL INDIA, AN ESTIMATED 15 MILLION FAMILIES  
ARE BOTH POOR AND LANDLESS



Photograph by Deborah Espinosa

## LANDESA IN INDIA

02

### GOAL

To help India's 15 million poor, rural, landless families obtain ownership of a small plot of land and the opportunity to build a better future.

### OVERVIEW

In rural India, an estimated 15 million families are both poor and landless. Scores of millions more lack secure legal rights to the land they currently occupy. Traditional poverty alleviation efforts will largely bypass these families – unless the families obtain legal rights to land. With land as a foundation, the rural poor are better able to use the building blocks of education, healthcare, clean water, nutrition and access to credit to bootstrap themselves out of extreme poverty.

Previous attempts in India to promote development through broadening land ownership using traditional sized farms produced mixed results, in part because

there wasn't enough land available or enough money in the government's budget.

In partnership with Landesa, national and state governments in India have developed another path toward the same goal: micro-plots. These house and garden plots, which may be as small as tennis courts, can be effective anti-poverty tools.

The plots allow families to produce most of the fruits and vegetables they need and to sell excess produce, providing a small income to supplement their earnings as wage laborers. This extra income can enable parents to pull their children out of the fields and place them in schools. Micro-plots also reduce malnutrition and boost health. And they are small enough

### PROGRESS

More than 430,000 families are now landowners.

Homestead allocation and pilot programs are working in three states with Landesa's assistance.

The national government of India has launched, with Landesa's help, a \$200 million initiative to provide 2 million landless families with secure access to land.

that even the government's constrained finances can afford to pay market prices to purchase and distribute enough land for the huge numbers of poor. Often, the poor are given ownership to government land they already occupy, further reducing costs.

#### LANDESA'S CURRENT INITIATIVES

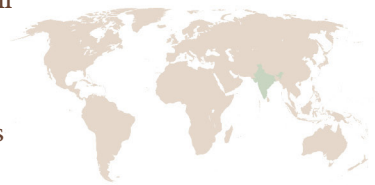
Landesa continues work with the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Odisha, and West Bengal to develop and help implement pro-poor government programs informed by our research findings.

- In West Bengal, Odisha, and Karnataka, Landesa supports the design and implementation of government programs to provide micro-plot ownership to impoverished, landless rural families and particularly to women.
  - Landesa is working with Indian states to explore policy changes that would allow poor families to access farmland through fair leasing agreements. Currently, leasing farmland is either illegal or greatly restricted in most states. Research shows that the restrictive tenancy legislation both reduces agricultural efficiency and restricts land access for the poor.
  - Landesa partners with local governments to ensure that families obtaining micro-plots are trained in agricultural techniques that will maximize the benefits of their plots.
- Landesa is helping state government planners participate in a national program that helps rural landless families obtain land on which they can build a house and develop a home garden.
  - Landesa is working with West Bengal, Odisha, and Karnataka to ensure women's names are included on land titles at the time they receive homestead plots.
  - Landesa is helping the state of Odisha establish a women's land rights center.
  - Landesa continues to work with the state government of Andhra Pradesh to support and expand a legal aid program that has already provided secure land rights to 280,000 poor rural families.
  - Landesa is working in West Bengal on a new government program aimed at helping poor rural girls avoid trafficking, abuse, and exploitation. The program will use livelihoods training, land ownership, and self-help groups to empower girls. In an effort to help change traditions harmful to girls, Landesa and its partners will also engage the community at all levels in conversations about the role of girls in the community.

#### LANDESA'S HISTORY IN INDIA

Landesa's involvement in India started in 1999 with focused field research. This research led to engagement with the national government on crafting new land policy that would focus on the rural poor.

These pro-poor policies serve as a foundation for Landesa's continued work in India as it partners with the national and state governments to develop and implement specific large-scale programs.



#### LANDESA'S HISTORY

Grounded in the knowledge that having legal rights to land is the foundation for prosperity and opportunity, Landesa partners with governments and local organizations to ensure that the world's poorest families have secure rights over the land they till. Founded as the Rural Development Institute in 1967, Landesa has helped more than 100 million families gain legal control over their land, unlocking sustainable economic growth and advancing education, nutrition, and conservation efforts.

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