



Research Paper

Homestead Land Allocation in Rural Haryana: A Micro Study of Intended and Actual Outcomes

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Abstract: Mahatma Gandhi Gramin Basti Yojna (MGGBY) was introduced in Haryana in 2008 with the express purpose of providing opportunities to the rural poor for owning homesteads and generating supplementary household incomes. Less ambitious than the earlier phase of largely unsuccessful land reforms, the virtue of this scheme was more realistic targets and operational viability. This study presents empirical findings regarding the actual outcomes of the scheme after a decade of its implementation. It finds that despite its partial penetration in terms providing actual land possession, the benefits for those who got possession have been substantial.

Keywords – Homestead-land Allocation, Upward Mobility, livelihoods' and well-being, Housing, Rural Haryana.

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I. Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi Gramin Basti Yojna (MGGBY)¹ was introduced in the state of Haryana in 2008 with the express purpose of allocating homestead land to the rural poor. It set out to grant free residential plots of 100 sq. yards to eligible SC, BC(A) and BPL households. Even though the first phase of the program (2008-2012) aimed to allocate house sites only, eventually these sites were also to be provided with necessary infrastructure such as power supply, drinking water, paved streets, et cetera. As of 2021², a total of 3.75 lakh BPL households had been conferred ownership rights through execution of gift deeds. The policy makers viewed provision of these site as a major initial step towards ensuring a dignified life to the benefitting families. Keeping in view this larger intended outcome, this paper deals with the actual utilization of the land and its impact on socio-economic mobility after almost ten years of implementation. With the help of empirical data gathered from four selected villages of NCR, Haryana, we attempt to assess the extent of transformation or improvements in lives of these households. In the setting where traditional rural life has been changing fast under the impact of modernization and urbanization, we attempt to examine how much value a house site of 100 square yards carries helped the sustenance needs of rural poor.

II. Methodology

Four villages, two each from the districts of Rohtak and Sonapat, were selected for the purpose of study. Using purposive sampling method, twenty BPL beneficiary households were selected from each of the four villages. In-depth interviews using a semi-structured questionnaire were conducted with them in 2021 & 2022. The study employs simple descriptive data analysis. The benefits of provided homestead plots are assessed in several respects such as building of assets in the form of plot-lands, livestock owning, consumption standards, livelihood alternatives, and changes in income.

The Historical Context for the Study

The scholarly debates about homestead land allocation in India can be categorized into two distinct yet interrelated themes. The first theme outlines how homestead allocation has been an integral part of the first-generation land reform policies and laws while the second theme traces the transformation brought about among land-poor households in rural settings by these policies.

During the initial years after independence in 1947, various governments sought to introduce land equity and efficiency. They enacted laws regarding land-ceiling and tenancy laws and aimed at abolition of intermediaries. Scholarly analysis later however revealed moderate to meager success in attaining land equity through these steps (Appu, 1997, Behuria, 1997). The first-generation land reforms also included distribution of

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government owned wasteland to poor households, which possessed no agricultural land and housing sites in rural settings (GoI, 2003).³ Various states provided house sites or homesteads to such the land-poor agricultural labourers or other marginalized community households. Land used for such allocation programs included ceiling-surplus land, government/Panchayati or common village land, residential land under the tenancy and any land purchased by respective governments. For example, before its reorganization in 1966, Punjab enacted the Punjab village common land Act (1961) to organize homestead allocations.

The available data indicated that an estimated 4 million households received ownership of such homesteads nationwide. The plots typically ranged in size from 0.02 acre (about 900 square feet) to 0.10 acre (about 4,300 square feet), with the majority at the smaller end of the range. (Das 2000, 38). What is more, homestead land allocation can be viewed in more recent times as one of the few remaining threads of land-distribution reforms. The accounts of initiating homestead provisions in land policy designs can now be seen in the 11th and 12th FYP (Five-Year Plan) and National Right to Homestead Bill (2018)—documents on which central and state governments now initiate to are making policies.

