

LANDLESSNESS AND ZERO LANDLESS PROJECT IN KERALA

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ABSTRACT

Landlessness is a most strong indicator of poverty in the country. Land is the most valuable imperishable possession from which people derive their economic independence, social status and permanent means of livelihood. Land also assumes them of identity and dignity and creates conditions and opportunities for realising social equality. Assured possession and equitable distribution of land is a lasting source of peace and prosperity and will pave way for social justice. Towards this end, the Government of Kerala came forward with a project to provide 3 cents of land to every landless families in the state. The study covers the Zero Landless Programme in Kannur District only and it is the limitation of the study. For the study data has been gathered from primary and secondary sources. Secondary sources including books, journals and reports of NSSO. The study focus on the Governments ambitious Zero Landless Programmes in Kannur District.

Keywords: Landlessness, Zero Landless Programme

INTRODUCTION

Rural poverty in India is closely tied to the condition of landlessness or small unviable holdings. Even today, ownership and control of land remains central to economic and social wellbeing in the countryside. By highlighting the fact that the right of ownership and control of land will lead to an upliftment of economic and social status of poor people and thereby reduce poverty to certain extend, the Government of Kerala initiated the steps to distribute land for landless people .Kerala has got a wide history in this regard. Recently Kerala government's ambitious "zero landless project" aimed at providing land to all landless people by 2015. There are 2,33,232

landless families in the state and the government would have to identify 8,000 acres of land to rehabilitate them. Of those 2,33,232 families, one lakh people would be provided land in the first phase. "Destitutes, people suffering from serious diseases, people with more than 50 per cent disability, widows and those from Scheduled Caste communities were given special priority," . Stating that all the beneficiaries in Kannur and Kasaragod would be given lands in the first phase itself, the Minister said that these two would be the first districts to achieve the target. By 2015, all landless in Kerala would get land. Apart from all these efforts, even after the introduction the several land reform measures by the Government, still there are a large number of people face several economic and social constraints. Therefore it is necessary to evaluate the various land distribution programmes undertaken by the Government during the last ten decades.

Land Governance in Kerala

Land is the single greatest resource in most countries. Land and its resources are central to a wide range of development objectives including social development, economic development, and sustainable management of natural resources. The world today faces many complex challenges, including climate change; rapid urbanisation; increased demand for natural resources; food, water and energy insecurity; and increased natural disasters. Many of these challenges have a clear land dimension including: unequal access to land; insecurity of tenure; unsustainable land-use; weak institutions for dispute and conflict resolution. Access to land and other natural resources and the associated security of tenure have significant implications for development. However, these rights are being increasingly undermined by weak governance, climate change, conflicts and natural disasters, population growth and urbanization and demands for new energy resources such as bio-fuels.

The last fifteen years have seen new global thinking and initiatives to improve land governance. Riding on the principles of transparency, accountability, subsidiarity, equity, justice, and rule of law, new global thinking recognizes that a pro-poor, gender-sensitive approach to land management and administration is not only the bedrock for improving land governance, but also cross-cutting above mentioned principles. Improved land governance is critical to the achievement of a wide range of development outcomes, including the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) like MDG1: Eradicating poverty and hunger, MDG3: Gender equality and the empowerment of women, MDG 7: Environmental Sustainability and MDG 8: Development partnerships.

When land governance is effective, equitable access to land and security of tenure can contribute to improvements in social, economic and environmental conditions. Good land governance can ensure that rights in land and natural resources are recognised and protected. By doing so, it

helps to reduce hunger and poverty, promotes social and economic development and contributes to more sustainable urbanisation. Weak governance, in contrast, has adverse consequences for society regardless of where it arises from as it promotes gender inequality, fosters social inequality and its illegal appropriation are therefore direct results of weak governance. Policy reforms to strengthen governance require political will to overcome opposition from those who benefit from non-transparent decision-making and corruption. It demands strong commitment of the people involved, and the development of capacity in order to make changes possible.

Whether one is in a developed or developing nation, land or property is often ones' most important source of wealth and security. The concept of land as collateral to mobilizing capital is increasingly being embedded in developing nations. In addition to private wealth, the state economy, particularly at the local level, uses land fees and taxes as a significant source of government revenue. Good governance in land administration is central to achieving good governance in society whereas weak governance affect the poor in particular and may leave them marginalized.

