

Press Release
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New Territory: Cultivating Support for Women's Land Rights in India

Survey of 1,400 rural women in three states finds that fundamental reforms are needed

SEATTLE – The [findings of a survey](#) released today from Landesa and UN Women, India indicate that eight years after the passage of legislation granting Indian women equal rights to inherit land from their parents, women across three Indian states (Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh) report that they are unaware of their right to inherit land and sometimes barred from exercising that right. This in-depth study of women's inheritance of parental land found startling evidence that many women have yet to benefit from the legal changes introduced by the 2005 Hindu Succession Act Amendment, which gave women equal rights to inherit their parents' land.

The survey's major findings include:

- Only 13 percent of women surveyed, whose parents own land, said they have inherited land or expect to inherit land from their parents.
- 44 percent of women surveyed said that their parents would not agree to bequeath them a share of the family's land.
- Women inheriting land is so uncommon that 69 percent of the women surveyed said they did not know of a single case where a woman had inherited land from her parents.
- 60 percent of the men surveyed said they did not know any woman who has inherited land from her parents.
- 51 percent of the women and 44 percent of the men surveyed reported that they consider it wrong for women to ask to inherit land from their parents.
- 61 percent of women surveyed reported that have signed No-Objections Certificates by which they renounce their rights to inheriting any of their family's land.

“This survey comes at a time when men are increasingly migrating to the cities, leaving women to manage the family farm,” said Ashok Sircar, India program director for Landesa, and one of the survey's authors. “If India is going to improve its food security and reduce poverty, ensuring women have stronger land rights is an essential first step.”

“What's particularly worrisome,” added Sircar. “Is that about half of the women reported that religious leaders and local government officials also do not recognize daughters' right to inherit parental land.”

The study also found signs of progress. In Andhra Pradesh, where women gained equal inheritance rights more than 20 years ago thanks to an early progressive state law, women's land inheritance rates were significantly higher. In the Andhra Pradesh sample, 34 percent of women had either inherited parental land or expected to as compared to eight percent in Bihar and seven percent in Madhya Pradesh.

The survey helps illuminate the different – often conflicting – forces shaping rural women’s lives: laws, tradition, community norms, religious leaders, the demands of relatives.

“The central government has taken enormous steps to protect women,” said Gregory Rake, India Country Director for Landesa. “Most recently, the 2005 Hindu Succession Act Amendment stated unequivocally that sons and daughters have equal rights to inherit family property and land. But clearly more needs to be done to ensure that women actually benefit from the progressive laws on the books.”

In rural India today, even though nearly 80 percent of women are dependent on agriculture for their livelihood, only 11 percent of rural landholders are women. Their land is generally smaller in size and of poorer quality than the land held by men. And women’s efforts to exercise their rights to inherit family land are not supported by the community, religious leaders, government officials, or the courts.

“Implementation of the provisions of the Hindu Succession Act Amendment has the potential to usher in a new era in gender equity in land ownership,” said Sohini Paul Program Coordinator at Landesa and one of the survey’s authors. “And we know from research around the world that women direct more of their income and resources towards meeting their children’s needs. By improving gender equity in land ownership, India can address some of its most stubborn problems and reduce poverty and domestic violence and improve nutrition and education.”

In an effort to achieve a broad range of development goals, the government must streamline systems to help women claim family land more easily. The government should also include information about women’s rights to inherit land in legal aid programs, legal literacy campaigns, and in training programs for government officials. These programs should not only help women understand their rights, but also help their communities understand the benefits of supporting women’s equal rights to land.

Such programs already exist in many locations in India and should be supported and expanded. In West Bengal, for example, Landesa in partnership with the state government are supporting [a program](#) in which tens of thousands of girls are learning about their rights and learning organic gardening skills which are helping them stay in school. In Andra Pradesh, the government in partnership with Landesa, is supporting [a television program](#) that educates rural residents about their land rights. And in Odisha, the state government and Landesa have partnered to help ensure that [poor women-headed households](#) learn about their rights and obtain rights to land.

The survey’s full report is available in English [here](#).

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About Landesa

Founded as the Rural Development Institute, Landesa has partnered with governments on reforms that have provided secure land rights to more than 100 million families since 1967. When women and men have secure rights to land, they can invest in their land to sustainably increase their harvests and reap the benefits – improved nutrition, health, education– for generations.