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Struggle for Housing and Land Rights: Challenges faced by low-income and marginalized single women



Society for Rural Development and Action
Thaltukhor, Mandi, Himachal Pradesh

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Preface

Single women in all parts of the country, face problems of having a place to live and problems in relation to claiming their land and property rights. The government has in recent years made important changes in the laws to give land and property rights to all women in both their natal homes and their marital homes. But even these legal reforms have not solved the problem. Single Women have to struggle to claim their housing and land rights. In a patriarchal society, the most important reason for women not being land owners is patriarchy itself.

Society for Rural Development and Action (SRDA), Himachal Pradesh, has been working on issues of women's land rights, and along with organizations working with rural Single Women in the states of Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, and Gujarat, SRDA felt the need to take up a study of the struggles for housing and land rights faced by rural women. The problems of urban low-income single women were also seen as important, and so the study was extended to include *bustis* of Delhi state too.

Through a survey, and focus-group discussions, organizations in the 5 selected states of India collected data from low-income Single Women in their state associations, about the challenges and problems faced in actually getting ownership, possession and user rights of land and property which, according to the law, is their legal right. Inquiry into the housing and living conditions of low-income single women was also a part of the study.

The type of singlehood is an important factor influencing access to land and housing, as culturally widowed women are more likely to get land from their marital families compared to the daughters getting lands from their parental families. However, this may change if the daughter never gets married or is in a troubled marriage i.e., she is deserted, separated or divorced. Also, religion has obvious importance in determining low-income Single Women's actual ability to access land and property rights, as the succession and inheritance laws according to the personal laws of the religions and the tribal customary laws, help to give legal strength, or difficulties, to the women claiming their rights.

The data from the questionnaire survey as well as from the Focus Group Discussions, which are also corroborated by their case stories, suggests that most women are hesitant and even afraid to claim their housing and land rights due to the hostile patriarchal cultural norms and gendered expectations existing in the society. And those who dare to claim and fight for their housing and land rights face various challenges and troubles like verbal abuses and intimidations, physical violence, false police cases, social and family boycotts etc.

Though on positive side, in few cases, the single women have also found support from family, friends and institutions like panchayats. Most women, however, have suggested and have narrated in their case stories that they could get their land rights with support of the single women organizations in their state. This is an important finding underlining the role and importance of getting organised and striving for their housing and land rights collectively. Case stories from Gujarat, Rajasthan and Telangana very clearly point to the importance of organisation and collective actions in realising the land rights of the single women.

This is an important study of the realities of low-income single women across several states of India, in finding out how they claim their land rights, an important economic resource for income and survival. Where they live, after their husband has left the marriage, died, or deserted the family, is also documented in this study.

We hope that those who read this study will understand the reality that is part of the lives of low-income single women of India. More studies are needed, and have been recommended in this study report. However, a beginning has been made to open up the issues of land and housing rights of low-income single women by the work of this study. We are grateful to all those who made it possible.

Dr. Ginny Shrivastava

Acknowledgement

This study is a result of hard work and dedication of many people. The idea of a study on the status of the land rights of the low income single women was initially proposed by Dr. Ginny Shrivastava and Shri. Ashwani Paliwal from the National Forum for Single Women's Rights, who also supported in developing a concept note for the study. Ginny ji has also written the preface to the study report. Data collection for the study was conducted by the dedicated members of the single women's organizations in the respective states, also the member of National Forum for Single Women's Rights. A state coordinator in each state supervised the data collection in the states and ensured that data collection work was completed without much delay. Names of the state coordinators and investigators who collected the data is provided in the annexure.

Sandhya Gautam took the responsibility of facilitating the entire study, coordinating with the state coordinators on behalf of the Society for Rural Development and Action and others and ensured that the study is completed smoothly. Sandhya Gautam along with Dr. Jyotsna Sivaramayya also supported in analysis of the qualitative data collected through FGDs and case studies. Shreeti Shakya helped with the Kobo application and in cleaning of the quantitative data. Sanjay Gupta helped in data analysis and making of the tables used in the study report. The report of the study has been written by Dr. Nesar Ahmad.

The study, however, would not have been possible without the participants of the study, the single women from across the five states who answered our questions and shared their stories of struggle to get access to the land which is rightfully theirs. We acknowledge their support and express our deep gratitude to them. The study has been made possible by the financial support of the Womanity Foundation. Ms. Shivani Gupta and Ms. Linzi Sarkar of the Womanity Foundation provided constant support and also gave their valuable inputs on the first draft of the study report.

Society for Rural Development and Action (SRDA)-HP

Abbreviations

CEDAW – Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

FGD – Focused Group Discussion

MDG – Millennium Development Goals

PRI – Panchayat Raj Institution

SDG – Sustainable Development Goals

SC – Scheduled Castes

ST – Scheduled Tribes

Glossary

Aadhar Card – National identity card of India

Bhoodan – Land donated by wealth landowners

Bigha – Unit of land = 0.62 acre

Gram sabha – General assembly meeting of all voters in a village held at least twice a year

Lakh/Lac – 100,000 (unit of measurement used in South Asia)

Mandal – Administrative subdivision in a district. Equivalent to a tehsil/taluka/block

Meher – Mandatory wealth/property/gift given to wife at the time of wedding under Islamic law

Nikah – Islam marriage contract

Panchayat – Local self-governance institution or village council

Parchi – Document/deed/paper

Patta – Land deed

Patwari – Government land records keeper

Samaj – Community/Society

Sangathan – Organisation

Sarpanch – Head of village *panchayat*

Tehsildar – Land revenue officer

Introduction

Agriculture remains the mainstay of the economy across many countries of Asia. Agriculture's share in the economy remains more than 15% in the South Asian countries.¹ In terms of employment, agriculture provides employment to 44% of the employed people in South Asia.² A majority of those employed in agriculture are women. In South Asian countries, 60% of total employed women work in agriculture.³ However, women do not own and control the agricultural land.

Share of agriculture in India's GDP is about 18% (Gol, 2024)⁴, while agriculture provides employment to 46% of the working population (PLFS 2023-24)⁵. In India, though 76.9% working women in rural areas and overall 46.1% working women (rural and urban combined) are engaged in agriculture as per the latest Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2023-24, the ratio of women among the agricultural land holders is only 13%.⁶ In Bangladesh it's less than 5%, in Nepal just 8% and in Sri Lanka it's about 16%.⁷ Therefore, despite their critical role in agriculture most women remain landless (Land Watch Asia).⁸ According to a recent study by Bina Agarwal and others (2021) women own land only in 16% of the sampled households and only 8.4% of total women own land in India.⁹

This poses serious problems in economic decision making and access to government schemes and extension services, apart from pushing women to secondary status. These constraints faced by women in agriculture hamper their productivity and is a primary reason behind the sector's underperformance in many developing countries (FAO, 2011).¹⁰ The importance of ownership of land can hardly be overstated. "Ownership of land and property empowers women and provides income and security. Without resources such as land, women have limited say in household decision-making, and no recourse to the assets during crises" (UN Women).¹¹ The international

¹World Bank database, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NV.AGR.TOTL.ZS>

²<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.AGR.EMPL.ZS>

³<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.AGR.EMPL.FE.ZS>

⁴ Gol, 2024, Economic Survey, 2023-24, available on: <https://www.indiabudget.gov.in/economicsurvey/>

⁵https://www.mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/publication_reports/AnnualReport_PLFS2023-24L2.pdf

⁶ Gender and Land Rights data base, FAO, http://www.fao.org/gender-landrights-database/data-map/statistics/en/?sta_id=982

⁷ Gender and Land Rights data base, FAO, http://www.fao.org/gender-landrights-database/data-map/statistics/en/?sta_id=982

⁸ Land Watch Asia, 'Women's Land Rights in Asia' available on:

https://www.hlrn.org.in/documents/Womens_Land_Rights_in_Asia_Land_Watch_Asia.pdf

⁹<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/india-must-push-for-womens-rights-in-land-ownership-7456996/>

¹⁰<http://www.fao.org/3/i2050e/i2082e00.pdf>

¹¹<https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/focus-areas/women-poverty-economics/women-s-land-property-rights>

agreements like Beijing Platform for Actions and CEDAW as well as MDGs have also emphasized the importance of the women's land rights. MDGs have now been replaced by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which again gives priority to the equal right of women to property and women's land ownership. One of the targets under Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) is: "Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws" (UN Women, 2022).¹² India is a signatory of CEDAW and also has committed to achieving the SDGs by 2030.

Justice and equality are basic tenets of the Indian Constitution. Articles 14 to 18 of the Indian Constitution very clearly define these rights of equality and justice. Though the Constitution guarantees equal rights to men and women, still inequality and discrimination exist in society in social, cultural and religious practices on basis of gender, caste etc. As discussed above, this is particularly visible in land ownership patterns in society not only in India but across the South Asian region.

Land Rights of Women: Legal Regimes

In India though land is a state subject, many subjects related to land are part of the concurrent list. Land acquisition and succession of land are under the concurrent list which means both union and state governments can legislate on these subjects. Additionally, regarding the subject of inheritance and succession, the personal laws of different religions and customary laws have been recognized by the Constitution. Therefore, we have national level succession laws for different religions but there could be state wise variations as well. Succession to land is governed by the following national level acts:

The Indian Succession Act, 1925 (applicable to Christians, Parsis, Jews and persons married under special marriage act and anyone not covered under any other law in India will be covered under Indian Succession Act, 1925)

The Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937

The Hindu Succession Act, 1956 (applicable to Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs)

Therefore, women's land rights vary according to their religion. According to Bina Agrawal (2021), The Hindu Succession Act, 1956 provided Hindu women substantial property rights, despite this two major inequalities remained. "First, the inheritance of agricultural land devolved according to land reform laws which were highly gender unequal, especially in six northern states. Second,

¹²<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs/sdg-5-gender-equality>

daughters were excluded from coparcenary rights in joint family property.”¹³ Some south Indian states had already amended the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 in their states to remove these disparities (Roy, 2015) (as inheritance is on the concurrent list of the Indian Constitution).

At the national level, the two major inequalities could be removed after a large civil society campaign, with the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005, which amended the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 (Agarwal, 2021). The high courts, however, have held divergent views on the applicability of the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005 on the agricultural land and some ambiguity therefore remains in interpreting the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act in case of agricultural land, in absence of any clear pronouncement by the Supreme Court in this regard (Deo and Mitchell, 2021).¹⁴

The Muslim Personal Law, recognizes the right of daughters in parental property, though not same as men. Similarly, the succession of property of Christians, Parsis, and Jews is governed by their own religious traditions (personal laws) according to the Indian Succession Act, 1925. Indian Succession Act, 1925 also applies to the persons married under special marriage act (Valera et. al, 2018).¹⁵

State wise variations: The state governments have revenue and tenancy acts for their states, many of which accept the central personal acts on succession. The Rajasthan Tenancy Act, 1955, for example, makes it clear that the inheritance of property will be governed as per the personal law of the faith of the tenant at the time of his death (Article 40). However, state level acts/rules in some states may not fully recognize women’s land rights, contradicting the Hindu Succession Amendment Act, 2005, because of the ambiguity in interpretation mentioned above. Uttar Pradesh, for example, does not fully recognize inheritance rights of married daughters (Dev, 2019).¹⁶

Tribal Customary Laws: The Hindu Succession Act, 1956 and Indian Succession Act, 1925 do not apply to tribal communities because the tribal communities residing in the Schedule V and VI areas are governed by their customary laws in matters of marriage and inheritance and succession etc., which remain uncoded so far¹⁷. Customs and usages are included in the definition of 'law' under Article 13 of the Indian Constitution. However, to become a valid custom

¹³<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/india-must-push-for-womens-rights-in-land-ownership-7456996/>

¹⁴<https://www.landesa.org/inheritance-of-agricultural-land-by-women-there-is-distance-yet-to-travel>

¹⁵<https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/453696/ewp-559-women-land-title-ownership-empowerment.pdf>

¹⁶<https://landportal.org/blog-post/2021/02/marriage-or-inheritance-strange-choice-daughters-uttar-pradesh-india>

¹⁷It is not to suggest that tribal customary practices of all tribes and in all the regions of the country are necessarily discriminatory based on gender. In fact, some tribal communities follow matrilineal practices which favours women.

it must pass the test of legality. The Hindu Succession Act, 1956 explicitly states that the act does not apply to the STs and the Indian Succession Act, 1925 empowers the state governments to provide exemptions to tribal communities. Indian succession laws, thus, do not apply to the schedule tribes (STs) communities (Saboo, 2023).¹⁸

The Supreme Court in its orders has defended this exemption. There are variations in tribal customary laws in the matter of women's right to land. The Supreme Court, however, protects the right to livelihood of a widowed woman who is dependent on land for her livelihood. "The Court declared that the female relatives of the last male tenant could hold the land as long as they remain dependent on it for their livelihood" (Saboo, 2023).¹⁹ There is also a principal of level of Hinduisation, implying that if the tribal persons are sufficiently 'Hinduised', practicing the Hindu customs, rituals etc., the Hindu Succession Act would apply to them (Agrawal, undated).²⁰

It is, therefore, clear that despite the various pro-women amendments in the succession acts, the inheritance and succession laws are not fully supportive of women's land rights.

Single Women's Land Rights

Single women which include widows, divorced women, separated women, unmarried women of ages 35 years and above, and women whose husbands are missing or are in jail for long period of time, are even further deprived of their land rights for a variety of reasons.

Though **unmarried women** have equal right over the property of their parental families under the Hindu Succession Act and Indian Succession Act but the Muslim unmarried women (daughters) get less than what the male decedents get from their parental property.

Widowed women are entitled to their deceased husbands' property under most succession acts, in varying degrees. Like Hindu widows get same share as other class I heirs. The Muslim widows are entitled to one fourth to one sixth of the share depending on the situation (having children or not) and whether she is from *sunni* or *shia* sects (Ghosal and Pal, 2021).²¹

However, **divorced and separated women** cannot claim same rights and are only entitled to alimony/maintenance/mehar (for Muslim women fixed at the time of nikah). The Supreme Court in various orders has upheld the rights of maintenance of divorced Muslim women as well.

¹⁸<https://www.barandbench.com/columns/succession-rights-of-tribal-women-time-to-make-them-gender-equal>

¹⁹<https://www.barandbench.com/columns/succession-rights-of-tribal-women-time-to-make-them-gender-equal>

²⁰<https://www.tsclcd.com/tribal-women-equal-succession> and

<https://www.barandbench.com/columns/succession-rights-of-tribal-women-time-to-make-them-gender-equal>

²¹<https://ir.nbu.ac.in/server/api/core/bitstreams/998ca2eb-b13b-4c0f-84a3-f1d0fe57b51b/content>

Similarly, **single women whose husbands are missing or are in jail** also do not enjoy their land rights as the social fabric of the society ensures that the land remains in the name of their husbands or fathers in law or other male members of their families.

Constraints in realizing women's land rights

In a patriarchal society based on caste, the most important reason for women not being land owners is patriarchy, which clearly restricts women and lower caste men from owning property. The perception is that girls do not belong to the parental families as they will one day get married into some other family, while in their husband's families also, they are seen as outsiders. Access to land largely comes from inheritance and inheritances are governed by various customary and religious laws.