Theoretical Context

Given the insurmountable hurdles associated with major macro level land reforms, policy practitioners have increasingly turned towards strengthening entitlement rights over ‘micro-sized plots’. Granting entitlement rights over small plots may be less likely than agricultural land reform to stir up intense opposition while improving living standards at the margins (Hanstad, Brown & Prosterman 2002, 3059). Even though these micro plots are too small to sustain a household by themselves, they are nonetheless large enough to provide an affordable dwelling space (Iyer 2012, 118) and support some additional income-generating activities (Santos, Fletschner, Savath & Peterman 2014, 532).

Andre Nickow and Sanjay Kumar, in their article "*Mobilising for Entitlement: A Randomised Evaluation of Homestead Land Rights Initiatives in Bihar, India (2021)*", explored the allocation of Homestead plots and accrued benefits/impacts on rural poor locating the study in the context of several mobility indicators like income, livelihood alternatives and social inclusion for rural-poor. Community-based organisations' role in achieving successful outcomes for the program was marked as a contributory factor in the implementation process.

Some studies evaluate the larger-sized homesteads and argue for intensive land use practices like poultry farming, cattle rearing and multi-layered use in homestead gardening. (Andrews, S. 2016. Nair & Sreedharan, 1986. Balakrishnan, T.R. 2015).

Some studies have focused on the impact of such homestead allocation on women's social and economic empowerment. The studies reveal significant effects on women perceiving land as security and investment and on women's involvement in decision-making (Santos et al., 2014. Reddy, 2020. Hanstad, Brown, & Prosterman, 2002. Mencher, J. P. 1980. Mitchell, R and T Hanstad, 2004).

Discussing poverty alleviation and development of rural poor, policy practitioners put homestead allocation as an important route to improving living standards. Yet the policy faced persistent obstructions. Opposition and resistance from vested interests, corruption, and bureaucratic red tape are widely acknowledged to be some of these crucial obstructions. (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2000; Gans-Morse et al., 2018; Olken & Pande, 2012).

The present research paper provides a more recent account for evaluating homestead allocation programme by taking up a study in the state of Haryana. This paper reviews the path that scholars have followed and hopes to contribute further answers for some questions.

Findings of the Study

(a) Allotment and Possession

During her field visits in villages, the researcher found that a particular pattern or process had been followed to allocate homestead land among poor households. Firstly, *Gram Panchayat* approves a list of beneficiaries, as also the particular *khawara*⁴ (*Khewat*) number or the area of village common-land where the homesteads would be located. The approved resolution is sent to *Patwari* and BDPO (Block Development and *Panchayati-Raj* Officer) in the concerned Tehsil. In the Tehsil office, an allotment registration certification with a Plot number is provided to the beneficiary and signed by SEPO (Social Education and Panchayat Officer) & *up-Mandal Adhikari* (civil). Then, an administrative official like *Patwari* comes to the village and marks the land plots. Finally, *Patwari* puts all the entries with the name of household owners in revenue registers for a record of annual governmental audit-reports.

The baseline survey data shows that official level tasks of approving resolution lists of beneficiaries in Gram-Panchayat meetings and providing them with the registration certificates with plot numbers have been done 100 per cent in each village respectively. However, 57.5 % of selected beneficiary respondents could get actual possession of their homestead plots in practice. The primary data shows that homestead demarcation and assisting the beneficiaries in taking actual possession had not been accomplished so far. Multiple factors were attributed to have caused the failure. These ranged from administrative delays, caste conflicts, wealthy landlords' arrogant attitude, to vote politics.⁵

(b) Utilization

In this paper, we take up only on those 42.5% allottees that could actually take possession of the allotted land. We focus on the socio-economic changes witnessed among these beneficiaries as a result of utilization of provided homesteads. The empirical data showed that only 7.50 per cent of the respondents had actually one or two room structures to start living there, or had at least built walls around the plot. Another 12 per cent of the respondents expressed a keen desire to use the assigned plot for residence shortly, with some referring to their financial in capabilities to build a home soon there to settle. On the other hand, some 17.50 % and 12 % of the beneficiaries were using the allotted homesteads for animal husbandry and kitchen gardening respectively. The detailed breakup of the utilization is as follows:

Sample Number of Eligible Homestead-Allotted Respondents	80 (100%)
Possession-holding allottees	46 (57.50%)
Animal husbandry	14 (17.50%)
Kitchen Gardening	12 (15.00%)
Rented it for income earning	1 (1.25%)
Keeping Animal-Fodder or agricultural equipment	1 (1.25%)
Residential use	6 (7.50%)
Kept it for future use or cannot use in present for financial in capabilities	12 (15%)
Yet to get possession (possession-less allottees)	34 (42.50%)

Of 46 actual beneficiaries who possess the allotted homesteads, 34 or 42.50 % agreed that they use the land for their daily needs. However, 16.25 per cent of the beneficiaries talked about various stumbling blocks in utilizing the land.⁶ The assigned plots were either too far away from the village *abadi* area, or there was no electricity and water supply connection available. In addition, some respondents stated that individually they were not in a position to save money to construct residences or leveling up the land there as they had to depend for their two square meals on wage earning. Thus, very few of them showed much interest in using it.

Impact Assessment

To assess the direct or indirect role of allocated homesteads in upward mobility and social transformation of land-poor households, we have categorized the program outcomes as follows: Increase in asset-holding; improvement in residential facilities; cattle ownership, homestead gardening; and changes in consumption patterns; investments in alternate livelihood opportunities; changes in income; reduction in dependencies on large landowners; and overall subjective perception improved self-dignity and well-being.

(1) Land as Asset

Homestead land allocation certainly contributed to improvement in landholding as an asset. The percentage of those who held very small landholdings decreased significantly between 2008 and 2021 (from 10% to 6.25% in the case of those who had held less than 50 gaj, and from 48.7% to 16.25% in the case of those who held between 50 and 100 gaj.) On the other hand, the percentage of those who had relatively larger holdings increased in the same period. It jumped from 20 to 36.25 percent in the case of those holding 100 to 150 gaj; from 12.5 to 26.25 percent in the case of those who held between 150 and 200 gaj land; and from 8.75 to 15 percent in the case of those holding over 200 gaj.

Interestingly, even those who had yet not gotten possession were upbeat. The following quote represents a recurring tendency among these households to feel reassured at least for their future generations: "Sarkar ne yojna garibon ke liye nikali hai aur zameen di bhi hai, milegi aaj na milne denge toh kabhi toh milegi hi. Hmare pass registration ke kagaj toh hai hi. Aaj nhi toh kai saal men milegi. Etna toh hai ki hmare aane wali peedhiyon ka bojh km hoga. Indira ke time mai jo plot hmare purkhon ki diye the unpe aaj hum base hue hai. Agar vo na deti toh hume toh gaon chorna hi prta, kya banta fir hmara. Ye bhi na hoti toh hum kha jate".⁷ (Government has brought this scheme for the poor and has also allotted lands. We will get it for sure, if not today, then on some other day for sure. We are already having registration documents. If we do not get it today, we will surely get it after some years. But it will relieve the burden of our future generations. We are now living on those plots

allocated to our ancestors during Indira Gandhi's era. Had she not given it to us, we might have emptied the village, what could have happened to us. Where would we go, if we even had not this.)

(2) Larger dwellings

Our research found that 7.50 per cent of the sample beneficiary respondents had used the additional land for residential use. This was a great help for those households who were barely living in congested houses with larger number of family members.

(3) Engagement in Dairy and Vegetable/Fruit Growing Activities

Our study revealed that allotment of land has facilitated ownership of milch cattle. In the period 2010-2021, the number of households that had no milch cattle was reduced from 47.5 to 32.5 percent. The percentage of households that owned one milch cattle increased from 33.75 to 43.75 percent. Similarly, the households that owned two or more milch cattle increased from 18.75 to 23.5 percent. Such increased ownership of milch cattle ensured better nutrition for the family as well as additional income from sold milk and ghee. However, it should be noted that ownership of milch cattle had been hampered by the high prices of these animals. Thus it was challenging to buy the first cattle for home, but once they had bought one, the calves born overtime mature and start yielding milk themselves, making cattle raising more profitable.