The essence of land administration typically involves processes that: manage public land, record and register private interests in land, assess land value, determine property tax obligations, define land use and management governance systems, and support the development application and approval process for land use. Land management on the other hand is associated with the activities on the land and natural resources, including such activities as land allocation, land use planning and resource management, simultaneously considering some inherent aspects of land administration. Land administration systems provide a set of tools that support land management.

Land scenario of Kerala is unique in many accounts. With more than 30 million inhabitants, it is one of the densely populated states in the India (Census, 2011). It is probably because of his that land lords with big land shares as well as a typical rural urban divide as in the case of neighboring states is not seen in Kerala. Kerala's land scenario has been mentioned as that of urban, a phenomenon of rural urban continuum (Sreekumar, (1993). One of the most radical and successful land reforms in India happened in the state of Kerala The land reforms were instrumental in the abolition of tenancy and providing hutment land to the vast section of population engaged in the agricultural sector as a result of which majority of the households have access to land rights. As per the literature (National Sample Organisation (NSSO) 59th round and Rawal (2008) Kerala has the fewest percent of the landless households including homestead and has got very active land markets in the current scenario

Land scarcity challenges and emerging scenario in Kerala

Managing land in Kerala has been a challenge that has increased especially with the boom of

building industry which has resulted in a new trend. Even a person who owns a small family home is in great demand if the location is a prime area. Presently builders purchase this land, demolish the old building and construct a high rise building in exchange of attractive and unimaginable price and an apartment in the building. This trend has resulted in scarcity of not only land but also natural resources like water, sand etc. Kerala with its linear type development along the existing roads, widening of roads requires linear acquisition which is bound to displace a large number of residential and commercial properties, structures, institutions and other establishments. Population growth, nuclear families, unique settlement pattern and preference for independent houses exert pressure on land. The richer sections found it convenient and economical to develop paddy fields near motorable roads and developing them as house plots. Extension of existing roads and opening of new roads, construction of buildings for commercial uses and improvement of infrastructural facilities necessitated conversion of more area of paddy fields.

Broadly, land consumption can be classified into agricultural and non agricultural. In the case of the former, land can be cultivated either by oneself or by engaging tenants. Land use changes in Kerala were unprecedented during the past half century. A substantial decline in the area under rice and cassava, besides increases in coconut and rubber cultivation are paramount in this respect. The consequences of deforestation, which also has been widespread in the state, include frequent flash floods and landslides, soil erosion, and silting of reservoirs, causing serious ecological and environmental problems and complex feedback effects on agricultural production.

Using land for industrial, residential, infrastructure fall in the non agricultural consumption. Though land continues to be sought after for housing and as real estate, there is a reluctance to invest in large land holding especially for cultivation. The use of land for non-agricultural purposes has been on the rise and the fact that Kerala is a popular consumerist State has been a matter of concern for many. Sam Pitroda, Chairman, National Innovation Council, has said that Kerala needs to be careful in handing over large tracts of land for development projects since land is definitely a precious commodity here. Talking to The Hindu on the sidelines of the Emerging Kerala meet, Mr. Pitroda, who is also the mentor to the Kerala government, said the State needs to go vertical. "We realise that land is a big issue in Kerala. Let us remember that land was a big issue in New York also. Kerala is one big continuum – an urban strip. So we need to go vertical," he said. Rationale The scarcity of land in Kerala is so much that the state is finding it difficult to give land for developmental projects. The issue is so grave that the policy makers at a point of time have thought of conceiving a project to reclaim land from the sea. In fact, according to Hindu mythology, the land of Kerala was recovered from the sea by Parasurama, an avatar of Vishnu.

Land governance is major portfolio of governance and it is the responsibility of the government to somehow find the land for providing at least a homestead plot and a house to all landless people in the State. For this, the Government has to make a correct assessment of the demand and supply of land, so that Kerala can be a zero landless state by 2015. Institute of Management in Government is the Administrative Training Institute (ATI) of Kerala and has been in the area of capacity building of Government Officials for more than three decades. With the declaration of State Training Policy, the responsibility of IMG has increased manifold whereby the unique training needs of different departments started getting addressed. Apart from training, being the think-tank for Government, IMG is instrumental in formulating policies that could help Government in policy formulation as well as impact assessment.