These social and cultural norms create impediments in realizing the limited land rights available to women through the various succession acts discussed above. Women are discouraged by society from claiming their land rights, they face various hostilities from the family and community and the authorities responsible for implementing the land acts show indifference towards implementing women's land rights. The cultural and social norms have prevented the Hindu women from getting full benefits of the Hindu Succession Amendment Act, 2005.

A study by Landesa, conducted in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh in 2014 finds that women though want to own land but they do not want to stake claim on their share in the prenatal land as they do not want to strain the relationship with their parents and brothers (Sircar and Pal, 2014).²²

A study by Agrawal et al (2021a) analyzing data from 2010-14 from 30 villages initially from 8 states and in 2014 from 9 states also finds that most of the women, who own land, have acquired land from their marital families and not their parental families, and very few own land jointly.²³ This shows that the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005 is yet to make its impact on the ground. Roy (2015) in her study of the impact of state level reforms in the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 by the south Indian states (prior to 2005) also finds that "even though the reform entitled daughters to inherit equal shares in joint family property as sons, in reality, this did not happen" (Roy 2015). Roy (2015) also suggests that in order to avoid giving daughters' share in their property, fathers "gifted" lands to their sons in their lifetime. Though in some cases daughters were compensated with higher education and higher dowry (Roy 2015).

²²<https://cdn.landesa.org/wp-content/uploads/What-is-Preventing-Women-from-Inheriting-Land-Sircar-Pal-March-2014.pdf>

²³<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00220388.2021.1887478#d1e2158>

The families therefore are not in favour of sharing their property with the women, but when it comes to providing land to women there is a clear preference for widowed women because “widows (and often wives), especially those with sons, are seen as rooted in the marital family and entitled to a share in family land” (Agrawal, 2021).

However, in spite of this preference, it is not easy even for the widows (specially with no sons) to get their share even in the marital family’s property and they face various practical problems in realising their land rights. Women are often not aware of the amount of land owned by their marital (and even parental) families and in whose names it is (Kathuria and Pineiro, 2022)²⁴. Widows struggle to have their rightful share in the marital family property due to patriarchal norms and social, cultural and administrative barriers.

Women whose husbands go missing or are in jail also face similar challenges as the lands are often not in their or their husbands’ name. Separated, deserted and divorced women also face different challenges.

About the study

Society for Rural Development and Action (SRDA) has been working on issues of women’s land rights. In the background of the above legal and socio-cultural challenges faced by single women, Society for Rural Development and Action (SRDA) felt a need to conduct a study on the challenges faced, especially by low-income single women in realising their land rights. The study has been conducted with the following objectives:

Objectives of the Study

1. Through desk research, to document the national laws and policies related to single women’s land rights in India, as well as the state land laws related to single women’s land rights in the states involved in the study.
2. Through a survey, and focus-group discussions, state associations in selected states will collect data from low-income single women in their associations, about the challenges and problems faced in actually getting ownership, possession and user rights to land and property; which, according to the law, is their legal right.
3. The participating state organizations will submit case studies of struggles of single women to claim their land rights. Insights from experience is also built into this study.

Methodology

²⁴<https://idronline.org/article/rights/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-womens-land-rights/>

The study is based on both quantitative and qualitative data collected from selected single women in five states: Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh and Delhi. A total of 567 single women were interviewed for the study using a scheduled questionnaire from 13 districts (the list of the districts from each states are provided in Annexure Table 1). Additionally, FGDs were conducted and cases stories were collected from the five states. The following table provides state wise data on the number of single women interviewed for the study:

Table 1: State wise number and percentages of single women

State	Number	%
Rajasthan	115	20.28
Gujarat	130	22.93
Himachal Pradesh	139	24.51
Jharkhand	129	22.75
Delhi	54	9.52
Total	567	100.00

Sampling: Participants were selected on the basis of purposive sampling from the districts where single women organisations are active. One of the criteria for selecting single women for the study was that their families should preferably have some land. It was also ensured that all types of single women were included in the sample of single women. In this study, half of the respondents are widows, and 14% of them never married (more than 35 years of age), followed by deserted women (11%), divorced women (9.5%), separated women (8%), husband missing (5%), and husband in jail (about 1%).

Table 2: Type of singlehood

State	Widow	Divorced	Separated	Deserted	Never married	Husband in jail	Missing Husband
Rajasthan	62	13	14	18	5		3
Gujarat	64	17	9	9	27		4
Himachal Pradesh	69	10	11	17	17	2	13
Jharkhand	53	13	3	21	30	2	7
Delhi	38	1	9	2	1	3	
Total	286	54	46	67	80	7	27
% to total	50.44	9.52	8.11	11.82	14.11	1.23	4.76

Tools for data collection: A scheduled questionnaire was used to collect data from the selected single women. Besides the questionnaire survey, 22 FGDs were conducted in five states. Additionally, 22 case stories were collected from the five states and seven more case stories were collected from two additional states namely West Bengal and Telangana.

FGDs conducted: Gujarat – 5, Jharkhand – 5, Rajasthan – 4, Delhi – 3, Himachal Pradesh – 5

Case stories collected: Gujarat – 4, Jharkhand – 4, Rajasthan – 6, Delhi – 3, Himachal Pradesh – 5, Telangana – 5, WB – 2

Limitations of the study:

The study has been conducted in five states in the districts where the single women's organisations are active and most of the single women included in the study are associated with the single women's organisation of the state except in Delhi where there is no active single women's organisation. This might have increased the chances of single women getting their land rights.

Findings of the Study

Profile of respondents

The single women were selected from the 17 districts where member organisations of the National Forum for Single Women's Rights have been working. Except in Delhi, respondent women have come from both rural and urban areas as shown on the table below.

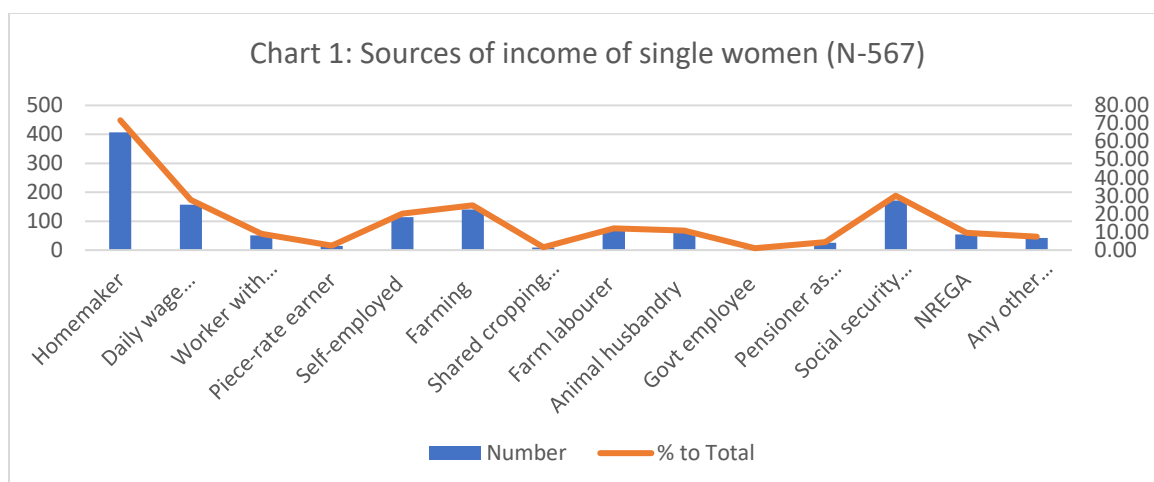
Table 3: State wise spatial distribution of single women

State	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural %	Urban %
Rajasthan	81	34	115	70.43	29.57
Gujarat	127	3	130	97.69	2.31
Himachal Pradesh	123	16	139	88.49	11.51
Jharkhand	110	19	129	85.27	14.73
Delhi	0	54	54	0.00	100.00
Total	441	126	567	77.78	22.22

About 78% women are from rural areas, while 22% are from urban areas. The percentage of rural respondents is highest in Gujarat (98%) whereas 100 respondents are urban in Delhi. About 30% respondents in Rajasthan reside in urban areas, followed by 15% in Jharkhand, and 12% in Himachal Pradesh are from urban areas.

62% of them live in nuclear households and 65% of them are head of their families. Forty percent of the respondents are living in their maternal homes and 45% living in their marital homes, while rest of them living in self-owned or rented houses and some other type of houses.

Sources of income: Most of the women look at themselves as housewives but almost all of them are working women, all of them having more than one source of income. Twenty-eight percent of the selected single women are daily wage earners, 12% of them are other workers (monthly salary and piece rate work), 10% of them also work in MGNREGA, one-fourth of them are engaged in farming their or their families' lands, 12% are farm workers and 11% of them are in livestock farming as well. Some 30% of them suggested government social security pension adding to their sources of income.



Note: Percent is from the total sample of 567. Women have more than one source of income

Age profile of respondents: More than one third of the respondents (35%) fall in 36-45 years age bracket, followed by 46-55 years (30%), 26-35 years (18%), 56-65 years (12%).

Table 4: State wise and ages wise distribution of single women

State	18-25 years	26-35 years	36-45 years	46-55 years	56-65 years	>65 years	Total
Rajasthan	2	30	35	28	14	6	115
Gujarat	1	10	45	54	18	2	130
Himachal Pradesh		27	48	42	14	8	139
Jharkhand	1	25	56	32	13	2	129
Delhi	2	11	14	13	11	3	54
Total	6	103	198	169	70	21	567
Total in percent	1.06	18.17	34.92	29.81	12.35	3.70	100

Years of singlehood: 57% of them are single for less than 10 years, another 28% are single for 11 to 20%, while 15% are single for more than 20 years.

Social background of the respondents:

Religion wise, most of the respondents identified themselves as Hindus (70%), followed by Sarna followers (11%) and Muslims (9.5%) and Christians (8.5%). Rest of them have stated Sikhism or no religion.

Table 5: Social background of the single women

State	General	SC	ST	OBC	Other/Not stated	Total
Rajasthan	14	42	32	24	3	115
Gujarat		7	87	36		130
Himachal Pradesh	47	52	14	25	1	139
Jharkhand	4	9	71	45		129
Delhi	25	25	1	3		54
Total	90	135	205	133	4	567
Total in Percent	15.87	23.81	36.16	23.46	0.71	100

Social category wise most of the respondent women (36%) come from scheduled tribe (ST), 24% from scheduled caste (SC) and 23% from other backwards classes (OBCs) and about 16% of them identified themselves as from general category castes.

Educational background of respondents

Respondents come from low education background, little less than half of them being illiterate or barely literate. The table below shows the educational status of the respondents.

Table 6: Educational status of the single women

Education Status	Rajasthan	Gujarat	Himachal Pradesh	Jharkhand	Delhi	Total	Total in percent
Never been to school	56	62	22	41	15	196	34.57
Literate	13	6	1	17	19	56	9.88
Up to class 5	11	10	27	17	7	72	12.70
Classes 6 to 9	9	22	18	23	7	79	13.93
Matric/10th	13	16	36	9	2	76	13.40
Sr. Secondary	4	7	25	9	0	45	7.94
Above class 12 th	5	7	10	13	4	39	6.88
No answer	4					4	0.71
Total	115	130	139	129	54	567	100

About 35% of the respondents have never been to school, 14% have been to secondary level school but could not pass / reach class 10th, 13% have passed matriculation (10th) exam, 10% are just literate, only 15% of them could reach senior secondary or above educational level.

Housing rights: Single women's ownership / access to houses

As mentioned above about 40% of the respondents are living in their maternal homes and 45% living in their marital homes, while the rest of them are living in self-built/bought or rented houses and some other type of house. Those who are living in their maternal house also include the single women who are “never married”. Three-fourth of never married women are living in their maternal homes, while one fourth of them are living on their own.

Ownership of house: About 40% of the women also say that they live in the houses owned by themselves, **implying that 60% of the single women do not own the house they live in.** State wise, more than 50% of the single women respondents from Delhi, Gujarat and Rajasthan claim to be living in a house owned by them, 37% of the respondents live in their own house in Jharkhand and only 27% of the respondents in Himachal Pradesh said so.

On the positive side, 73% of these women who reported to be the owner of the house they live in, have also said that the house is in their name, while about 7% of them own the house jointly. **That means about 20% of them think that though the house they live in is owned by them it's not in their name individually or jointly.** State wise, again, respondents from Jharkhand are far behind in having houses, which they think they own, in their names compared to the other four states. While in other states 84% to 95% women who own the house they live in, have the house in their names (individually or jointly), in Jharkhand just 42% women have the houses, which they own, in their names.

Table 7: House ownership Status of single women

State	Living in their own house (% to total)	House in their name (individually or jointly) (% to house owners)	Having ownership document with them (% to house in their names)
Rajasthan	50.43	84.48	87.76
Gujarat	52.31	95.59	100.00
Himachal Pradesh	27.34	84.21	84.38
Jharkhand	37.21	41.67	80.00
Delhi	53.70	89.66	73.08
Total	42.50	79.67	88.54

Of those women who have the house in their names (jointly or individually), 88.5% also have the ownership document with them.

Source of the house owned by single women: Mostly not inherited from parents or in laws

Most importantly, most of the single women have a house in their names, either because their husbands had bought or built those houses or they themselves have bought or built them. Thirty-six percent of the women have a house in their name because their husbands had bought/built it and 28% of women have a house in their name because they themselves have bought or built them. Only 17% single women inherited it from their in-laws and 7% from their parents. Rest of them got it from some government scheme or from some other sources.

Table 8: Sources of house in their name (%)

Sources of the house in their name	Delhi	Himachal Pradesh	Jharkhand	Rajasthan	Gujarat	Total
Husband bought/built it	40.00	56.25	20	26.53	23.08	31.63
Inheritance from In-laws	20.00	9.37	15	30.61	10.77	17.35
Any other	26.67	3.12	0	0.00	6.15	6.63
Got it under welfare scheme	0.00	0	15	12.24	15.38	9.69
Inheritance from father	0.00	9.37	20	6.12	4.62	6.63
Bought / built this house	13.33	21.87	30	24.49	40.00	28.06
Total	100.00	100	100	100.00	100.00	100.00
N	30	32	20	49	65	196

Forty percent of the single women in Gujarat have bought or built the houses which are in their name while 23% in Gujarat got a house in their name because their husbands had bought/built it. In Gujarat, 15% of single women got their house under some government scheme. The percentage of single women who inherited it from their in laws or their parents is lower in Gujarat at 11% and 5% respectively, compared to the overall average. Inheritance from in laws is highest in Rajasthan at 31%. It's also higher in Delhi and Jharkhand at 20% and 15% respectively but the number of women having houses in their own names itself is very low in Jharkhand. Similarly, inheritance from father is also highest in Jharkhand and Himachal Pradesh but that is again within a lower number of single women having houses in their names in these two states.

This trend shows that most of the single women are not able to get their share in the house owned by their in laws or parents, as most of the single women have house in their name which their husbands bought/built or they themselves have bought or built. It could also be possible that their marital or parental families did not have house or had a very small piece of land.

The higher share of women inheriting houses from their in laws in Rajasthan could be due to the presence of a strong single women's organisation in the state as the sample women are mostly the members of the Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan (ENSS) in the state.

