

Landesa

Can Microplots Contribute to Rural Households' Food Security? Evaluation of a Gender Sensitive Land Allocation Program in West Bengal, India

COUNTRY: India

YEAR(S) OF PROJECT/STUDY: 2010 - 2012

PROJECT CONTACT: Florence Santos (florences@landesa.org)

BACKGROUND

Landesa, a nongovernmental organization focused on land legislation and programming among poor populations, supports government land allocation and regularization programs in India. This study is based on Nijo Griha, Nijo Bhumi ("My Home, My Land" or NGNB), a program by the government of West Bengal, India that aims to reduce poverty by allocating microplots to landless agricultural laborers and assist with homestead development. NGNB works with local communities to purchase and allocate small plots of land, with titles issued jointly under the names of the husband and the wife. In addition, NGNB helps beneficiaries connect with other government agencies responsible for the provision of assistance with housing and basic inputs, capacity building in homestead food production, and investments in infrastructure.

This study evaluated the NGNB program and is a result of collaboration between Landesa and the Gender, Agriculture and Assets Project (GAAP). The project examined how land ownership and joint titling affect households' tenure security and agricultural investments, as well as women's involvement in food and agricultural decision-making—outcomes that when enhanced are expected to lead to increased household food production and long-term food security.

METHODOLOGY

Quantitative data was gathered from 1,373 households from three districts (Coochbehar, Bankura, and Jalpaiguri) that were surveyed in 2010-2011 and again in 2012. The sample includes beneficiary households that, at the time of the baseline survey, had received their homestead plots and obtained their land titles but had not yet moved to their new plots, plus households that made it to the list of NGNB-eligible households but were not selected as beneficiaries of the program and act as a control group.

Qualitative information was purposely gathered in a single district—Coochbehar—to gain an in-depth perspective on a specific locality. This information was collected in 2012 by relying on three complementary tools: key informant interviews with village-, block-, and district-level officials responsible for implementing the program; life-history interviews with program beneficiaries; and focus group discussions with beneficiaries and with eligible non-beneficiaries.

FINDINGS

Even after a relatively short period of time, the NGNB program shows very encouraging results regarding tenure security, women's decision making power, and household agricultural investments:

- Women perceive their NGNB plots to be more secure than other plots: women are 8 percent less likely to report being concerned about having to vacate an NGNB plot than other plots and 18 percent more likely to report that they expect their households to have retained access to and control over an NGNB plot than other plots five years later. Their perceptions of tenure security vary with plot size, with larger plots viewed as more secure.
- Including women's names on the land titles significantly contributes to women's involvement in food and agriculture decisionmaking. Compared to their non-NGNB peers, women in NGNB households are 12 percent more likely to be involved in decisions to take loans from a Self-Help Group or microfinance institution, 12 percent more likely to be involved in decisions on

whether to purchase productive assets, and 9 percent more likely to be involved in decisions related to the purchasing and consumption of food. Further, when women's names are included on land documents, the share of their households' land where they are involved in decisions on how to use the land, what to grow on it, and whether to sell produce from increases by 15 percent, 14 percent, and 11 percent, respectively.

- The average NGNB household is 12 percent more likely than a non-NGNB household to report having taken out a loan from a formal bank since 2009 and 88 percent more likely to use a loan for agricultural purposes.
- During the year before the survey, NGNB households were 11 percent more likely to have used fertilizer or pesticides; 11 percent more likely to have used seedlings, seeds, or stems; and 7 percent more likely to have agricultural equipment than eligible households that did not become NGNB beneficiaries.
- Despite NGNB's noteworthy impact on outcomes that can contribute to future food security, we are unable to detect statistically significant NGNB effects on households' current food security. On average, NGNB-eligible households are just as likely to be food secure regardless of whether they became program beneficiaries. We suspect that not enough time has passed for households to become food secure. This would be consistent with other experiences, like a resettlement program in Zimbabwe, where it took 12 years for the positive welfare effects to materialize (Kinsey, Burger and Gunning, 1998). In our case, qualitative work revealed that only 25 percent of the beneficiaries had actually moved to their plots by the time of the endline survey and that some of the plots are of marginal quality.

