



Power of Homestead

The best predictor of poverty in India is neither caste nor illiteracy, but landlessness.

Nearly three-quarters of India's extreme poor, those living on the equivalent of less than \$1.25 a day, are rural. And the very worst off of the rural poor are the 13 to 18 million households that the 11th Five Year Plan acknowledged to be completely landless.

Now, after more than six decades of mostly failed attempts to address this most fundamental cause of rural poverty – access and secure rights to land – the Union government is poised to tackle the hardest part of the land problem, by adopting a historic land distribution programme that is tested, affordable, and politically feasible.

However, it is essential to the success of this effort – which joins the Centre, several States, and civil society groups – that all stakeholders understand the potential of this crucial programme, what the programme calls for and how it differs from past failed exercises.



Despite India's record economic growth over the past years, a just issued World Bank report shows that the absolute number of these extreme poor has barely budged in the past three decades, from 429 million people in 1981 to 400 million in 2010.

It is the 13 to 18 million landless households, the poorest of the poor, who form the target group for the 11th Plan's proposed distribution of 1/10th acre (10 cents) Homestead plots. And this is precisely the commitment the Union government made in October 2012 in Agra, to end the peaceful mass march-for-land on Delhi.

Since that Agra Agreement, intense discussions between the Centre and the civil society groups led by Ekta Parishad have synthesized into the **draft National Right to Homestead Bill, 2013**.

This Bill, which now awaits final Cabinet approval and submission to the legislature, may well represent the most serious effort since Independence to substantially and comprehensively address rural landlessness and its resulting poverty.

The Bill would provide 1/10th acre Homestead plots to all of the completely landless rural households, probably at the upper end of the 13-18 million

estimated in the Plan.

To do this, it would distribute existing public land and, where that is insufficient, would purchase voluntarily offered private land at a full market price, with the Centre paying the full cost of any private land, in cash.

The beneficiaries, the super-poor, would pay nothing, but would have to begin to use the land and move on to it within a certain time window.

It is critically important for all participants in the process to understand what the programme is and how it works.

This is not classic "land reform". The plots are small (1/10th acre) and 18 million Homestead plots will require 1.8 million acres, which is less than one-half of one percent of India's arable land.

This programme has nothing to do with re-setting "ceilings" or acquiring additional above-ceiling land.

The first used for land distribution is already-existing public land, and if that is insufficient in given locales, the Government will purchase private land at a voluntarily negotiated market price.



If that is still insufficient in a particular locale, the Government will use land acquisition, but must pay a full market price in cash.

All administrative elements of the programme have been thoroughly tested and carried out in multiple states on a substantial scale. The states of Kerala, West Bengal, Karnataka and Odisha have already successfully implemented such schemes, and there is extensive successful experience with such programme at international level as well.

The small Homestead plots are not intended to provide the family's full livelihood, but the plots will supplement that livelihood in crucial ways.

They add to nutrition and income, provide the household with status within the community, empower owners (with wives' names on the *patta*), confer access to credit and other government programmes, give leverage to the poor in bargaining for their wages and, of course, provide a secure place for basic shelter and motivation for its steady improvement.

Moreover, with nearly one quarter of all districts nationwide now considered subject to left-wing extremism, conferring land ownership upon the poor,

has a significant added benefit: it reduces land-based grievances.

Finally, for the success of the programme, certain key elements are essential.

First, the Centre must fund 100% of land costs, or many States will not participate.

Second, in most states, the deployment of suitably trained village youth to assist the Revenue Officers in local administration of the programme will reduce costs and expedite the distribution, and will be mostly funded from the Centre.

Third, the programme will not be successful if the distributed land is not suitable.

And, last, the existing programmes show that land parcels provided to landless families need to be close to where the poor work, free of other claims, and identified in parcels of at least one acre, so that colonies of at least 10 beneficiary households can be established on adjoining plots, to be served by common facilities (a well, basic access road, etc.).

A solution for the worst of India's rural poverty is now there for the taking – but the moment must be seized.

Homestead plot leads to increase in assets

Assets	In Six months	In One year	In Two years
House	One bedroom and kitchen (bamboo and reed wall with thatch roof) Area: Approx 2/100 acre.	One bedroom, one kitchen (bamboo and reed wall with tin roof). Kitchen sometimes is used as cattle shelter. Area: Approx 2/100acre.	One bedroom, bigger kitchen (bamboo and reed wall with tin roof) and cattle shelter. Area: approx 3/100acre.
Vegetables in kitchen garden - Size of 6 decimal	March-May: Bitter gourd, Pumpkin, Cucumber, Papaya, Sponge gourd, Ridge gourd chilly, Lady finger		
	June- September: Pumpkin, Spinach, Radish, Sponge gourd, Pointed gourd, Cowpea, Bottle gourd, Chilly		
	November- February: Cabbage, Cauliflower, Turnip, Radish, Spinach, Tomato, Papaya		
Timber trees		2 (Gamari trees)	4 Gamari trees, 2 Sal trees, 1 Pipul Tree
Fruit trees	Guava	4 fence trees (Guava, Beetlenut)	5 fence trees (Guava, Beetlenut)
Poultry		2 Chickens	4 Chickens
Cattle	1 Goat (existing)	1 Goat (existing)	4 Goats (new), 1 Cow, 1 Calf
Hand pump		1 (provided by the local govt)	1
Sanitary toilet		1 (provided by the local govt)	1
Fuel		Fencing plants	Fencing plants

Source: This information is based on Landesa's field observation as part of documentation of the impact of homestead plot allocation.



Landesa / Rural Development Institute (RDI) works to help millions of rural land insecure families obtain secure access and ownership of land. Landesa partners with governments and civil society organisations in India to ensure that the poorest have secure rights over the land they till, and live on, to help them overcome poverty. In India, Landesa works in the states of West Bengal, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.



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