"Now I am associated with the Ekal Nari Shakti Manch- Gujrat (single woman's forum) for the past three years, which has helped me mentally to stay strong and to be motivated to continue my case Sangathan is supporting me for a quick resolution. Since now I am with sangathan so Panchayat is also now willing to help me with whatever I need to get my right on my land."

Kavita Ben, tribal widow woman from Gujarat

Anxiety of not owning a house

The women who do not have their house in their name are quite worried. About two-thirds of the single women who do not have their house in their name are worried about this situation.

Table 9: Worried, if house is not in their name

Worried	Delhi	Himachal Pradesh	Jharkhand	Rajasthan	Gujarat	Total	%
Yes	8	89	83	28	31	239	64.95
No	19	17	26	33	34	129	35.05
Total	27	106	109	61	65	368	100.00

Those single women who do not own a house in their name have various fears and anxieties.

"I married in 2007, but five years later, my husband was jailed for murder. At that time, my two children were very young. Now, they are in the 10th and 8th grades. I pursued further education and secured a job as an ASHA worker. However, I endured countless struggles and societal taunts. My husband had a single room, but after he went to jail, my husband's elder brother and his wife got evicted us. I now live in a rented house and take care of my children. It feels like my husband committed the crime, but we are the ones paying the price !"

A young woman from HP

Fifty-eight percent of them (138 single women) keep thinking that will they ever get their share in the house, 123 (51% of those who are worried) are

afraid that “they will throw me out of the house”, 52 single women (22%) are worried that “what if they sell the house”, 43% (102) of them keep thinking about “what will happen when elders will pass away”, and 22 women (9%) reported that they have all these worries.

Struggle to get their housing rights

It’s not easy for the single women to stake claim to their lands. These women face a lot of

“I got married at the age of 15. Within three years of marriage, I had two children. My husband and sister-in-law would verbally abuse and physically assault me over minor mistakes, and this continued for 15 years. I reported the incidents to the panchayat and the police, but they only tried to mediate and sent me back. Then I learned about the Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan-HP and filed a domestic violence complaint there. Despite efforts by the organization’s women to resolve the matter, my husband refused to reconcile and demanded a divorce. Even my family would say that husbands behave this way. Eventually, I decided to step out and look for work. I found a job but didn’t receive any financial support from my husband even after filing a maintenance case. My father had transferred my inherited land to my brother, who now doesn’t speak to me. Meanwhile, my husband continued to threaten to kill me and says he won’t provide financial support but is willing to divorce me. The organization has become my family now.

An abandoned woman (35 years old) from HP

problems when they try to claim the ownership to their houses. Both who had the house in their names and those who were trying to stake claim to their house have faced various challenges and threats and even verbal and physical violence. Twenty-one (about 11%) out of 196 single women who have a house in their name faced challenges in getting the house in their name. When asked if it was not bought /built by you have you faced any problems in claiming your right in this house, 10 single women reported physical violence, 15 verbal abuses, 5 of them faced character assassinations, 11 family boycotts, and 5 had to face police cases, some single women are facing multiple

problems as more than one answer was allowed. They also had to face problems from local authorities/officials. About 14 percent of single women, who did not purchase or build their house, had to face problem from the authorities, mostly local, as well.

As mentioned above, single women who do not have a house in their name are worried about this situation. And some of them have tried to get the house in their name and are facing various problems in claiming their rights to the house they consider their own.

Out of the 239 who are worried about the house not being in their name, 88 single women (37%) tried to claim their houses; almost half of them happen to be from Jharkhand. Sixty-nine of them talked about it in the family, 15 in their caste/clan *panchayat*, 25 in the gram *panchayat*, 6 in the *gram sabha*, 8 at the counselling centre, 14 went to the court.

Out of the 88 single women who had staked claim to their house, 70% of them reported facing some or the other problem in claiming their house. They faced physical violence (18), verbal abuses (42), character assassination (30), being labelled as witches (7), family boycott (21), and police cases (5).

“When I asked for a place to live in my father’s house, my brother and his wife started abusing me. Though they gave my share in agricultural land.”

Never married tribal woman from Gujarat

Opposition/trouble also came from the concerned government officials/authorities. In total women 23 single women (more than one-third of those who chose to answer this question) faced some or the other problem, mostly, from the local authorities.

So, the road to get their own share in the house is not easy for single women and is marred by multiple difficulties. On the positive side, however, 38% of single women (who answered this question) got support from family, community, *panchayat/gram sabha* and/ or organisations when they laid claim to their house. Most of the women who answered in yes come from Jharkhand, followed by Himachal Pradesh. The support mostly came from marital family members (5), parents (12) brothers (12), CBO/organisation (18), gram panchayats/gram sabha (15). In most cases, single women recognise the support of their *sangathans* (single women organisations) in claiming their housing rights during the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) as well.

Ownership of agricultural land

In this section we focus on the ownership and control over the agricultural land by single women and the struggle to take the ownership of any land which is rightfully theirs. As we saw above, one fourth of the single women who participated in the study are farmers working on their own or their families’ lands, 2% of them are involved in share cropping and another 12% of them are agricultural workers. Twenty-one percent of the total sample of single women have land in their name, while another 10% of them have land in their husbands’ or children’s names.

Table 10: Land ownership status of women

Land ownership	Delhi	Himachal Pradesh	Jharkhand	Rajasthan	Gujarat	Total	% to total
In their own name	1	26	14	25	53	119	20.99
In their husbands’ names	1	17	14	11	7	50	8.82
In their children’s names	0	6	0	1	1	8	1.41

In their own name (%)	1.85	18.71	10.85	21.74	40.77	20.99	
In their husbands' names (%)	1.85	12.23	10.85	9.57	5.38	8.82	
In their children's names (%)	0	0.72	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.18	

However, the percentage of single women whose marital or natal families own land is much higher. As the tables below suggests, about half of their marital families and two-thirds of their natal families own some piece of agricultural land.

Table 11: Land owned by the marital families

Land owned by marital families	Delhi	Himachal Pradesh	Jharkhand	Rajasthan	Gujarat	Total	%
Yes	7	63	70	70	71	281	49.56
Yes (%)	12.96	45.32	54.26	60.87	54.62	49.56	--
No	45	50	49	36	53	233	41.09
Don't know	2	26	10	9	6	53	9.35
Total	54	139	129	115	130	567	100.00

Table 12: Land owned by the parental / natal families

Land owned by natal families	Delhi	Himachal Pradesh	Jharkhand	Rajasthan	Gujarat	Total	%
Yes	9	84	93	89	105	380	67.02
Yes (%)	16.67	60.43	72.09	77.39	80.77	67.02	--
No	41	47	28	25	23	164	28.92
Don't know	4	8	8	1	2	23	4.06
Total	54	139	129	115	130	567	100.00

One interesting fact emerging from the tables above is that in many cases the land-owning families have married their daughters into landless families and another important point is that though about 10% of the single women included in the study are **not** aware of land ownership status of their marital families, only 4% of them are **not** aware of land ownership status of their natal families. **The educational level seems to have an impact on the awareness level, as none of the 'above higher secondary' educated single women said 'don't know' about land-owning status of their natal families and only four of them said so about the land-owning status of their marital families.**

There is also another aspect to the lack of awareness among the selected single women about the land owned by their families. As 14% of the single women, whose marital families own land, don't know the amounts of agricultural lands owned by their marital families, 11% of the single women, whose natal families own land, don't know the amounts of agricultural lands owned by their natal families. Not only this, 5% of single women who claimed to have lands in their own names also do not know the amount of land owned by themselves. (see Annexure tables 2 to 4).

Single women are not only ignorant of the land owned by their (mostly) marital families they also lack awareness of the importance of land related documents and lack access to those. Case stories collected from Gujarat and other states suggest that despite having legal documents or being known legal heir, single women are facing problems in getting their claim because they are not aware of the importance of land related documents and do not have access to these documents. Mostly male members handle these documents and because of their mobility and social interactions it becomes easier for them to influence community level officials of revenue department, or get the documents changed.

"After my husband's death in 2001, I immediately took the process of transferring the land into my name. I gathered all the necessary documents for the inheritance process, though I didn't have much knowledge at the time. But after some time, my family members started opposing me and causing trouble. They tortured me verbally and mentally, telling me to either go away or give up the land. I couldn't argue with them at that time. Then, in 2019, my name was removed from the land records. Initially, my share of the land was 12 bighas, but 9 bighas were removed from my name, and only 3 bighas remain under my name. The names of my sons and me were also removed from the land records. This was done by my chacha sasur and jethh (uncle-in-law and brother-in-law), as they didn't want to share the land with a widow. I also had to endure mental and verbal abuse, with people calling me a witch and saying I would run away with the land."

Kavita Ben, a tribal widow woman from Gujarat

Small and marginal agricultural families

Most of the single women's families, be it marital or natal, are small and marginal land owners. Little less than half of them own up to 1 acre of agricultural land and 17% to 18% of them own agricultural land between 1- to 2 acres, suggesting that about two-thirds of the marital and natal families of these single women own up to 2 acres of agricultural lands. Obviously, the single women, who have land in their own names, own even smaller sizes of lands. **Three-fourths of the total 119 single women who have agricultural lands**

in their own names have up to 1 acre of land while, another 18% have 1-2 acres of agricultural lands. Thus, more than 88% of the single women who have land in their own names own up to 2 acres of land. (see Annexure tables 2 to 4).

Control over the agricultural land owned by single women: Not all of the single women who have agricultural lands in their or their husbands' or children's names have control over their lands. Forty-two percent of the land-owning single women said that they do not have control on

their lands. 72% of the single women who have land in their names possess the documents related to their lands, while two-thirds of them said that they look after the finances and accounts related to their land. This was emphasized by the Women in FGDs as well in Kota (Rajasthan), Hazaribagh (Jharkhand) and Gujarat.

मेरे पति ने दुसरा शादी कर लया मैं अपना भरण पोषण के लए खर्च मांग रही थी और जमीन का हिस्सा मांग रही थी और मैं पु लस केस भी की थी ले कन मुझे न्याय नहीं मला।

My husband has married another woman. I demanded alimony and my share in land. I even filed a police case but could not justice.

A tribal woman (40) from Jharkhand, deserted by her husband.

Sources of land owned by single women

It is important to analyse the sources of land owned by single women to fully understand the land ownership situation of single

women. The table below provides data on the sources of agricultural land of single women who have land in their names.

Table 13: Sources of lands owned by single women

Sources of land owned (in their names)	Delhi	Himachal Pradesh	Jharkhand	Rajasthan	Gujarat	Total	%
From marital family	1	16	5	14	29	65	54.62
From natal family	0	5	2	6	23	36	30.25
Forest land	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.84
Bought	0	1	5	2	0	8	6.72
Husband bought	0	3	1	1	0	5	4.20
Others	0	1	1	2	0	4	3.36
Total	1	26	14	25	53	119	100.00

As the table above suggests more than half of the single women (55%) who have land in their names have got it from their marital families, while 30% of them received it from their parental families as inheritance. Seven percent of them bought their lands while in four percent cases the land was bought by the husbands. Others include a lady from Jharkhand suggesting the land was bought by herself and her husband jointly and three respondents provided no answers to this (HP and Rajasthan). Notably, though 67% of the women reported that their parental families possess agricultural land, very few of them managed to claim their share in the parental land.

It shows that most of the single women are getting their agricultural lands from the marital family itself. State wise, percentage of single women who could get a share in the land from their marital families (who own land) is highest in Gujarat (41%) followed by Himachal Pradesh (25%), Rajasthan (20%), Delhi (14%) and Jharkhand (7%). Single women in Gujarat also seem to be doing better in getting land from their parental families which is much higher at 21% compared to the overall average of single women who got land from their land-owning parental families.

Table 14: State wise sources of land in the names of single women

	Delhi	Himachal Pradesh	Jharkhand	Rajasthan	Gujarat	Total
Land owned by marital families	7	63	70	70	71	281
Land owned by natal families	9	84	93	89	105	380
Land their own names	1	26	14	25	53	119
From marital family	1	16	5	14	29	65
From natal family	0	5	2	6	23	36
% land from marital family to the marital family owning land	14.29	25.40	7.14	20.00	40.85	23.13
% land from natal family to the natal family owning land	0.00	5.95	2.15	6.74	21.90	9.47

While the presence of a strong single women's organization could be a reason for the single women from some states doing better than other states in getting their share of agricultural land from their land-owning marital families, a higher percentage of unmarried single women from Gujarat could be a reason for most of the single women who got land from their land-owning parental families belonging to Gujarat.

Likelihood of owning agricultural land by single women

As discussed above, 119 single women from the total sample of 567 single women have agricultural lands in their names, which is about 21% the total number of single women. This percentage, however, is not important as the total number includes single women whose marital or natal families do not own land. It is therefore important to see the numbers of the women's parental families and marital families owning agricultural lands and then derive percentages of the single women who inherited agricultural lands from these two sources separately. Above we have done this exercise for all the states and we see that single women from Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan have done better than other two states in inheriting land from marital

families while single women from Gujarat are doing better in inheriting agricultural land from their natal families. In this section we have tried to understand what are the other factors which may increase the likelihood of women inheriting agricultural lands from their natal or marital families. In this section, we have done this exercise for type of singlehood, religion, social category and education.

Type of singlehood

Type of singlehood is an important factor as culturally, widowed women are more likely to get land from their marital families compared to the daughters getting lands from their parental families. However, as the table below shows, this may change if the daughter never gets married or is in a troubled marriage i.e., she is deserted, separated or divorced.

Table 15: Type of singlehood and sources of land in their names

Type of singlehood	Total	Land in their marital families	Land in their natal families	Land in their name	% of women with land in their name to total	Women Getting land From maternal family	Women Getting land From natal family	% women getting land from marital families to the marital families having land	% women getting land from natal families to the natal families having land
Widow	286	173	182	76	26.57	57	7	32.95	3.85
Divorced	54	20	34	6	11.11		6	0.00	17.65
Separated	46	28	33	7	15.22	1	6	3.57	18.18
Deserted	67	37	45	12	17.91	3	5	8.11	11.11
Never married	80		62	14	17.50		12		19.35
Husband in jail	7	2	4		0.00			0.00	0.00
Missing Husband	27	17	20	4	14.81	3		17.65	0.00

The table above shows that though slightly more widowed women are likely to own agricultural land, their chances of inheriting land from their marital families are much higher as 33% of widowed single women inherited land from their land-owning marital families compared to 23% of all single women inheriting land from their land-owning marital families. But when it comes to

inheriting agricultural lands from the parental families, never married women (above 35 years) as well as separated women, divorced women and deserted women are much more likely to inherit land from their land-owning natal families.

Religion:

Religion has obvious importance as the succession and inheritance laws are in accordance with the personal laws of the religions and the tribal customary laws. The table below suggests that the Hindu women are more likely to have inherited agricultural land from their land-owning marital families, while the likelihood of getting land from their land-owning parental families are almost at the same levels for Hindu, Muslim and Christian women, with the Christian women having slightly better chances than the other two. Notably, a very small share of the Sarna following single women have inherited lands from either their marital or parental families.