Resettlement and Rehabilitation policy

The Kerala government has announced a new resettlement and rehabilitation (R&R) policy to rejuvenate road and rail projects in the state that had taken a backseat in the past 18-odd months. The State Government has cleared the comprehensive rehabilitation policy formulated to provide relief to those who would lose their land when acquired for development projects.

The government has also decided to set up an expert committee to decide on the modality of the idea of issuing infrastructure bonds that would be issued to land owners losing their land. The Government is seriously considering the issue of bonds, which at a later stage can be encashed.

In addition to the cost of the land, a beneficiary would be eligible for Rs 5,000 per month for six months and one-time benefit of Rs 25,000 for other expenses. The new land acquisition policy will replace the present policy which was formulated in 1894.

Proportion of landless families falls to 7.41% in rural India

The proportion of landless families has come down in rural parts of the country to 7.41% in 2013, while the percentage of such families in respective areas has gone up in Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, and Uttarakhand, says NSSO study.

“The percentage of landless households had registered a downward trend in the last two decades for all the major states, except for Andhra Pradesh, Jammu Kashmir and Uttarakhand and Kerala”, stated the NSSO report titled, ‘Key Indicators of Land and Livestock Holdings in India’.

According to the study, Kerala witnessed a double increase in percentage of landless household in the last decade. The proportion of landless families in the state rose to 9.85% in 2013 from 4.8% in 2003.

Similarly, in Uttarakhand the proportion of landless families increased to 20.77% in 2013 from 10.64% a decade ago. In Andra Pradesh , the percentage of such families was 15.93% in 2013 compared to 14.33% in 2003. In West Bengal, also the proportion of such families also marginally increased to 6.55% in 2013 from 6.15% in 2003.

The National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) conducted a nation- wide survey on ‘Land and Livestock Holdings in this 70th round (January 2013 – December 2013) in rural India. The survey was conducted only in the rural areas of the country. The survey covered 4529 sample villages.

The report also stated that in the last two decades, all the major states showed a decline in the average area owned (both including and excluding landless households) except for Assam , which has shown a marginal increase in both the cases.

The study further stated that the share of land owned in rural India by different social group was 13.06% or ST's , 9.23% for SC's , 45.68% for Other Backward Class and 32.03% for others.

Assignment of Land to the Landless Poor

Recognizing the need for land among the poorer sections of the society, many State Governments had come up with land distribution programmes to facilitate land ownership for the poor. The Government land which is vacant and is fit for cultivation was assigned to the landless poor for cultivation purposes. Similarly the land which is suitable for dwelling purposes was given to the rural poor for their housing/homestead purposes. In addition to the Govt. lands, other categories of land like the ceiling surplus lands, bhoodan lands etc. were also distributed to the landless poor for cultivation purposes. This assignment of lands had its conditions such as the land being heritable, but not alienable etc. Sizeable extents of lands thus were distributed in many States. Field observations show that many of these lands are fraught with issues relating to possession, boundary disputes, successions, encroachments etc. making further investments in the land difficult thus making a very little impact on the livelihoods of the assignees. It is also seen from the field that even after all these interventions the landlessness or near-landlessness among the poor, especially the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, is considerable and the demand for land is still being unmet. Hence, the States shall have a comprehensive plan for assignment of lands and their management which shall also include plans for their development and increase in productivity and incomes.

The surplus land allotted by the Government to the landless poor in Kannur district is shown in the below table

Table 1: Caste- wise distribution of surplus land to landless in Kannur district

| Category | No. of Household | Percentage |
|-----------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| General | 19717 | 60.99 |
| Scheduled Caste | 7784 | 24.07 |
| Scheduled Tribe | 4827 | 14.94 |
| Total | 32328 | 100 |

Source: Survey Data

Mission Mode Project on Zero landless

“Landlessness” has been a key issue especially in a land dearth state like Kerala. One out of three city dweller lives in inadequate living space worldwide and Kerala is not an exception. The rural poor too have housing issues in Kerala due to the massive urbanization even in panchayath areas. Giving secure titles in the form of pattayam is a formal recognition which will help the poor and the under privileged better access to legal and financial services to raise capital and to invest in avenues of productive and sustainable nature. It is a well known fact that there are situations wherein the people who are not eligible for getting assignment of Government land get the land assigned in their favour and there are situations where the eligible people are being deprived the chance always. This discrimination has been due to the non-identification of the landlessness scientifically ever in the history of Kerala. Since the land resources are limited and it is obligatory on the part of the Government to have a correct assessment of the demand and supply of land. With the following objectives of creating an error free state wide database of the eligible landless citizens by 15.8.12 and making Kerala the first state to become zero landless (Citizens) state by 2015, the Government is introducing this project. According to 2011 census 3,34,06,061 indigenous tribal Adivasis, the state’s 35 adivasi communities constitute about 1.45 percent of Kerala’s population.