FEEDBACK ON CASE STUDY BASED ON INTERVIEWS WITH DIANA FLETSCHNER:

1. What kind of support did you need for undertaking data collection for your case study?
 - Landesa has a local office in India and although its program team is well established, its research team is fairly nascent. The Gender Assets and Agriculture Project (GAAP), with the opportunity to get research support through IFPRI, helped the research team understand how to conduct rigorous field work. While collecting sex-disaggregated was not a new idea for Landesa, we did benefit from direct technical input from the IFPRI team (by Ruth Meinzen-Dick, Agnes Quisumbing, and Amber Peterman) and were able to obtain valuable feedback on our research design, tools and approach.
2. What are the unique gender-asset questions and indicators you collected in your survey instrument that were particularly valuable or reflective of methodologies you would like to see replicated in future work and why?
 - We had good modules on plot disaggregated data—regarding documentation, decision-making, vulnerability, etc. Landesa is trying to standardize the questions asked and has used the same questions in five other settings to date. In general, we see high value in standardizing the questions asked to provide greater comparability between studies and are working towards this goal. We are also in the process of adopting standardized modules on food security that were also asked in this survey.
3. What are the unique gender-asset questions/indicators you either collected in your survey instrument that you would have implemented differently or you were not able to collect, but which you would have liked to collect and why?
 - We did a life history exercise to try to understand if and why land mattered to people. For instance, in recounting their life story, did women mention land in connection to important life events? What we quickly realized is that the women we interviewed were born poor, had stayed poor, and were currently poor; there wasn't a large amount of variation throughout their lives and so this may not be the best approach to explore our question. In addition, given our resources we were only able to interview 8 women and this makes it very hard—if not impossible—to reach conclusions that are generalizable. However, we would certainly consider repeating a life history exercise with a larger sample, in which case we will definitely incorporate lessons learned from this round.
4. Are there any particularities about the region or country of implementation which you think are important to recognize in relation to the gender-asset indicators you collected which are important for other researchers to be aware of? Did any of these context- or country-specific factors influence your survey implementation methodology, and how?
 - Our enumerators were hired from two different states in India and we hired two sets of enumerators in each—firms to do the quantitative work and consultants to conduct the qualitative work. While we had no trouble finding good organizations to take on the quantitative work, finding qualified local researchers to do the qualitative work became a considerable challenge. This was further complicated by the fact that we thought it was important to hire a woman.

An additional obstacle was dealing with enumerators' and consultants' preconceived ideas of what the "correct" answers were. We worked hard with them to minimize the potential for biases in their interviews.

5. What do you see as the largest methodological challenges in collecting gender-asset data in general and how can we as a research community work towards filling this gap?
 - There are a number of remaining challenges for researchers. Foremost, it will be important to standardize questions. As a research community we should decide on a standard set of issues/activities that we want to understand regarding land, formulate a standard set of questions and then ask them consistently. For instance, there is an internationally standardized question module regarding domestic violence. Similar standardization for an asset ownership and decisions-making module would be beneficial. Another issue we came across was that women oftentimes could not answer questions asked about land or asset ownership. As a result, enumerators had to ask her husband or the primary male in the household to obtain the answer. It is not entirely clear to us if these women refused to answer those questions because they did not know the answers or because they were not supposed to talk about those issues. We will need to test alternative modules to decide if it would be better to reframe the questions or to rely on answers from someone else in the household. Since we are unlikely to be the only ones experiencing this problem, we could benefit from guidance from the research community on how to effectively address this issue.
6. Anything else you would like to share about the GAAP project and your involvement with it?
 - One issue for our project is that the baseline and endline were done just three years apart when many of the expected benefits of the program may take considerably longer to materialize. Given this, it would be beneficial to conduct another round of data collection to measure the longer term effects of the program, at say five or more years from the baseline.

For more information about the Landesa project please see Santos, F., D. Fletschner, V. Savath, and A. Peterman. 2013. Can Government-Allocated Land Contribute to Food Security? Intrahousehold Analysis of West Bengal's Microplot Allocation Program. IFPRI Discussion Paper 01310. Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute. <http://www.ifpri.org/sites/default/files/publications/ifpridp01310.pdf>

For questionnaire(s) and survey instrument(s), please visit: <http://gaap.ifpri.info/tools-used-by-gaap/landesa-tools/>
For more information about GAAP, please visit: <http://gaap.ifpri.info/>

INTERNATIONAL FOOD POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE
2033 K Street, NW, Washington, DC 20006-1002 USA | T. +1.202.862.5600 | F. +1.202.467.4439 | ifpri@cgiar.org | www.ifpri.org

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