



**Press Release
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Thousands of Women Receive Title to Land in India

Programs in Odisha and West Bengal help the rural poor gain secure rights to land

SEATTLE – On the eve of International Women’s Day, tens of thousands of poor women in rural India were recently awarded legal titles by the state governments to their own land – [a proven tool](#) for poverty alleviation – thanks to programs designed by the Indian government with support from the nonprofit Landesa.

“Less than 10 percent of women in rural India own land, but our research shows that when women – more so than men – have secure rights to land, they use it to help pull their families out of poverty,” said Sanjoy Patnaik, Landesa India Country Director. “Land rights give women more of a voice in their households and communities. With land rights, women gain the power to ensure that the profits from any home business or agriculture work on the plot go towards meeting their children’s needs – ensuring they are well fed and attend school.”

Last week, 331 single women and women-headed households in the state of Odisha received title to small plots of land from the Odisha state government, a landmark achievement made possible through Odisha’s Women Support Centers, a program designed and implemented by the government of Odisha in partnership with the nonprofit Landesa.

This comes on the heels of several land title distribution ceremonies in February across the state of West Bengal in which more than 55,000 families received title to [micro-plots of land](#) from the State government of West Bengal. Women’s names appear first on the land titles, followed by the husband’s name. This dual titling is an innovative concept, introduced by Landesa with the support of the state government in 2010, which increases women’s bargaining power within the household and protects women from being evicted from their homes by husbands or other relatives.

The Women’s Support Centers program in Odisha was specifically designed by Landesa in partnership with the Odisha district administration to reach single women and women-headed households and help them access social security benefits, with homestead and secure land titles as the main focus. In the absence of a systematic identification mechanism, the single women – widows, divorcees, abandoned, disable and unmarried adult women – had no way of accessing government services. Many lived desperate lives on the margins, taking shelter with their children in cow sheds or shacks owned by sympathetic relatives. With the introduction of a new identification method through the Women Support Centers, however, these women were documented and able to receive land titles along with other government benefits.

“Land has unleashed a new life for me. I won’t have to beg for shelter any longer,” said Chabi Pradhan, a widow, who was dependent on relatives for a place to live with her two small children.

With support from Landesa and district administration of Odisha government, the centers trained government workers to identify these “invisible” women and submit lists of names to the center. The revenue officials were trained to facilitate land allocation to the identified women. The officials conducted field verification of these women and identified plots of land that could be given to the women in clusters – a novel concept – which provides the women with a supportive community, instead of placing them within communities that may have cultural prejudices about single women or women-headed households.

The government of Odisha recently announced that the Women’s Support Center program will expand from 23 centers to 76 centers. In addition, the 331 land titles that were distributed by the state government of Odisha are part of an ongoing effort and currently 800 land titles, or “pattas,” are in process and will be distributed to landless single women.

To see interviews with some of the women who gained title to land in West Bengal, [watch this short video](#) captured in the field on the day many were awarded title to land.

To learn more about Landesa’s work in India and elsewhere in support of women’s land rights please visit www.landesa.org.

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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, and education– for generations.