Alternatively, many households had started vegetable gardening and fruit growing on their allotted patches of land. The percentage of such households had increased from 2.5 to 15. Some of these households took the researcher to their allocated plots and showed winter fruits and seasonal vegetables growing on their plots. More often, in the early mornings, the females of these households could be seen coming back from their plot-fields with bundles of chaff on their heads. Thus in the case of homestead-gardening and cattle owning, the beneficiaries had benefitted in terms of consumption and cost saving for their families.

(4) Changes in Income

One of the most significant intended outcomes of land allocation was increased incomes. The households earning less than Rs. 5000 per month were reduced from 27.5 to 15 per cent. Similarly, the beneficiary households earning between Rs. 5,000 and 10,000 per month were reduced from 58.75 to 57.50 per cent. On the other hand, the beneficiary households earning between Rs10,000 and 15,000 increased from 13.75 per cent in 2008 to 26.25 per cent in the year 2021. Thus the overall data revealed a significantly improved picture of income benefits after twelve years of providing them with homesteads.

(5) Reduced dependency on large landowners

Locating the homestead rights also need to be reviewed in terms of their impact on caste/class relation in rural society. These are directly related to factors such as dependency of BPL households on rich landlords, and indebtedness.

Empirical data presents a reduction of 5 per cent in indebtedness from 2008 to 2021 among beneficiaries. Whereas for the year 2008, 36.25 per cent of the beneficiary households acknowledged having some direct or indirect dependency upon wealthy landlords of the village,⁸ the same got reduced by 26.25 per cent in the year 2021. Yet despite this data, when asked about sources of loans or credits, the researcher observed a recurrent mention of some harsh realities: "*Paise ki raat-birat zarurat pde toh aur kha jayenge, yha jaaton-jamindaaron ke hi jana pdega, aur hame loan kaunsa bank de dega khade-khade*".⁹ (If we urgently need money, where else can we go other than Jaat large-landowners. They are the only people to in need. Otherwise do you think some bank will give us loan instantly.)

Apart from credit in emergency situations, several other dependencies exist in village economies. These include wage earnings from agricultural labour, part-time domestic employment in household chores of wealthy landlords, daily consumable goods like milk, curd, *lassi*, vegetables and *nyaar-foos* (grass) for their domestic animals, et cetera.

The survey data reveals that the addition of homesteads has played a great role in reducing such dependencies on rich landlords over the years. As a beneficiary household woman said, "phle ki baat aur thi ... hmari bhi zarurat thi. Hmare ghar mai koi dhan-pashu toh the nahi. Roz dudh, chah ke liye kha jate..... jab jamindaar ke ghar se dudh chach late the unko paise dekar late lekin hum neechi jaat ke hai esliye uski do baat sunni bhi

prti thi. Uske ghar ke kaam bhi karne parte the. Ab mai kyu sunu. Meri apni bhais hai ghar mai. Bcho ka dudh ho jata hai. Ghee bech lete hai. Nyaar foos apna panchayti zameen pe lga rakhi hai, teen-char dino ma ek din jakar sab aurton ke sath ja kar le aati hun”¹⁰ (Earlier, things were different we were dependent on them for our daily consumable needs too like, milk, lassi, curd et cetera. We had not had any wealth or livestock in our house. We used to get milk and *curd* form the large-landowners and we used to pay for that. But, just because we belong to lower caste, we not only had to do their household chores also in returning their favors but also listen some abusive and uncomfortable words from them as well. But why would I listen to them now. We have our own cow in our house. We manage to make milk for children, and also ghee by our own.)

(6) Greater Self-Assurance

Another beneficiary added, “we didn’t get our homestead for so many years because we were not united, we didn’t fight for our rights earlier. But now we know it. Furthermore, now we know that they (the landowners) depend on us, not we. We can work, earn and live easily but the fact is they cannot work without our skills and our labour”.¹¹

Such accounts led us to conclude that the whole process of program implementation and homestead rights acts as an imperative to create social consciousness for rights which in turn deliberates ways for upward mobility as well.

