

STUDYING IMPACT OF LAND REFORMS IN BANASKANTHA DISTRICT

Executive summary:

Land reform in India has been seen as a state's historic and direct action for eradication of poverty, reduction in unemployment and inequality in the society. One of the underlying principles of land reform was to identify large landholding and distribute surplus to poor, landless and families that belong to marginalized sections of the society like dalits, adivasis and other backward classes (OBC).

The scenario in rural economy much has not been changed in Gujarat, especially for the marginalized communities, for whom landholding defines their socio-economic condition and position in society. This study explores how much lands have been actually transferred to the dalit communities in Banaskantha district through land reforms in Gujarat. The objective of the study is to creating database on land reform in Banaskantha district; to know extent of land holding/possession over allotted land under LCA; and to plan advocacy measures for effective implementation of LCA that leads to greater and effective landholding.

The study initially was started with data collected by community based organization, Banaskantha Dalit Sangathan (BDS). Later the research team of BSC combined data from BDS and the government and started visiting selected villages in order to check possession over land. According to BDS data, land was allocated to 797 persons in Banaskantha district during the year 1981 and 2005. Of them, there is no information about 106 thus the data analyzed further is of total 691 beneficiaries. 25% of the total beneficiaries has been taken as sample and hence, primary data collected from 186 respondents.

The study found that more than half (55%) of beneficiaries received allotment of 3-6 acre of land, one third (30%) received 1-3 acres of land, and 11% received allotment of 6-9 acre of land. Only 7 (4%) received allotment of more than 9 acre of land. Majority (82%) of the beneficiaries received allotment of Jarayat lands. Completely irrigated land was allotted only to 4 (2%) beneficiaries. Seasonally irrigated lands to 6 (3%) beneficiaries, dry land was allotted to 9 (4%), and Bagayat land allotted 10 (5%). In all three-fourth (75%) beneficiaries received land within the village where they have been living. About a fourth (25%) of beneficiaries has received land in groups. Almost 65% of the beneficiaries received all types of documents of landholding from government.

Of total 186 beneficiaries, 72 (39%) possess land and cultivate. The average possession over land is 37% by each social category. Only 2 out of 11 female (18%) has possession over lands.

The possession over land is in greater proportion in Dhanera (43%) and Tharad (45%) taluka. Only 2 out of 11 female (18%) has possession over lands. In all 40% of males reported possession over land. The average possession over land is 37% by SC and ST while the possession varies between 25 to 35% among OBCs.

Occupationally, among casual labourers, only 8 (10%) beneficiaries reported possession while among cultivation cum labour category, a large number (69%) reported possession over land. In all 36% of IRDP list holder and 42% among non-IRDP list reported

possession over lands. Inversely, 43% BPL cardholders and 36%APL cardholders has possession over lands. As the size of the land grows bigger, the proportion of possession is also increasing. Around one-third (33-35%) of beneficiaries have possession who received allotment of 1-3 acre (19 out of 56) and 3-6 acre (34 out of 103) of lands. More than 65% possess land which is >6 acres. The large number of beneficiaries (153 out of 186) was given Jarayat land; about 42% possess lands. Surprisingly, 4 beneficiaries were allotted totally irrigated land but the do not possess land. Among those with seasonally irrigated land, the possession is 50% (3 out of 6). Those having Bagayat land, the possession is very little, i.e. 10% (1 out of 10) and 2 out of 9 (22%) reported possession over dry land. Of total 39 beneficiaries, who were allotted land in group, 14 (36%) has possession over lands; 58 out of 142 (41%) has possession over land who received allotment as individual (not in group). If the land is allotted within the villages, instances of possessing it are higher. Of total 46 (land outside own village), 7 (15%) have possession over land, but of 140 (land within the village), 65 (46%) reported possession over land. The land allotted after 1990 is 1-3 acres. Mostly 3-6 acre and 6-9 acre land was allotted mainly during 1981-2000; of that, 64% of 3-6 acre land was allotted in 1981-1990 and 92% of 6-9 of land allotted in the 1981-1990. Of total 72 beneficiaries, land has been measured by the government of 38 (53%). This indicates irregularity of land records.

More than two-thirds (77%) of beneficiaries do not have possession since the land allotted, mostly over 20 years ago. While, of total 114, 26 (23%) beneficiaries once possessed lands but later left the possession. The largest number of original landholders belongs to mainly three castes – Patel (33%), Rajput (25%) and Darbar (24%); they belong to so-called ‘upper caste’ and hold half of the total lands redistributed under LCA. Of total 114, 64 (56%) beneficiaries did not take any action for possession of the land while 50 (44%) did act to possess allotted land. A third (30%) knew that they should approach the government office and submit written application for possession over land. The rest did not know ‘what action should be taken’. Lack of information about action to be taken is one of the major reasons for not possessing allotted land under LCA.⁴³ (68%) informed that ‘they were confused and did not know what action should be taken’. Total 12 (19%) beneficiaries reported that ‘they were scared of original landowner’. In all 66 (92%) said that ‘if land has been given happily by the original landowner, they would have taken it.’

The study concludes that mere official formalities cannot make land reform meaningful and successful. This needs a commitment and rigorous follow up actions to fight the vested interests. The social dynamics in an unequal society must be taken in to consideration to make the land reform effective.