Table 16: Religion of single women and sources of land in their names

Religion	Total	Land in their marital families	Land in their natal families	Land in their name	% of land in their name to total	Women Getting land From maternal family	Women Getting land From natal family	% women getting land from marital families to the marital families having land	% women getting land from natal families to the natal families having land
Hindu	396	203	268	104	26.26	60	28	29.56	10.45
Muslim	54	13	17	3	5.56	1	2	7.69	11.76
Christian	49	26	38	9	18.37	1	6	3.85	15.79
No religion	5	1	2	0	0.00			0.00	0.00
Sarna	60	37	54	2	3.33	1	0	2.70	0.00
Other	3	1	1	1	33.33	1	0	100.00	0.00

Social Category

The data suggests that the social categories are also important in this regard. Social category wise, likelihood of owning land in their own name is higher for the ST and OBC women. The table below suggests that OBC single women have much higher likelihood to inherit agricultural land from their marital families compared to other social categories, general and SC single women also have a better chance compared to the ST single women.

Table 17: Social Category of single women and sources of land in their names

Social category	Total	Land in their marital families	Land in their natal families	Land in their name	% of land in their name to total	Women Getting land From maternal family	Women Getting land From natal family	% women getting land from marital families to the marital families having land	% women getting land from natal families to the natal families having land
General	90	35	44	11	12.22	7	3	20.00	6.82
SC	135	52	71	23	17.04	11	8	21.15	11.27
ST	205	118	175	40	19.51	15	19	12.71	10.86
OBC	133	74	87	44	33.08	31	5	41.89	5.75
Don't know	4	1	2	1	25		1	0.00	50.00

Whereas, with respect to inheriting land from their land-owning natal families, SC and ST women have slightly higher likelihood than other women.

Educational Status

Education wise, likelihood of owning land in their own name is higher for women who have never been to school. Likelihood of owning land for women in their own names from the marital families is also higher for such women who have never been to school or are just literate. Likelihood of getting land from their natal families is also higher for the single women who never attended school and some not so highly educated women.

Table 18: Educational status of single women and sources of land in their names

Educational status	Total	Land in Marital family	Land in Natal family	Land in their name	% of land in their name to total	Women Getting land From maternal family	Women Getting land From natal family	% women getting land from marital families to the marital families having land	% women getting land from natal families to the natal families having land
Never been to school	196	101	140	57	29.08	33	17	32.67	12.14
Literate	56	27	33	9	16.07	6	0	22.22	0.00
Up to class 5	72	33	41	13	18.06	6	4	18.18	9.76
Classes 6 to 9	79	46	53	13	16.46	10	1	21.74	1.89
Matric/10 th	76	40	56	13	17.11	5	6	12.50	10.71
Sr. Secondary	45	20	30	9	20.00	3	4	15.00	13.33
Above class 12 th	39	12	25	4	10.26	0	2	0.00	8.00
No answer	4	2	2	1	25.00	1		50.00	0.00
Total	567	281	380	119	20.99	64	34	22.78	8.95

The analysis of the data in this section suggests that a single woman from Gujarat, a Hindu OBC widow woman, and one who has never been to school has a much better chance of getting land from their land-owning marital family compared to others and a single woman from Gujarat, a Christian or Muslim single woman, one who is never married (over 35 years), separated or divorced and a SC or ST single woman and one who has never been to school or is educated up to secondary or higher levels have higher possibility of inheriting land from their parental families. **However, the most important factor determining the land inheritance from the marital families seems to be widowhood. The widow women are more likely to get a share in land from their marital families. On the other hand, never married, separated, divorced and deserted women have more chances of getting land from their natal families.**

Challenges faced in claiming the land:

As we saw in the case of housing rights, single women have to face a lot of resistance and trouble

Chandarika Ben's story: Role of the Sangathan

Renuka ben is 40 years old. In her childhood she got polio and because of that her one leg got disabled. About 18 years ago she was married off. She gave birth to one daughter. Situation was not the same as her husband and in laws started harassing her. She gave birth to the second daughter. She was beaten by her husband and his family. With her both daughters she came to her maternal home and started living there with her widow mother. She had two brothers who live separately. Her brother started supporting her but in return she had to stop her elder daughter's study so that her daughter could work at his brother's house and can take care of cattle. Renuka's father owned 20 bigha land which was equally divided between mother, 2 sons and Renuka. Single women's organisation supported her in getting this share of hers. Now she is all prepared to file a case against her husband claiming the share in land and property for herself and her daughters.

Case story from Gujarat

in getting their rights to the agricultural lands owned by their families. A good percentage of them feel that they have not been able to get their agricultural lands. About 36% single women also reported that there is some piece of land in which they should have got a share which they could not, as shown in the table below.

"An OBC widow woman (50 years) from Jharkhand is living at her parental house since she became a widow when she was just 24. She does everything at her natal home like farming, looking after the animals, and caring her old parents, still she does not have any property rights in her parental family."

An investigator's note from Jharkhand

Table 19: Have land in which could not get their share

Have land in which could not get their share	Delhi	Himachal Pradesh	Jharkhand	Rajasthan	Gujarat	Total	%
Yes	8	57	74	28	33	200	35.84
No	42	80	53	87	96	358	64.16
Total	50	137	127	115	129	558	100.00

Women do not make claims to their lands because of various reasons. This is true for the agricultural land as well as for their houses (as seen in the housing rights section). In the FGDs

conducted in 5 states, women shed lights on the reasons for not staking claim on their lands. Single women from all states have mentioned in the FGDs that the women who claim their share in lands are stigmatised by the society and they feel societal pressure to relinquish their share of land. They also fear the violence and intimidation according to the women in Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Delhi and Himachal Pradesh. Women in FGD in Una (Himachal Pradesh) and Banka (Jharkhand) said that local customary practices often override the statutory laws.

Out of the 119 single women having land in their names, 109 responded to the question about having faced a problem in getting it in their names. Out of the 109, 26% faced some or the other problems in getting the land transferred in their names. Twenty-three faced physical violence, 27 faced verbal abuses, 10 faced character assassination, four got labelled as witches, 20 were boycotted by their families, 14 faced boycotts by the community and six got charged with police complaints. Twelve single women also faced trouble from the government officials like *patwaris* (local revenue officials), *panchayats* and local police. These findings have again been corroborated by the discussions in the FGDs and by the case stories collected for the study. Women from Lohadaga (Jharkhand), Kota (Rajasthan) and Gujarat also highlighted the administrative hurdles and complex male dominated bureaucratic process as major issues in the FGDs too.

In total 13 of these women reported to have got support from someone and half of them (7) got support from the *sangathan* (organisation), while others got support from close relatives like brother, sister, parents and even the in laws, family and friends.

Qualitative data from the Focused Group Discussions also suggest that the women relied on the organisation in getting their land rights as well as the housing rights.

Benefits from the government agriculture schemes

As we discussed above only about one third of single women are getting social security pensions. Also, as we saw above, about a third of the women are engaged in farming. But, only 16% of the women who responded to the question about benefits from the government agriculture related schemes said that they are getting benefits of some scheme. In total 82 single women i.e. two thirds of single women who have agricultural lands in their names, have received benefits of *Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana* in last three years. Besides this, four women also have received benefits of *Fasal Bima Yojana* in the last three years.

The organization helped me file a complaint with the village head (Gram Pradhan), requesting justice through a village council (Gram Sabha). Since the police were not taking legal action, the organization escalated the matter by submitting an application to the Superintendent of Police (SP). On December 23, 2011, a notice was sent to my brother, informing him of a panchayat meeting scheduled for January 22, 2012. He was warned that failing to attend would result in legal action by the organization. On the scheduled date, the panchayat meeting was held in my village, Narayanpur, with the presence of my brother, sister-in-law, local police, the village head, villagers, and members of the organization. My brother attended, saying, "I respect the organization; that's why I am here." During the panchayat, both parties presented their cases. After hearing all sides, the panchayat found my brother guilty. The panchayat ruled that I had equal rights to our father's house and property. They decided on a traditional division, granting me half of the house and three out of six plots of land for my livelihood. The decision was implemented the same day, with police oversight and with the help of the villagers. Two rooms of the house were allocated to me for living, and three plots of agriculture land were marked and handed over for my sustenance. It was only because of the organization's intervention that my life was secured. Otherwise, I could have been killed over the land and property dispute !!

Prabhati Tudu, (Never married), Jharkhand

Beside these the single women do not seem to have benefited from any other agricultural schemes.

The case studies suggest that the lack of ownership of the land is also an important factor behind not getting the benefits of the government programmes. In some cases, land was given to women as empathy or as charity, but since it was not registered in the name of the recipient, later on it created dispute or barred them from getting benefit of government schemes /agriculture related benefits.

Changes in last 10-15 years: Effects of climate change!!

As we discussed above only about one third of single women are getting social security pensions. But as we saw above about a third of the women are engaged in farming. A few of the women also are working on land leased in from others while few more are leasing out their lands.

As much as 136 out of 140 women, working on their lands, say that they have enough harvest for their family consumption during the year. Most of the women however also feel that the yield has decreased in last 10-15 years.

Summary and conclusions

The study highlights the plights and struggles of low-income single women in realising their housing and land rights. Only 42% of single women are living in their own houses and only 80% of those have houses in their names. A little less than 90% of those, who said they have the houses in their names, have documents of those houses.

However, most of the 196 women who have lived in their own houses (in their names or not), said that those houses were bought/built by them (28%) or their husbands (32%), suggesting that very few could inherit them from their in laws (17%) or parental families (7%). It could also be possible that marital or parental families of those who did not inherit a share in houses, did not have houses or had it on very small piece of land.

Percentage of single women living in their own houses is higher (more than 50%) in Gujarat, Rajasthan and Delhi compared to other two states. Single women from Jharkhand are particularly far behind the single women of the other states in living in their own houses and having those houses in their names.

A little less than 60% of the single women who participated in the study are not living in their own houses. This makes them worried about their and their children's future as they live in fear of being thrown out of the houses they are living in and that what will happen when the elders pass away.

Those women who have got the houses in their names or have in their husband's/children's names and those who do not have the houses that they have a right to, in their names, have struggled to get it and have faced a lot of trouble in the process.

Similarly, the single women who are part of the study are also struggling to get the ownership and control over their share of the agricultural lands of their families. Only 21% of the single women have agricultural lands in their names and another 10% in their husband's or children's names. Though, the agricultural land is owned by the marital families of half of the selected single women and by two-thirds of the parental families of the selected single women, is mostly in small amounts. A good percentage of single women are not aware about the ownership status of agricultural land and the amount of land owned by their marital families and some in cases of

their parental families as well. In a few cases they are not aware of the amount of land they own themselves. A good share of single women (42%) also lack control over the agricultural land in their names.

The single women from Gujarat are ahead of their sisters in other states in terms of having land in their names. In Gujarat single women are also doing better in inheriting their share of land from their marital and parental families. Analysis of the data using variables like type of singlehood, religion, social categories and educational status suggests that a single woman from Gujarat, a Hindu OBC widow woman, and one who has never been to school has much better chance of getting land from her land-owning marital family compared to others and a single woman from Gujarat, a Christian or Muslim single woman, one who is never married (over 35 years), separated or divorced and a SC or ST single woman and one who has never been to school or is educated up to secondary or higher levels has a higher possibility of inheriting land from her parental family.

Again, the single women who have taken their share of agricultural lands in their marital and/or parental families or are trying to take their rightful share in agricultural lands of their marital and/or parental families are facing various challenges and have to struggle a lot.

The struggle and troubles they face are a result of patriarchal social and cultural norms and the expectations and pressure from the families and society and the apathy and indifference of the government authorities towards single women's housing and land rights. The data from the questionnaire survey as well as from the FGDs, which are also corroborated by their case stories, suggests that most women are hesitant and even afraid to claim their housing and land rights due to the hostile patriarchal cultural norms and gendered expectations. And those who dare to claim and fight for their housing and land rights face various challenges and troubles like verbal abuses and intimidations, physical violence, false police cases, social and family boycotts etc.

Though on the positive side, in a few cases, the single women have also found support from family, friends and institutions like *panchayats*. Most women, however, have suggested and have narrated in their cases stories that they could get their land rights with support of the single women organisation in their state. This is an important finding underlining the role and importance of getting organised and striving for their housing and land rights collectively. Case stories from Gujarat, Rajasthan and Telangana very clearly point to the importance of the organisation and collective actions in realising the land rights of the single women.

Also, the single women in the study have highlighted the effects of climate change in farm production and yields, which have declined in last 10-15 years in their observations.

Suggestions and Recommendations

The housing and land rights of low-income single women are crucial as in most cases they are dependent on the land for their livelihood. Single women having ownership and access and control over the houses and agricultural lands are also directly related to the realisation of various SDGs like SDG 1 No Poverty, SDG 2 Zero Hunger, SDG 5 Gender Equality, SDG 10 Reduced Inequality and indirectly linked to most other SDGs as well. It is important therefore that all-round efforts are made to support low-income single women in realising their land rights. Some of the suggestions which could be made in this direction are as following:

The government and the Supreme Court should clarify the applicability of the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005 on agricultural lands as it seems to be interpreted differently by different High Courts.

There is a need of clearly defining the rights of the single women like separated, deserted, divorced, or those whose husbands are missing or are in jail for a long time.

It is also very important that the government officials and local authorities are made aware of the recent pro women amendments in the land laws and are sensitized towards the importance of their roles in implementing the law and realising the low-income single women land rights.

Gram Panchayats as the decentralised local level governing system should be made aware of the women's land rights and are sensitized towards the same.

State and the local governments should make concerted efforts to provide surplus land, *Bhoodan* land, and other government lands to low-income single women and make the housing schemes more easily accessible for them.

Low income single women can become members of some single women collective or collectivise themselves in order to overcome the various challenges faced by them in trying to claim their housing and land rights.

The role of civil society organisations, single women's organisations and community-based organisations become very important in this regard not only in awareness generation but also in providing crucial legal aid and other support.

Next Steps: Follow up

Presence of a single women's organisation seems to be a big support mechanism for the single women struggling for their land rights. There is a need to probe deeper in the roles played by the organisations, on strengthening of single women's organisations and broadening their support base.

There is also a need to study the impact of land ownership on single women's lives and its effects on realising the SDGs.

There is a need to work with the union and state governments to bring clarity on the applicability of the Hindu Succession Amendment Act, 2005 on the agricultural land.

Also, there is need to have a clear guideline on or an act defining the property/land rights of divorced, deserted and separated single women and women whose husbands are missing or are in jail for a long time.

Programmes on creating awareness among and sensitising the district, block and *panchayat* level functionaries of revenue department, elected representatives of the *gram panchayats* and the functionaries of the PRIs at all three levels should be planned and implemented.

There is a need to work with the tribal communities their traditional institutions and community leaders on ensuring the land rights of tribal women. The Jharkhand data suggests that tribal women are far behind other women in realizing their land rights. The cases studies (for instance Prabhati Tudu's case), however, shows that the tribal society is willing to support the tribal women in claiming their land rights. This positive trend must be supported. A study on status of women land rights in the various customary laws and how tribal women are dealing with the same can also be considered.