However, there is resistance to this project. The All-India Confederation of SC/ST Organisations has said that they will boycott the Zero Landless programme, stating that the three cents of land that will be disbursed is insufficient for a family. “As per the Zero Landless programme, the government has said that three cents of land will be provided in urban areas and five cents in rural areas. We demand that it should be increased to five cents and ten cents,” Confederation president K Ramankutty said.

About the Project

Under the project, Zero Landless State by 2015, an intensive and extensive effort was taken to identify the landless, identification of suitable land for developing homesteads with proper allocation of spaces for roads/pathways and other common amenities for a habitat development. It is a mission mode project to make the State Zero Landless by 2015.

Identification of Beneficiaries

The identification of beneficiaries for the project was made at the villages and further scrutiny of their eligibility was done at Taluk level. Statistics show that there are 2,43,928 landless families with poor income level in the State.

Zero landless programme in kerala

The prestigious Zero Landless programme of the United Democratic Front was flagged off by Congress president Sonia Gandhi in October 2013. The Zero Landless programme envisages distribution of three cents of land each to 243928 families identified across the State.

Kannur in Kerala is India's first 'zero landless citizen's district'

The district administration has identified 500.81 acres for distribution. The identified land included 485.13 acres of excess (michcha bhoomi) land and 15.68 acres of government (puramboke) land in Thaliparamba, Kannur and Thalassery taluks

The amendments were planned to remove practical difficulties in donating land for the programme. The government was planning to encourage land donation on the lines of the Bhoodan movement of Vinoba Bhave. There were 11,100 applicants in Kannur and 15,600 in Kasaragod.

The “Zero Landless” programme envisages distribution of three cents of land each to 2,43,928 families identified across the State. In the first phase, one lakh families will get land. The Revenue authorities have been able to identify land for distribution to 39,200. The title deeds would be distributed among the beneficiaries at the function.

Assigning land to over 11,000 families has not been an easy task. The 12.5 acre land in Kayaralam village is fertile, however, a cremation ground lies in the middle of it and the area is divided into 242 similar plots. The scheduled tribes get 1 acre of land in Aralam village while all landless families get 3 cents.

The Minister said land declared Poramboke and excess under the Land Ceiling Act and “bottled land” under revenue recovery proceedings would be utilised for redistribution within the ambitious deadline of August 2015. In view of the large number of applications, the government had decided to prioritise land distribution, which would be managed by a piece of software developed for the purpose. Priority would be given to the destitute, cancer patients, persons with 60 per cent or more disability and widows.

One of the major challenges of the Revenue Department officials faced was in locating land in Idukki district with a dubious history of land records. The second challenge was to get the local bodies to surrender their claims on prime land that had been identified for distribution to the landless.

To overcome this problem, the Revenue Department formulated a scheme under which the local bodies would be given the prime land if they were to hand over as compensation livable plots to the extent of three times the land it had identified for redistribution. Similarly, there were several corporate entities which were reluctant to surrender excess land in their possession. The government would formulate a scheme to get the land from them.

In “Zero –Landless programme” the number of beneficiaries is shown in the below table :

Table 2: Category- wise distribution of land to landless as a part of Zero-Landless in Kannur district

| Category | No. of Household | Percentage |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Scheduled Caste | 799 | 7.17 |
| Illness | 185 | 1.69 |
| Destitute | 123 | 1.15 |
| Handicapped | 101 | 0.95 |
| Widow or Legally divorced | 1021 | 9.25 |
| General | 8803 | 79.79 |
| Total | 11032 | 100 |

Source: Survey Data

CONCLUSION

Even after more than 50 years of planned initiatives and policy measures, fair distribution of land among these backward communities appears merely hoping against hope. The main trust of the present study is to evaluate the beneficiaries of Zero landless programme in the Kannur District of Kerala.

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