(7) The Case of Nonagricultural BPL Families

The villages selected for the study are part of NCR (National Capital Region), where industrial activities have grown extensively in the last few years.¹² The economic value of land has also increased due to land acquisition by the government, state highway construction projects, and transport facilities. Several rural workers commute to nearby urban areas and industrial parks for work. For these non-agricultural workers, the supplementary activities of animal husbandry, kitchen gardening, or simply land rent, support household economies of the land allottees.

III. Concluding Remarks

In this paper, we have argued that homestead land creates many opportunities to upgrade and transform lives in rural settings. Whether in the form of larger dwellings, consumption of dairy products and home-grown vegetables, improved credit-worthiness, or simply sense of security provided by land possession, these changes enhance overall subjective sense of well-being by reducing dependencies. Moreover, the homestead land program is more progressive and egalitarian in its land distribution process. It registers land plots in the name of women of beneficiary households and thus contributes indirectly to women empowerment.

Our findings suggest the intended objectives have been achieved in the case of more than half of the sampled beneficiary respondents. Since the area from where primary data was collected is part of the National Capital Region (NCR), even tiny plots carry social and economic worth necessary to establish settlement assistance for the rural poor. Even though mixed, our assessment regarding homestead assistance-based upward mobility is similarly positive. This tallies with most of the earlier work done on homestead allocation.

Our primary data-based evidence here strongly suggests the benefits of such plots, particularly in the case of villages located in NCR. Owning a small piece of land saves the beneficiaries from many daily life struggles. The poor aspire to life of dignity. Such dignity starts having roof of one’s own overhead. Our study clearly shows that the beneficiary households which had actual possessions and used the assigned micro-sized homesteads have improved their economic conditions and consequently experienced noticeable changes in self-dignity, and awareness of their equal righteous in society.

Notes and References

¹ The government of Haryana announce a homestead allocation program in October, 2007. Later the program, Mahatma Gandhi Gramin Basti Yojna¹ (MGGBY) was implemented on 2nd October 2008. Under this scheme, free homestead-plots of 100 Sq. yards each are to be allotted to eligible SCs, BCs(A) and BPL households.

² As per the information available on department of Panchayats and Development, Haryana. Available at <https://harpanchayats.gov.in/> accessed on December 23, 2021.

³ In addition to these government land reform tools, civil society used another tool that achieved some redistribution success. Vinoba Bhave, a disciple of Mahatma Gandhi, started the *Bhoodan* (land gift) movement in Andhra Pradesh in 1951, when an armed landgrab upsurge was gathering momentum. Bhave asked landowners to donate a portion of their land for peaceful distribution to the landless. The *Bhoodan* ultimately received donations of 39.16 million acres of land across multiple states for redistribution to the poor. Of the land donated, only 21.75 million acres have been distributed formally to the poor. The remainder have not been distributed for a variety of reasons, including that land was unfit for agriculture or had been encroached on, the donation was contested by heirs, or the donation documents were either missing or not in order (Government of India, Ministry of Rural Development 2003, annex XXXIX).

⁴ Khasara is a unit of land measurement in revenue records.

⁵ The causes and consequences of policy implementation process and loop holes in machinery is most contended aspect in policy and grass route institutions studies in India. The missing policy links and implementation loopholes are not being discussed as any part of this paper. Rather, we deal with how does the utilized or unutilized but provided entitlements impacts the beneficiary lives and livelihoods.

⁶ The detailed qualitative evidences on the ground level processes and local context can provide leverage to understand the casual chain leading from program design to the impacts/outcomes.

⁷ Respondent 82, Village. Sisana.

⁸ The dependency has been talked in terms of in terms of daily consuming products like milk, curd, *lassi*, *nyaar-foos* (chaff) for pet animals and credit-money in need et cetera.

⁹ Respondent 6, Village Kakrana.

¹⁰ Respondent 27, Village chiri.

¹¹ Respondent 133, Village Issapur Kheri.

¹² Hoda, Anwarul (2018): Land use and land acquisition laws in India, Working Paper, No. 361, Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER), New Delhi.

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