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Annexure tables:

Annexure table 1 Sources of income of the single women

Income sources / occupations	Delhi	Himachal Pradesh	Jharkhand	Rajasthan	Gujarat	Total	%
Homemaker	33	84	98	90	102	407	71.78
Any other	21	10	3	5	3	42	7.41
Daily wage earner	2	27	59	19	50	157	27.69
Worker with monthly salary/ honorarium	8	19	21	2	1	51	8.99
Piece-rate earner	12	1	0	1	0	14	2.47
Self-employed	1	16	19	36	42	114	20.11
Farming	0	16	40	31	53	140	24.69
Shared cropping /rent farming	0	2	6	0	1	9	1.59
Farm labourer	0	6	10	8	44	68	11.99
Animal husbandry	0	8	16	0	37	61	10.76
Govt employee	0	2	1	0	3	6	1.06
Pensioner as Retired govt. employee	14	2	4	2	3	25	4.41
Social security /welfare pension	1	41	57	44	28	171	30.16
MGNREGA	0	9	1	20	24	54	9.52
Total	92	243	335	258	391	1319	

Annexure table 2: Land owned by the marital families

Amount of land	Delhi	Himachal Pradesh	Jharkhand	Rajasthan	Gujarat	Total	%
Upto 1 acre	5	47	24	26	29	131	46.62
More than 1 - 2 acres	0	5	11	7	25	48	17.08
More than 2- 3 acres	1	1	5	4	11	22	7.83
More than 4 to 5 acres	0	0	0	5	3	8	2.85
More than 5 acres	0	1	8	11	0	20	7.12
More then 3- 4 acres	0	0	3	8	2	13	4.63
dont know	1	9	19	9	1	39	13.88
Total	7	63	70	53	71	281	100.00

Annexure table 3: Land owned by the natal families

Amount of land	Delhi	Himachal Pradesh	Jharkhand	Rajasthan	Gujarat	Total	%
Upto 1 acre	8	74	30	33	41	186	48.95

More than 1 - 2 acres	0	5	10	11	44	70	18.42
More than 2- 3 acres	0	1	5	4	12	22	5.79
More then 3- 4 acres	0	1	3	6	2	12	3.16
More than 4 to 5 acres	0	0	7	3	2	12	3.16
Do not know	1	2	31	5	2	41	10.79
More than 5 acres	0	1	7	27	2	37	9.74
Total	9	84	93	89	105	380	100.00

Annexure table 4: Land owned by the single women

Amount of land	Delhi	Gujrat	Himachal	Jharkhand	Rajasthan	Total	%
Upto 1 acre	1	34	23	13	12	83	69.75
More than 1 - 2 acres	0	15	0	1	6	22	18.49
More than 2- 3 acres	0	4	0	0	3	7	5.88
More than 4 to 5 acres	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.84
Do not know	0	0	3	0	3	6	5.04
Total	1	53	26	14	25	119	100.00

Annexures

Annexure 1:

List of Districts

Sr. No.	State	Districts
1.	Delhi	Shahdra
2.	Gujarat	Ahmedabad, Navasari, Tapi
3.	Himachal Pradesh	Kangra, Mandi, Una
4.	Jharkhand	Hazaribagh, Lohardaga, Godda
5.	Rajasthan	Kota, Phalodi, Sirohi

List of Team Members engaged in data collection

Sr. No.	State	State Lead	State Anchor	Name of investigators
1.	Delhi	Sandhya Gautam	Jyotsna Sivaramayya	Aarti Mohini Kashaf
2.	Gujrat	Sushila	Hansa Rathor	Jayshree Parul Rachel
3.	Himachal Pradesh	Nirmal Chandel	Radha	Meena Devi Sonika Rajni Meena Sharma Leela Milapa Rajni
4.	Jharkhand	Binni	Pritee Guria	Suhagini Tudu Manisha Shweta Marandi Shaniyaron Devi
5.	Rajasthan	Chandrakala Sharma	Priyanka Mahawar	Pawan Udani Reena Sharma Neema Aary Abhishek Rupa

Questionnaire Schedule

Single Women's Access to Land and Housing

एकल महिलाओं का घर और जमीन पर अधिकार - एक शोध

Survey Form सर्वे फॉर्म

State: राज्य – Delhi दिल्ली Gujrat गुजरात Himachal Pradesh हिमाचल प्रदेश Jharkhand झारखंड Rajasthan राजस्थान	District जिला:		
Village/Town गाँव / कस्बा / शहर :	Type of Area क्षेत्र :	Rural ग्रामीण	Urban शहरी
Date : तारीख			
Surveyer's Name सर्वे कर्ता का नाम	Phone No. फोन नंबर		

I. Individual and demographic details व्यक्तिगत ववरण :

1.	Name of the woman महिला का नाम	
1.a	Woman's mobile / contact no. महिला का मोबाईल संपर्क नंबर	
2.	Age उम्र (वर्ष)	Age category आयु वर्ग 18- 25 26- 35 36-45 46- 55 56- 65 66 या इस से ऊपर
3.	Religion धर्म	a. Hindu हिन्दू b. Jain जैन c. Sikh सिख d. Buddhist बौद्ध धर्म e. Muslim मुस्लिम / Islam f. Christian ईसाई g. No religion कोई धर्म नहीं h. Sarna सरना i. Any other (mention)अन्य (लखें)
3 i	Any other (mention)	
4.	Social category सामाजिक वर्ग	a. General सामान्य b. SC, अनुसूचित जाति

		c. ST अनुसूचित जनजाति d. OBC अन्य पछड़ा वर्ग e. Other (mention) अन्य (लखें)
4 e	Other (mention) अन्य (लखें)	
4 a	Is she from DNT ? क्या DNT (वमुक्त खुमंतू) जनजाति से संबंध रखती हैं ?	a . Yes हाँ b. No नहीं
5.	Education शिक्षा	a. Never been to school कभी स्कूल नहीं गई b. Literate साक्षर c. Upto class 5 कक्षा 5 या इससे कम पढ़ी d. 6 to 10 class कक्षा 10 से कम पढ़ी e. Matric/10 th कक्षा 10 पास f. 12 th कक्षा 12 पास g. Above 12 th --- कक्षा 12 से ज्यादा पढ़ी h. Other (pls mention) अन्य (कृपया लखें)
5 h	Other (pls mention) अन्य (कृपया लखें)	
6.	Since how many years have you been single? आप कतने साल से एकल हैं ? (यदि अ ववाहित है तो 35 वर्ष से ऊपर की आयु लेंगे) वर्ष
7.	Status of singlehood एकल होने की स्थिति	a. Widowed वधवा b. Husband missing पति लापता (4 years and above 4 साल या इस से ज्यादा) c. Divorced तलाकशुदा d. In prison पति जेल में (for 7 yrs and above) 7 साल य e. Deserted पति ने छोड़ दिया f. separated पति से अलग हो गई g . Never married शादी नहीं की (for women above 35 years) h. Other (pls mention) अन्य (कृपया लखें)
7 h	Other (pls mention) अन्य (कृपया लखें)	
8.	Type of family परिवार	a. Joint संयुक्त b. Nuclear एकल
9.	Are you the Head of the household क्या आप घर की मुख्या हैं ?	a. Yes हाँ b. No नहीं
10.	Do you have children क्या आपके बच्चे हैं	a.Yes हाँ b. No (go to Q. No 13) नहीं (प्रश्न 13 पर जाएं)

11.	If yes; number of children यदि हाँ; तो बच्चों की संख्या	a. Totalb. daughter c. Son a कुल b बेटियाँc बेटे
12.	Number of children living with you यदि हाँ तो आपके साथ कतने बच्चे रहते हैं ?	a. Daughters बेटियाँ b. Son बेटे
13.	What are your main source of earning/ livelihood ? आपकी आमदनी के मुख्य स्रोत / आजी वका के साधन क्या क्या है ? (अधिकतम 3 जवाब चुने)	a. Homemaker गृहणी b. Daily wage earner दिहाड़ीदार c. Worker with monthly salary/ honorarium मा सक वेतन/ मानदेय d. Piece-rate earner पीस रेट कमाने वाली e. Self-employed खुद का काम f. Farming खेती g. shared cropping /rent farming बंटाई या कराये पर खेती h. Farm labourer खेतिहर मजदूर i. Animal husbandry पशु पालन j. govt employee सरकारी नौकरी k. Pensioner as Retired govt. employee सरकारी पेन्शनर l. Social security /welfare pension सामाजिक सुरक्षा / कल्याणकारी पेंशन m. Any other (mention) अन्य (लखें)
14.	Presently where are you living ? वर्तमान में आप कहाँ रह रहे हैं ?	a) Maternal home मायके में b) Marital home ससुराल में c) I Independently in self -owned house अलग से अपने घर में d) Independently in rented house अलग से कराये के घर में e) Any other (mention) अन्य (लखें)

II. House Ownership घर पर मा लकाना हक

15.	Do you own the house you live in? जिस घर में आप रह रही हैं क्या आप उसकी मा लक हैं ?	a. Yes हाँ b. No (go to Qtn 17) नहीं (प्रश्न 17 पर जाएं)
15 a	If yes, then is this house is in your name ? यदि हाँ तो क्या ये घर आपके नाम पर है ?	a)Yes हाँ b) No नहीं c) Joint ownership which includes you as one of the owner संयुक्त मा लकाना जिसमें एक नाम आपका भी है d) do not know मालूम नहीं
16.	If house in your name, then , do you have ownership documents with you? यदि घर आपके नाम पर है तो क्या इसके कागज आपके पास हैं ?	a)Yes हाँ b) No नहीं

		If yes, then go to Qtn 24 यदि हाँ तो प्रश्न 24 पर जाएँ ।
17.	If not in your name or in joint ownership , in whose name is the house? यदि घर आपके नाम पर नहीं है ना ही संयुक्त मा लकाना है, तो घर कसके नाम पर है ?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Husband पति b. Father in Law/Mother in law ससुर/सास c. Husband's brothers जेठ / देवर d. Parents माता- पता e. भाई f. Son बेटे के g. Daughter बेटी के h. Built a house on public land सरकारी जमीन पर घर बनाया i. Other please mention..... अन्य(लखें)
18.	If the house is not in your name, are you worried about anything ? यदि घर आपके नाम पर नहीं है तो क्या आपको इसको लेकर कोई चंता है ?	a)Yes हाँ b) No नहीं
18 a	If you are worried then what all kind of worries do you have ? (Check all that applies.) यदि चंता है तो कस तरह की ? (एक से ज्यादा जवाब हो सकते हैं)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Not sure if they will give my share or not ! पता नहीं मेरा हिस्सा देंगे या नहीं ! b. What if they evicted the house ! कहीं निकाल तो नहीं देंगे ! c. What will I do if they sold the house ! अगर घर बेच देंगे तो मैं क्या करूंगी ! d. What will happen when elders won't be around /pass away बड़े बुजुर्गों के जाने के बाद क्या होगा ! e. Any other अन्य (लखें)
19.	If you are worried, have you tried to claim rights in the family house where you live?	a)Yes हाँ b) No नहीं If No , then go to Qtn 30

	यदि आपको चंता है तो , क्या आपने कभी परिवार के इस घर में अपने हक के लिए बातचीत/ दावा किया है (जिसमें आप रह रहे हो)	
20.	Where did you speak about your claim ? आपने अपने हक के लिए बातचीत /दावा कहाँ किया ?	a) In the family परिवार में b) In your clan / caste /tribe panchayat अपनी बिरादरी / कबीला पंचायत में c) In Gram panchayat ग्राम पंचायत में d) In Gram Sabha ग्राम सभा में e) At Women Counselling Centre महिला परामर्श केंद्र में f) In court कोर्ट में g) Any other (mention) अन्य (लखें)
21.	If house not in your name, are you facing any opposition /problems in claiming your right in the family house where you live? यदि घर आपके नाम नहीं हैं तो क्या अपने हक का दावा करने में आपको किसी तरह के वरोध / दिक्कतों का सामना करना पड़ रहा है ?	a)Yes हाँ b) No नहीं
22.	What kind of opposition / problems you are facing आपको कस तरह के वरोध / दिक्कतों का सामना करना पड़ रहा है ?	a) Physical violence शारीरिक हिंसा b) Verbal abuse गाली-गलोच c) Character assassination चरित्र पर लांछन लगाना d) Labelled as witch डायन घोषित कर देना e) Boycott by the family परिवार द्वारा बहिष्कार f) Social boycott by the community समुदाय द्वारा सामाजिक बहिष्कार g) Police complaints / False cases पुलिस में शिकायत झूठे केस h) Other (mention) अन्य (लखें)
23.	Are you facing any problems from the concerned authorities ? क्या संबंधित	a)Yes हाँ b) No नहीं

	अधिकारियों से आप कसी तरह की समस्याओं का सामना कर रही हैं ?	
23 a	If yes from whom ? यदि हाँ तो कन - कन से ?	a) Patwari / community level revenue officials पटवारी / समुदाय स्तरिय राजस्व अधिकारी b) Revenue high up authorities राजस्व उच्च अधिकारी c) Municipal officials नगरनिगम अधिकारी d) Gram panchayat ग्राम पंचायत e) Harassment by police पुलिस प्रताड़ना f) Any other (mention) अन्य कोई (लखें)
Note : (Go to notes section after Q. 27) इसके बाद प्रश्न 27 के बाद नोट सेक्शन में जाएँ		
24.	If you own the house, how did you acquire it? यदि घर आपके नाम हैं तो, आपने इसे कैसे हासिल किया ?	a) Bought / built this house अपने आप खरीदा / बनाया b) Husband bought it पति ने खरीदा / पति से मला c) Inheritance from father, पता से मला d) Inheritance from In-laws ससुराल से मला e) Got it under welfare scheme कल्याणकारी सरकारी योजना में मला f) Any other अन्य (लखें)
25.	If did not buy it yourself / built it , did you face any problems in claiming your right in your house ? यदि आपने स्वयं नहीं खरीदा/ नहीं बनाया , तो क्या आपको अपने घर की मालकी लेने में कसी तरह के वरोध का सामना करना पड़ा ?	a) Yes हाँ b) No नहीं
26.	What kind of opposition / problems did you face आपने कस तरह के वरोध / दिक्कतों का सामना किया ?	a) Physical violence शारीरिक हिंसा b) Verbal abuse गाली-गलोच c) Character assassination चरित्र पर लांछन लगाना

		d) Labelled as witch डायन घोषित कर देना e) Boycott by the family परिवार द्वारा बहिष्कार f) Social boycott by the community समुदाय द्वारा सामाजिक बहिष्कार g) Police complaint /False cases पुलिस शिकायत / झूठे केस h) Other (mention) अन्य (लखें)
27.	Did you face any problems in getting it in your name from the concerned authorities ? क्या कन्ही संबंधित अधिकारियों से कसी समस्या का सामना क्या ?	a)Yes हाँ b) No नहीं
27 a	If yes, from whom ? यदि हाँ तो कन कन से ?	a) Patwari / community level revenue officials पटवारी / समुदाय स्तरिय राजस्व अधिकारी b) Revenue high up authorities राजस्व उच्च अधिकारी c) Municipal officials नगरनिगम अधिकारी d) Gram panchayat ग्राम पंचायत e) Harassment by police पुलिस प्रताड़ना f) Any other (mention) अन्य कोई (लखें)
Note for the investigator: Please note down the problem she faced नोट: इन्होंने जिस समस्या का सामना क्या उसको कृपया संक्षेप में लखें :		
Support Received सहयोग मला		
28.	Did you get support from anyone when you claimed or tried to claim your right to the house? जब आपने घर पर अपने हिस्से का दावा क्या या ऐसा प्रयास क्या तो क्या कसी ने आपको मदद क्या ?	a) Yes हाँ b) No नहीं c) Help not needed / help not asked for मदद की जरूरत नहीं पड़ी / मदद नहीं मांगी गई
29.	If yes, then who all helped you or are helping you ? यदि हाँ तो आपकी मदद कसने की या कौन मदद कर रहे हैं ?	a) Husband's family पति का परिवार b) Parents माता - पता c) Brother भाई d) Sister बहन e) Friends मित्र

		f) CBO/ NGO संस्था g) Gram Panchayat ग्राम पंचायत h) Others (mention) अन्य (लखें)
ईनवेस्टिगेटर के लए नोट : उत्तरदाता को जिससे भी मदद मली है, कस तरह की मदद मली है, कृपया उसके बारे में लखें		

III. Ownership and control of agricultural land कृष भूम पर हक और नियंत्रण

30.	Does your husband's family own agriculture land ? क्या आपके पति के परिवार के पास खेतिहर जमीन है ?	a) Yes हाँ b) No नहीं c) Do not Know मालूम नहीं
30 a	If yes, then how much agriculture land does your husband's family own? यदि हाँ , तो, आपके पति के परिवार के पास कतनी खेतिहर जमीन है ? (एकड़ में लखें)	a) Up to 1 acres एक एकड़ तक b) More than 1 to 2 acres 1 एकड़ से अधिक - 2 एकड़ तक c) More than 2 to 3 acres 2 एकड़ से अधिक - 3 एकड़ तक d) More than 3 to 4 acres 3 एकड़ से अधिक - 4 एकड़ तक e) More than 4 to 5 acres 4 एकड़ से अधिक - 5 एकड़ तक f) More than 5 acres 5 एकड़ से अधिक g) Do not Know मालूम नहीं
31.	Does your natal family own agriculture land ? क्या आपके मायके के परिवार के पास खेतिहर जमीन है ?	a) Yes हाँ b) No नहीं c) Do not Know मालूम नहीं
31 a	If yes, then how much agriculture land does your natal family own? यदि हाँ , तो, आपके मायके के परिवार के पास कतनी खेतिहर जमीन है ? (एकड़ में लखें)	a) Up to 1 acres एक एकड़ तक b) More than 1 to 2 acres 1 एकड़ से अधिक - 2 एकड़ तक c) More than 2 to 3 acres 2 एकड़ से अधिक - 3 एकड़ तक d) More than 3 to 4 acres 3 एकड़ से अधिक - 4 एकड़ तक e) More than 4 to 5 acres 4 एकड़ से अधिक - 5 एकड़ तक

		f) More than 5 acres 5 एकड़ से अ धक g) Do not Know मालूम नहीं
32.	Do you own any agriculture land in your name ? क्या आपके नाम पर कोई कृष भूम है ?	a) Yes हाँ b) No नहीं (If No, go to Q.33)
32 a	If yes , then how much total land do you own? (Convert the local term in acre) यदि हाँ , तो आपके नाम पर कतनी जमीन है ? (स्थानीय दर को एकड़ में बदल कर लखें)	a) Up to 1 acres एक एकड़ तक b) More than 1 to 2 acres 1 एकड़ से अ धक – 2 एकड़ तक c) More than 2 to 3 acres 2 एकड़ से अ धक – 3 एकड़ तक d) More than 3 to 4 acres 3 एकड़ से अ धक – 4 एकड़ तक e) More than 4 to 5 acres 4 एकड़ से अ धक – 5 एकड़ तक f) More than 5 acres 5 एकड़ से अ धक g) Do not Know मालूम नहीं (go to Qtn 36)
33.	If you do not own any land , is there any land in your children's and/ or husband's name? यदि नहीं , तो क्या आपके बच्चों और / पति के नाम पर कोई जमीन है ?	a) Husband पति b) Son बेटा c) daughter बेटी d) None किसी के पास नहीं
34.	If yes to Qtn 32 and 33 , then do you have control on that land यदि प्रश्न 32 व 33 का जवाब हाँ है तो क्या इस जमीन पर आपका नियंत्रण है ?	a) Yes हाँ b) No नहीं
35.	If replied Yes to Qtn 32, how did you acquire it? यदि Q 32 का जवाब हाँ है , तो , ये जमीन आपने कैसे हासल की ?	a) Bought the land स्वयं खरीदी b) Husband bought it पति ने खरीदी c) Inheritance from father पता से वरासत में मली d) Inheritance from In-laws ससुराल से मली e) Got it under welfare scheme कल्याणकारी योजना के तहत मली f) Govt./ revenue सरकारी / राजस्व

		g) panchayat/ grazing land पंचायत /शामलात / चरान भूम h) Forest land वन भूम i) Any other (mention) अन्य (लखें)
36.	Do you have documents of this land ? क्या इस जमीन के दस्तावेज / कागज आपके पास हैं ?	a) Yes हाँ b) No नहीं
37.	Do you handle the finances related to the land? यदि आपके नाम पर जमीन है, क्या इस से जुड़े हिसाब - कताब आप रखती है ?	a) Yes हाँ b) No नहीं
38.	If did not buy it yourself, did you face any problems in claiming your right in the land? यदि आपने स्वयं नहीं खरीदी तो क्या इस जमीन को लेने में कोई समस्या आई ?	b) Yes हाँ b) No नहीं (if no, go to Notes section after Q.42) यदि नहीं तो Q 42 के बाद नोट सेक्शन में जाएँ
39.	What kind of opposition / problems did you face आपने कस तरह के वरोध / दिक्कतों का सामना क्या ?	a) Physical violence शारीरिक हिंसा b) Verbal abuse गाली-गलोच c) Character assassination चरित्र पर लांछन लगाना d) Labelled as witch डायन घोषित कर देना e) Boycott by the family परिवार द्वारा बहिष्कार f) Social boycott by the community समुदाय द्वारा सामाजिक बहिष्कार g) Police complaint /False cases पुलिस शिकायत / झूठे केस h) Other (mention) अन्य (लखें)
40.	Did you face any problems from the concerned authorities ? क्या आपने कसी संबंधित अधिकारियों से कसी समस्या का सामना क्या ?	a) Yes हाँ b) No नहीं
41.	If yes, tick mark who all caused problems यदि हाँ तो कस कस से समस्या झेली ?	a) Patwari / community level revenue officials पटवारी / समुदाय स्तर के राजस्व कर्मचारी b) Revenue high up authorities राजस्व अधिकारी c) Municipal officials नगरपालिका अधिकारी d) Gram panchayat ग्राम पंचायत पदाधिकारी

		e) Harassment by police / false cases पु लस प्रताड़ना / झूठे केस f) Any other (mention) अन्य (लखें)
42.	Was any police complaint filed against you or your immediate family to prevent you from claiming your rights in the land? आपको दावा करने से रोकने के लिए क्या आपके या आपके नजदीकी परिवार के खिलाफ पु लस में कोई शिकायत की गई ?	a) Yes हाँ b) No नहीं
Note for the investigator: Please note down the problem she faced इन्वेस्टिगेटर के लिए नोट : कृपया उत्तरदाता द्वारा बताई समस्या को वस्तुतः से लखें ।		
43.	Is there any piece of land in which you have a share but could not claim? क्या ऐसी कोई जमीन है जिसमें आपका हिस्सा है लेकिन आप ले नहीं पाए ?	a) Yes हाँ b) No नहीं (if No, go to Q.50) यदि नहीं तो Q.50 पर जाएँ
44.	Did you get support from anyone when you claimed or tried to claim your right to the land? जब आपने जमीन पर अपने हिस्से का दावा किया या ऐसा प्रयास किया तो क्या किसी ने आपकी मदद की ?	a) Yes हाँ b) No नहीं
45.	If yes, then who all helped you or are helping you ? यदि हाँ तो आपकी मदद करने की या कौन मदद कर रहे हैं ?	a) Husband's family पति का परिवार b) Parents आपके माता - पिता c) Brother आपके भाई d) Sister आपकी बहन e) Friends दोस्त f) CBO/ NGO संस्था g) Gram Panchayat ग्राम पंचायत h) Others (mention) अन्य (लखें)
इन्वेस्टिगेटर के लिए नोट : जिससे भी उत्तरदाता को मदद मिली है कृपया उसके बारे में लखें		
46.	Do you receive any benefits under govt. schemes related to agriculture ? क्या आपको कृषि संबंधित योजनाओं का लाभ मिलता है ?	a) Yes हाँ b) No नहीं
47.	If Yes, then, in last 3 years under what schemes you have received the benefits? यदि हाँ तो पिछले 3 साल में कस योजना के अंतर्गत आपको लाभ मिला है ?	a) PM Kisan samman nidhi yojna प्रधानमंत्री कृषि सम्मान निधि योजना b) Fasal beema yojna फसल बीमा योजना c) To purchase seeds on subsidized rates बीज खरीद पर सब्सिडी

		d) Subsidy on electricity use बिजली खपत पर सब सडी e) Subsidy to buy fertilizers खाद खरीद पर सब्सिडी f) Support for organic farming ऑर्गेनिक खेती करने के लिए सब्सिडी g) न्यूनतम समर्थन मूल्य पर फसल बेचा h) Kisan credit card कसान क्रेडिट कार्ड i) Any other (mention) अन्य (लखें)
	<i>If owning land, please answer the following questions यदि उत्तरदाता के नाम पर जमीन है तो निम्न सवाल पूछें :</i>	
48.	Do you farm the land yourself? क्या इस जमीन पर आप खुद खेती करती हैं ?	a) Yes हाँ b) No नहीं
49.	Do you do farming with extended family members? क्या आप अपने परिवार के सदस्यों के साथ मलकर खेती करती हैं ?	a) Yes हाँ b) No नहीं
49. a	Do you give your agriculture land on lease or on share cropping ? क्या आप अपनी खेती की जमीन लीज पर या बंटाई पर देती हैं ?	a) Yes हाँ b) No नहीं

IV. For those who do not own agriculture land but do farming by taking others' land on rent (उन

एकल महिलाओं के लिए जो बंटाई / कराये पर जमीन लेकर खेती करती हैं)

50.	Do you do farming by taking others' land on rent or sharing crop produce ? क्या आप दूसरे की जमीन कराये पर / बंटाई पर लेकर खेती करती हो ?	a) Yes हाँ b) No नहीं
51.	If you do farming on others' land (on rent / sharing), do you get benefit under govt's agriculture schemes? यदि आप दूसरों की जमीन पर खेती करते हो (Qtn 50), क्या आपको सरकार की कृषि योजनाओं का लाभ मल रहा है ?	a) Yes हाँ b) No नहीं
52.	If yes, then under which schemes you have received benefits ? (Free listing) यदि हाँ तो कन कन कृषि योजनाओं के अंतर्गत आपको लाभ मला है ? (लखें)	1..... 2..... 3..... 4..... 5.....

V. Climate change and agriculture

जलवायु परिवर्तन और कृषि

53.	Do you get farm produce sufficient to meet the annual needs of your family? क्या आपकी खेती से इतनी पैदावार हो जाती है जिससे आपके परिवार की सालाना जरूरत पूरी हो जाए ?	a) Yes हाँ b) No नहीं
54.	Has the farm produce decreased in last 10-15 years, as compared to earlier times? क्या पछले 10 -15 साल में पहले की अपेक्षा पैदावार कम होने लगी है ?	a) Yes हाँ b) No नहीं c) don't know
55.	If yes, what are the reasons, according to you? (Tick all that apply) यदि हैं तो आपके अनुसार इसके पीछे क्या -क्या कारण हैं ? (आप एक से ज्यादा कारणों पर निशान लगा सकते हैं)	a) Insufficient rains अपर्याप्त बारिश b) Irregular rains -rains not on time , heavy rains , long period of drought अनियमित बारिश - समय पर बारिश न होना , भारी वर्षा, लंबा सूखा c) Insufficient water for irrigation संचाई के लिए पर्याप्त पानी ना होना d) Forest around have been cut आस पास का जंगल काट दिया e) Underground water is salty जमीन के नीचे का पानी खारा होना f) Use of too much fertilizers रासायनिक खाद का बहुत ज्यादा इस्तेमाल g) Use of too much pesticides कीटनाशक का बहुत ज्यादा इस्तेमाल h) Any other अन्य (लखें)

Selected Case Studies of Single Women

Cases studies from Gujarat

Case Study 1: Sumi Ben

Sumi Ben (name changed) is 49 years old. She lives in Juval village of district Ahmedabad. She has been married for 30 years and has four daughters and one son. Her husband passed away 15 years ago due to illness. At the time of her husband's death, her children were very young. Sumi Ben would take her children along to do labour work, but she couldn't afford to educate her daughters. She could only provide basic primary education to one son and one daughter. In her in-laws' family, she has two elder brothers-in-law and their wives. Her father-in-law owned 18 *bighas* of land, which her two brothers-in-law cultivate.

Sumi Ben is associated with Single Women's Forum. One day, she gathered the courage to confront her brothers-in-law, saying, "Give me a share of the grain from the land so that I can feed my children. My financial condition is terrible. How can I manage to feed and educate five children by doing labour work? I also have a right to the land for sustenance." However, her brothers-in-law argued with her and refused to give her any grain.

Sumi Ben approached the forum for help and asked them to speak with her second brother-in-law as well. When her second brother-in-law learned that she was associated with an organization, he started giving her some grain, but it was a very small amount. During a village meeting organized by the organization, Sumi Ben heard a discussion about women's rights to land. She shared her situation, explaining that the family had land, but she was only given a little grain after a lot of disputes, and she wanted her share of the land in her name. The women advised her to first talk to her brothers-in-law and see their response, and then the organization would take further steps. Sumi Ben returned home and confronted her brothers-in-law, stating that she had a rightful claim to her father-in-law's land and wanted her share in her name. Her brothers-in-law got angry and accused her, saying, "First, you asked for grain, and now you want land. You will get nothing. This land belongs to our father, and only we have a claim to it." Sumi Ben argued back, saying, "My husband also had a right to this land. Since he is no longer here, I deserve my rightful share. Divide the land." Her brothers-in-law insulted her, saying, "If we give you the land, you will run away with it. We will give it to your son later, but for now, you won't get anything." Sumi Ben reminded them of how, after her husband's death, no one in the family ever cared about how she and her children were surviving. She recounted her struggles, saying, "We earn only ₹150–₹200 a day through labour work. How am I supposed to manage the household? And yet, you refuse to give me my rightful share of the land." Sumi Ben broke down into tears but resolved to claim her rightful share of the land.

She went back to the forum's meeting and narrated her ordeal. Since she had no documents to prove her claim to the land, the organization helped her. In 2017, with her husband's death certificate and her Aadhaar card, she went to the e-Dhara centre at the *tehsildar's* office to retrieve land documents. She didn't even have a ration card, so the organization helped her get a new one and initiated the process of transferring the land inheritance. Being illiterate, Sumi Ben struggled to understand what needed to be

done. With the organization's help, she got affidavits and declarations prepared on stamp papers through a lawyer. They also took her to the patwari for further processing. However, the village sarpanch and the patwari initially refused to help and demanded that she first pay property tax. Since Sumi Ben had no money to pay the tax, the patwari continued to delay the process. The women from the organization confronted the patwari, insisting that he process the paperwork immediately. Even then, he refused. The women demanded a written statement from him explaining the reasons for the delay, which pressured him into processing the documents. Finally, the documents were submitted to the tehsildar's office at the e-Dhara centre, and within three months, Sumi Ben's name was included in the inheritance records. She received 6 bighas of land as her share, forcing her brothers-in-law to part with her rightful portion. Today, Sumi Ben engages in farming and animal husbandry and is very happy. She shares that her children, who once faced severe hardships during their childhood, have now grown up, and she has also managed to get her share of the land. After her name was included in the land records, Sumi Ben learned about various government schemes. She started receiving ₹2,000 under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana and benefited from other schemes like the roofing (Tarpal) scheme.

Sumi Ben has married off two daughters and one son. She says, "I am illiterate, but with the help of the organization, everything turned out well. It has been seven years since the land was transferred to my name. Now, I encourage and help other widows to get land in their names. If the land is in our name, we will have an identity as a farmer and landholder."

Case Study 2: Kavita Ben

My name is Kavita Ben (name changed), and I belong to the tribal community. My village is ****, which falls under the Khergaon tehsil in the Navsari district of Gujarat state. I am 50 years old. I belong to the Hindu Chodhya Adivasi community. My family consists of two sons, two daughters-in-law, and four grandchildren, making a total of nine family members. My husband passed away 25 years ago, and since then, I have taken full responsibility for my household. For our livelihood, we do labour work, farming, and animal husbandry. We've struggled a lot to survive so far.

After my husband's death in 2001, I immediately took the process of transferring the land into my name. I gathered all the necessary documents for the inheritance process, though I didn't have much knowledge at the time. A man from the village helped me during this time.

But after some time, my family members started opposing me and causing trouble. They verbally and mentally tortured me, telling me to either leave or give up the land. I couldn't argue with them at that time. Then, in 2019, my name was removed from the land records. Initially, my share of the land was 12 *bighas*, but 9 *bighas* were removed from my name, and only 3 *bighas* remain under my name. The names of my sons and me were also removed from the land records. This was done by my uncle-in-law and brother-in-law, who didn't want me to keep the 12 *bighas* of land as they didn't want to share the land with a widow. I also had to endure mental and verbal abuse, with people calling me a witch and saying I would run away with the land. In frustration, I approached the village Panchayat and spoke to the *sarpanch* and the *patwari*, but nobody paid attention to me. I also asked the head of the village for help, but nobody was ready to support me. I am uneducated and a widow, and no one in the community

helped me. I didn't know what to do. Eventually, my brother advised me to file a case. At the time, my children were still young and naive, and our financial condition was poor. We didn't have the money, but I filed a case in the civil court in Khergaon in 2019. The court was far from our village, and we didn't have the money for special vehicles or auto rickshaws to go there. We had to rely on whatever transport we could find, even if it was someone's car or motorcycle, but we were often looked at suspiciously and with bad intentions. It was a mentally, physically, and economically exhausting experience. I had to pay the lawyer's fees every month and cover the transportation and food costs, but our financial situation was difficult. Even then, I managed to pay the lawyer's fees for six years. Initially, the case was in Khergaon, but later it was transferred to Vansda and Chikhli. The case is still ongoing, and now it has reached the High Court. Kavita Ben says that she has spent around 5 *lakh* rupees so far on this case, but she is determined to continue and get her rightful share of the land.

Kavita Ben has been associated with the single woman's forum for the past three years, which has helped her mentally to stay strong and motivated to continue her case and push for a quick resolution. She is now ready to fight for her land with the support of the organization. The *panchayat* is also now willing to help her with whatever she needs. Kavita Ben is determined to secure her 9 *bighas* of land.

Case Study 3: Renuka Ben

Renuka Ben (name changed) got married 18 years ago and is now 40 years old. She is physically disabled due to polio in her childhood. She got married in a village. Initially, their marriage was fine, and they had a daughter. Things were going well for some time, but soon after, her disability became the cause of mental distress, and then the physical abuse began. The abuse became so severe that when she became pregnant for the second time, she had another daughter. The abuse only increased from there, and Renuka Ben, with her one-and-a-half-year-old daughter, decided to leave her husband's home and move back to her parental house. Renuka Ben has two daughters and has been living with them at her parental home for the last 13 years. She cannot do household chores or work as a labourer due to her disability. This has caused frustration for her husband. Her parents' house is in a village where her widowed mother, aged 60, lives along with her two brothers. The family survives with the help of her brothers, who provide for the living expenses of Renuka Ben, her mother, and her two daughters. Renuka Ben's elder daughter, who is 9 years old, had to drop out of school. She now works at her maternal uncle's house, helping with household chores, bringing fodder for the livestock, and cleaning the cow dung. She also helps with farming. Her younger daughter, who is 7 years old, is still studying. Renuka Ben's husband has never cared for or asked about the welfare of her daughters. He only demands a son.

Renuka Ben's father owned 20 *bighas* of land, and she, along with her mother and two brothers, has a rightful share in the inheritance. The organization helped her secure her rightful share. Since she now has a part in the land, she receives a portion of whatever produce the land yields, and her brothers give her a share of the grain.

Renuka Ben's in-laws also own land. Her husband's family has two brothers and two sisters, one of whom stays in her parental home. The land inheritance from her in-laws includes 6 *bighas* under her husband's name. Renuka Ben once asked her husband for a share of the land, as she is unable to work due to her

disability, and she has to support her two daughters by herself. However, her husband outright refused, and after saying a lot of hurtful things, he told her he wanted a divorce. Renuka Ben responded firmly, saying that she would never divorce him as her two daughters' future is also his responsibility. However, her husband clearly stated that he would not give her anything. He even sold her jewellery.

Renuka Ben has requested her husband to return her jewellery and give her a rightful share of the land.

She says she doesn't know what to do to get her share. She is unsure of the paperwork required or what steps to take if her husband refuses to give her land and jewellery. She is mentally exhausted, as she doesn't know the process, and being uneducated, she feels lost. She has the responsibility of raising two daughters and taking care of her mother. Her brothers provide the food, but there are also financial needs. With her daughters growing up, she is unsure of how to proceed. If she could get her share of the land, she could start farming on her own. Even if she can't, by giving it on rent for farming, she hopes to earn something. Renuka Ben is asking for help from the single women's forum, as she wants to fight for her share of the land in court. However, she does not have the money to pay for a lawyer. She is mentally distressed, constantly thinking about how her husband doesn't want to give her the land because she has no son. Still, she is determined to fight for her share.

Case studies form Jharkhand

Case study 1- "Sangathan helped me in getting my right"

Zarina Khatun (name changed) is 55 years old, resident of village Lakhe of district Hazaribag. She got widowed at the age of 37 years and since then she is the only parent to her daughter who is dependent on her.

Zarina's destiny played trick with her. She had nikah (Marriage in Islam) twice and both times she lost her husband. First time she was married to Razia Khatun's eldest son with whom she had two daughters and one son. Everything was fine and since then ten years passed happily. After that her husband died in a road accident when he had gone to the nearby town for job. Zarina came to know about this incident after three months. She filed a case but nothing seemed to happen, hence the case was closed.

After passing away of her first husband, Zarina got married to Imtyaz who was youngest son of Razia Khatun. After marriage couple started living in Lakhe in district Hazaribag. She was blessed with a daughter. For five years, everything was fine but then Imtyaz fell ill with TB (Tuberculosis).

During the same time, Zarina's mother in law sold a property and from the amount she earned, she gave Rs 30000/- for Imtyaz's treatment. Unfortunately Imtyaz could not survive and passed away. Zarina started working as domestic help to take care of her children. She saved some money from her earnings and with the mediation of a local doctor purchased two dismal (about 871 Sq. feet) land in Lakhe. Doctor took 12000/- Rupees as commission from her and helped her in purchasing land in his neighborhood.

Zarina started constructing her house. In April 2012 doctor started harassing her saying that his land was falling towards her side, so she had to move back. Zarina refused to accept it saying that doctor himself mediated the whole process of measurement of land and acquisition. Dispute did not resolved and turned

into an ugly fight when doctor attacked Zarina and beaten her physically. Zarina went to the police station to lodge her complaint. At the police station she was advised to give a copy of the complaint to Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan (ENSS). Zarina then first time visited *sangathan's* office and submitted a copy of her complaint.

The case was discussed in the block level committee meeting of the ENSS and decided for further investigation. After investigation both parties were given notice to appear before the block committee. Both parties were heard carefully one by one and then found that doctor was wrong. Decision was taken that Zarina can restart the construction work and that she does not need to move away even a single inch from her current position of land. Doctor apologized to Zarina and gave in writing that he will not do any such thing in future. A copy of the decision was given in the police station. Zarina completed the construction and started living there. After that she became member of the *sangathan* and started helping other women.

Case-Study 2: Sundari Oraon

Sundari Oraon (name changed) is a resident of **** village, Sadar Block, Lohardaga district. She has been working as an Anganwadi Sevika since 2008. Sundari has five daughters and has faced a life full of struggles from her childhood until now. Her husband, the late Chandrapal Oraon (name changed), was murdered in Odisha 13 years ago.

Chandrapal Oraon had one younger brother, Mahesh. While Chandrapal and Sundari had five daughters, Mahesh had one son. Because of this, Sundari's father-in-law constantly taunted and insulted her for not having a son. The situation worsened when he pressured Chandrapal to marry another woman to carry forward the family lineage. When Chandrapal refused, his father handed over all cultivation rights on their 5-acre farmland to Mahesh, leaving Sundari and Chandrapal in financial distress. They were left wondering how to provide for their family and children. Though Sundari worked on her father-in-law's farm, she did not receive any share of the produce. Amidst this economic crisis, Chandrapal managed to secure a job as a guard in a private factory in Odisha. The couple believed their bad days were behind them. However, within a month, Chandrapal was murdered while on duty. This tragedy left Sundari devastated.

A few days after her husband's death, her father-in-law asked her to leave their house. Her parents had already passed away and she had no brother. In such situation where could she have gone! Her father's property was taken over by her relatives—Sundari had nowhere to go.

Additionally, her sister and brother-in-law had also passed away, leaving her responsible for their three children. Her sister's in-laws refused to give her nieces and nephews any share in their property. Meanwhile, her father's relatives were embroiled in disputes over his property. Sundari was left fighting battles on multiple fronts. Her father-in-law and brother-in-law severed all ties with her and her children, leaving her isolated. Despite this, she didn't lose hope and continued to fight for her and her sister's children's rights. She approached her village's *panchayat* for help but received no support.

Two years after her husband's death, her father-in-law also passed away, and all the property came under her brother-in-law's control. He began selling off the land and constantly quarreled with Sundari to deny her any share. Yet, she refused to give up.

During this time, Sundari came to know about the Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan (Single Women's forum) in Jharkhand. She attended a block-level committee meeting, where she shared her story, became a member of the organization, and submitted an application about her case. The organization decided to intervene, formed an investigation committee during the meeting, and conducted a thorough inquiry, which confirmed her claims. They then discussed the matter with the village head, the village priest, and other prominent individuals, eventually organizing a *panchayat* meeting in the village. Through the organization's efforts, the *panchayat* ruled in favor of Sundari.

Finally, after nine years of struggle, the organization's persistent efforts through the current village head's efforts, in collaboration with the *Gram Sabha*, led to the transferring 2.5 acres of land from her brother-in-law to Sundari.

Sundari says, "If I hadn't fought for my rights, neither I nor my daughters would have received what was rightfully ours." She further adds, "If the *Gram Sabha* had supported us earlier, we wouldn't have had to struggle for nine long years."

Case Study 3 - Rani Kisku

Age: 40 years

Marital Status: Widow (for 20 years)

Social Class/Religion: Scheduled Tribe, Sarna

Livelihood: Farming

Family Members: 2 (1 dependent)

District: Godda, Jharkhand

It is often said that the tribal society is very open. In this society, gender discrimination is negligible; no one is saddened by the birth of a daughter, as there is no evil practice like dowry. Both men and women work together, and there is no purdah system. Despite all these virtues, what happens to a family when a couple has only daughters is vividly portrayed in the story of Rani Kisku!

I was born in 1984 in **** village, Boarjore Block, Godda District. My mother's name was Churki, and my father was Manu. I was their only child. When I was about four years old, my father was murdered. At that time, my mother and I were at my maternal uncle's house, and we were unaware of the incident. After my father's death, his body was taken to the Sadar Hospital in Godda for post-mortem. No one from my father's family or household went to the hospital. As a result, the hospital staff declared the body unclaimed and threw it by the riverbank. When we came to know about the incident, we returned to the village. My mother inquired from everyone about who had killed my father, but no one gave her an answer. There was no evidence of the crime either. My mother collected soil from the riverbank where my father's body was abandoned and performed his last rites according to Santhali customs. None of my father's relatives offered any help during his funeral. During my father's lifetime, he had taken a government loan. To recover the loan, the police came to my mother and informed her that she would have to repay the loan, or her house would be confiscated. To repay the loan, my mother decided to sell land. However, her elder brother-in-law and his son stopped her from doing so. My mother had to sell her buffalo and all her jewelry to repay the loan. About three months later, my mother had a fight with my

elder uncle's wife. She insulted my mother and said, "Once you repay the loan, I will kick you out of this house."

My mother enrolled me in school for my education. However, not long after, she fell ill and passed away in April. My maternal uncle and aunt came to the village, and my mother was buried according to Santhali customs. My elder uncle and his wife refused to perform the last rites. It was my grandmother who performed them. A few days later, my grandmother also passed away, leaving me completely alone and orphaned. My maternal uncle and aunt took me in and raised me. When I turned 17, my uncle arranged my marriage with Durgan. I was called back from my maternal uncle's house, and my marriage was conducted in a simple and inexpensive manner. I was given only four utensils and a small wooden box. My uncle had promised at a village meeting before the wedding that he would provide all the necessary items. Even the village head suggested providing essential items, including a bicycle and a calf, but this promise was not fulfilled.

After the wedding, I stayed at my in-laws' place but frequently visited my maternal home for daily wage labor. We would work there almost every day and then return to my in-laws' house. Despite our frequent visits, no one ever invited us to stay overnight or offered us food or water. My husband and I lived happily for about three years. During this time, I became pregnant. Shortly after, my husband fell ill. Upon seeking medical treatment, we discovered he had cancer. During this period, I gave birth to a son. Weak from childbirth, I sold all my jewelry to fund my husband's treatment, but he could not be saved. No one from my maternal family came after hearing about his death, nor did anyone participate in his last rites. Even after this, my maternal family provided no financial or emotional support. I continued visiting the village for labor work to raise my child. Carrying a small child, working, and making ends meet was a struggle only I can understand. After my parents' death, I never felt a sense of belonging from my paternal family.

In 2018, ECL Company came to our village to begin the process of land acquisition. When my paternal family prepared the family lineage for this, I demanded my name be included. However, my family members refused, stating that according to our tribal customs, married daughters have no claim to their parental property. They said daughters only receive support while unmarried and living at home, and after marriage, they lose any claim to the land. Hence, my name would not be included in the lineage.

I was a member of the Single Women Empowerment Organization, and I knew that as my parents' only child, I had a right to their property. With the support of the organization, I fought to have my name included in the lineage. Even after my name was added, my family never accepted that I should receive a share of the property. When the issue of compensation and jobs for the acquired land arose, my father's share was taken by my uncle, aunt, and their sons. They offered me just ₹2,00,000 to relinquish my claim. I refused and, with the organization's help, met the company's area officer, who assured me of ₹10,00,000 and a job. Understanding this, I rejected the ₹2,00,000 offer and demanded both the money and the job. My family did not like this and began threatening to kill me. I submitted an application to the Single Women Empowerment Organization, stating that my family was threatening my life. Subsequently, my family offered ₹5,00,000 and asked me to leave for my in-laws' place. I remained firm in my decision, as my family never supported me in times of need or treated me with respect. Tribal traditions dictate that daughters are invited back to their parental home, treated respectfully, and sent off with gifts during their visits. However, my family forgot all their responsibilities and only remembered my land.

I decided to challenge this traditional system and assert my legal rights through the court. In 2019, I filed a case in court, which is still pending. Despite being a single woman, I have not given up. I am preparing witnesses and attending court dates. The challenge lies in balancing the tribal customs and my legal right to ancestral property.

In court, witnesses are crucial. Preparing witnesses is a significant challenge because they come from the same community that upholds traditional customs. However, with the full support of the

organization, we are convincing witnesses to testify in court. I am trying to ensure the witnesses support my case so I can achieve justice.

Another challenge is the opposing side threatening and intimidating the witnesses. This poses a substantial hurdle for me and the organization. We are working on finding ways to address this challenge.

Case Study 4: Anita Tudu

What an Irony! The family I dedicated my entire life to serving and taking care of turned against me later, even willing to take my life. Siblings who once lived for each other now seemed eager to take away lives. This tragic turn of events occurred in my life.

I, Anita Tudu (name changed) a resident of **** village, Rajabitha Police Station, Boarijor Block, Godda District, am an elderly unmarried single woman. We were two brothers and two sisters. My younger brother was differently-abled. Being the eldest sibling, his responsibility fell on me while my elder brother continued his education. During that time, our parents arranged my elder brother's marriage following the Santhali customs. My mother was uneducated and wanted her daughter-in-law to be educated, so she encouraged my sister-in-law to complete her graduation. Thus, my elder brother pursued his junior engineering studies while my sister-in-law pursued her graduation. Providing timely meals for both of them and taking care of their children also became my responsibility.

My father was in the army, so our family was financially stable. My mother stayed busy with agricultural work. She often told me, "You are the eldest; look after the household and the children." As a result, I could only study up to the primary level. Because of these responsibilities, I did not get married either. My parents never paid attention to my marriage, reasoning that someone needed to take care of my differently-abled brother. In the meantime, my elder brother secured a junior engineer's job and, for a while, supported me financially by providing clothes and covering other expenses. I was happy then, but my sister-in-law and some neighbours didn't like this. Influenced by them, my brother stopped supporting me.

In January 2008, my mother passed away, and in October 2008, my father also passed away. My younger sister got married, and I was left in the house with my differently-abled brother. My brother and his wife moved to Dumka city for work, living in a rented house. Later, my elder brother, was transferred to Ranchi. One day, my elder brother came from Ranchi and took my younger brother (the differently-abled one) along with him. Three months later, I received news of my younger brother's death. My elder brother brought his body back to the village, performed the funeral rituals, and returned to Ranchi. I continued living in the village, while my elder brother and sister-in-law lived in Ranchi. One day, my elder brother came to the village and tried to evict me from the house. When I resisted, he attacked me with a stick, injuring me. Villagers admitted me to the local district hospital for treatment. After recovering and returning home, I was not allowed to enter the house. My brother had locked it and gone back to Ranchi. I began living wherever I could, struggling to make ends meet.

During this time, I came across a leaflet from the Single Women's Empowerment Organization, Jharkhand. Reading it, I understood its purpose. With the help of a cousin, I attended the committee meeting of the Sadar Block in Godda, a neighboring block. There, I learned more about the organization and shared my ordeal. Since there was no branch of the Single Women Empowerment Organization in my block, Boarijor, I started attending the Sadar Block meetings every month, despite it being 20 kilometers away from my home. Walking to these meetings took about three hours, but I still participated because I felt a sense of belonging there. After attending six meetings, I requested the formation of a branch in my block. Recognizing my dedication, the organization started holding meetings in Boarijor as well. At that time, I lived at a distant relative's (maternal uncle's) house. In return for doing household chores, they provided me with food but no other support.

On October 8, 2010, I submitted a written application to the organization regarding my housing issue. The organization took the initiative and contacted the local police station, as my case had already been

registered there. The police officer remarked, "We have repeatedly tried to make your brother understand, advising him to let his sister live peacefully in the house. He agrees every time but never follows through and acts according to his own will."

The organization helped me file a complaint with the village head (Gram Pradhan), requesting justice through a village council (Gram Sabha). Since the police were not taking legal action, the organization escalated the matter by submitting an application to the Superintendent of Police (SP). Meanwhile, under pressure from my brother, even my maternal uncle asked me to leave his house and find another place to stay. The organization acted swiftly and consistently, organizing a panchayat meeting with police cooperation. On December 23, 2011, a notice was sent to my brother, informing him of a panchayat meeting scheduled for January 22, 2012. He was warned that failing to attend would result in legal action by the organization. On the scheduled date, the panchayat meeting was held in my village, with the presence of my brother, sister-in-law, local police, the village head, villagers, and members of the organization. My brother attended, saying, "I respect the organization; that's why I am here." During the panchayat, both parties presented their cases. After hearing all sides, the panchayat found my brother guilty. The panchayat ruled that I had equal rights to our father's house and property. They decided on a traditional division, granting me half of the house and three out of six plots of land for my livelihood. The decision was implemented the same day, with police oversight and the help of the villagers. Two rooms of the house were allocated to me for living, and three plots of land were marked and handed over for my sustenance. It was only because of the organization's intervention that my life was secured. Otherwise, I could have been killed over the land and property dispute. Today, I live peacefully in my home and consider the organization my family. I am dedicated to working for it with complete devotion.

Case Study 5 – Malini Devi

Malini Devi (name changed) is a 38-year-old abandoned single woman. She has two brothers and one sister. Her ancestral home is in the village of ****, District Hazaribagh. In the village, her father owned arable land and a residence. However, the entire family has been residing in Banaso for a long time. Malini says, "Despite being the only daughter of my parents, I was never loved or pampered. My father always considered me a burden. Even my mother left me at my aunt's house during my childhood. My aunt treated me better than my mother, but at an age meant for playing and eating, I was burdened with a lot of work. Somehow, my childhood passed. Upon reaching adolescence, in the year 2007, I was married off at the tender age of 13 to Sandeep, according to Hindu customs. At the time of my farewell, my mother said, 'Now your in-laws' house is your home—daughters leave their parents' house in a palanquin but only leave their husband's house on a funeral bier. Whether good or bad, accept your new home as yours and live there.'

Malini arrived at her in-laws' house with many colorful dreams, thinking her life would change for the better. She imagined becoming her husband's beloved and living happily as the cherished daughter-in-law of the family. But fate had other plans. On the very first night of her marriage, her husband made her take a vow to keep his sister-in-law and her children happy and said, 'If my sister-in-law is happy, I will be happy, and if I am happy, only then will you be happy.' At the age of 13, Malini couldn't understand much. She accepted her husband's words and replied, 'She is like my elder sister; why would I upset her?' Malini's husband was the third among four brothers. The eldest brother and his wife lived in Delhi, where they worked in the rickshaw business. There was ample land in the ancestral village, so food was not an issue. The family had two houses—one new house, meant for living after the housewarming ceremony, and the old house where Malini stayed. All meals were prepared in the old house. Soon, Malini realized that her husband had an unusual interest in his sister-in-law. He preferred spending time with her, ate meals prepared by her, and avoided spending time with Malini. Malini, who longed to serve her husband, was

never given the chance to do so. Her husband mostly lived in Delhi but returned to the village during the farming season. Even then, he spent most of his time in the new house, where his sister-in-law lived. Whatever money he earned in Delhi was spent on his sister-in-law and her children, which kept her happy. The elder brother, despite being aware of everything, stayed silent because he earned less than Sandeep. Malini, on the other hand, yearned for her husband's attention. Whenever he returned home, she tried to talk to him, but he ignored her and often fought with or even beat her. All her dreams were shattered. When Malini confided in her parents, they never questioned their son-in-law or visited her in-laws' house to intervene. During this period, Malini became pregnant. Her health deteriorated, but neither her husband nor her in-laws cared for her. When her middle sister-in-law tried to speak up for Malini, she too was silenced by her husband and in-laws. At one point, the sister-in-law was sent back to her maternal home for one and a half years after a dispute. Lacking proper care, Malini's health worsened. Eventually, a distant aunt scolded Malini's parents over the phone, saying, 'Will you come only to collect your daughter's corpse?' Her father came and took her home, but he didn't utter a word to her in-laws. At her maternal home, Malini shared everything with her mother, but her mother responded, 'No matter what, your home is with your husband; even if you die there, don't complain.' Time passed, and Malini gave birth to a daughter.

Meanwhile, a dispute arose between her husband and his elder brother over money matters, forcing her husband to return to Banaso. He brought Malini back and opened a bicycle repair shop in the Ganwa block headquarters. The shop began to do well, and the couple started living peacefully. During this time, Malini gave birth to a son. Malini managed the household and even saved some money, feeling hopeful that her life had finally improved.

But trouble resurfaced when Sandeep's sister-in-law, unhappy with no longer receiving money from him, instigated the family to lock the shop and take away all its belongings. Sandeep then decided to go to Dubai to earn more money and assured Malini that he would send her money to support the children's education. Malini happily gave him the ₹80,000 she had saved. In 2014, Sandeep left for Dubai, leaving Malini and the children in a rented house in Banaso. He initially sent money regularly and kept in touch over the phone. During this time, one of Sandeep's friends advised him to buy land in Giridih. Sandeep, earning well in Dubai, agreed and sent Malini the money. Combining his savings with her own, Malini bought four decimals of land for ₹6 lakhs in her name. She even got the land registered in her name. When her in-laws learned about this, they were furious and threatened her over the phone, warning her not to visit the land.

In 2016, in January, Sandeep returned from Dubai and came to Banaso to stay with his wife and children. However, he only stayed for a day and then went to his home in Ganwa. No one knows what discussions took place between him, his sister-in-law, and the family there, but a few days later, Sandeep went back to Dubai. After that, he stopped answering Malini's calls and ceased sending any money. Malini's situation worsened. It became increasingly challenging, even impossible, for her to manage the children's education, rent, food, and other essential expenses. She received no support from her parents either. Seeing her dire condition, the father of a friend of Malini's arranged for her to stay in an old irrigation department quarter. However, the quarter is in a dilapidated state, and she is barely managing to live there. She enrolled her children in a government school, where they receive one meal a day under the mid-day meal scheme. To meet her needs, she started taking up odd jobs, but she also faced harassment and sexual abuse at the workplace. This has left her constantly fearful and anxious. Currently, she keeps some bangles and cosmetic items at home, which she sells to earn a small income. Malini says, "When my husband went to Dubai, I had learned some beautician skills and even bought a few tools. But now, I can't afford to rent a shop. If someone comes to my house, I manage their work at home."

While narrating her story, Malini becomes emotional and says, “I was born into a family where parents didn’t value their daughter, and I was married to a man who didn’t need a wife. It would have been better if God had taken my life instead. I am only living for the sake of my children.”

This is why people often say that a deserted woman in a patriarchal society is “neither here nor there.”

Delhi: Situation of single women in urban marginalized community

Case study 1: Seema (Name changed)– Single mother

Age – 20

I am staying with my parents since the last three months. Before that I was staying with my daughter’s father. He used to hit me. I used to come back and then he used come again to take me. My *sasural* is in Bareilly. He is working as security guard in Chandigarh. He has four children from his first wife who had died. We are not married. He called me to Chandigarh saying that there is work available here. I didn’t know anyone there. He used to take me out in the night. It takes time to get to know the area. It was a totally unknown place. He was 40 years old when I first went with him.

He used to stay on rent here. We also used to stay on rent. We both used to work. He said that you work here or you work there, what difference does it make? I had said that I don’t go to unknown places. He said, I will give you money to come. You take a bus from Kashmiri Gate. I will be in touch with you via phone.

My parents did not stop me from going. When I reached Chandigarh, he came to pick me up and took me to his home in the night. In the morning I said - now take me to the place of work. He said you are not going to work. Then I said, ok then give me money, I will go back. But he said that I won’t give money to go back, you stay with me. He even forced himself upon me and I had my daughter. I said don’t force yourself on me, to which he said that he will marry me. But he didn’t even marry me.

He used to drink and beat me even before my daughter was born. My daughter was born in hospital in Chandigarh. After she was born, he used to say, this is not my daughter. I don’t know whose daughter she is; you are a whore. He used to abuse me all the time. One day he had hit me with bricks when I was pregnant, he had hit me on my waist. I have tolerated a lot. I could not go anywhere, I didn’t have money, or a phone, I didn’t know the area. He used to beat his children also. His daughters are in their youth, he used to beat them too.

Once when we were traveling, he pointed out the main bus-stand to me. He told me that all buses leave from here. At that time I had said – why are you telling me all this? To which he had replied – just in case I am not there and you have to go somewhere.

After the child was born I said to him, why don’t you take me to meet my parents? But he refused. Then one day he gave me 500 rupees to buy groceries. I bought the groceries and then took the remaining money and found my way to the bus-station. There I boarded a bus to Delhi. That is how I got back. My daughter was 6 months old then. Now she is two years old but he does not phone.

My daughter is blind and cannot speak. She neither sits nor is able to stand. It costs money to take her to the hospital. Should I take care of myself or the child? My parents are old. I earn a few rupees a day. I don’t even ask my parents for money. I have 4 sister who are married and in their marital homes and 4 brothers. We are not in touch with two of them. My parents and I cook together, but I alone fulfill my child’s needs. I alone take care of my daughter. I take her everywhere with me. And I do not go outside

the house to work. I get work home. I remove the extra threads from trousers when they are stitched. I do not leave my daughter with anyone else. And no one else is willing to take care of my daughter.

After I came back to my parents house, he again came to take me back. My parents told me to go. But again he used to beat me. I came back 2-3 months ago. But I don't want to go back to him. He keeps threatening me that he will file a complaint with the police against me. Even if he buys me something, he will abuse me. He keeps saying, give me in writing that you do not want to stay with me.

My parents are not supportive. That is a problem. We do not have our own house. We live in a rented place. My father is 'mistry', brick layer.

Case study 2: Uma (Name Changed)

My natal family was poor. My father used to get fits. So we were married off early. I was married early. My in-laws were not good. My mother-in-law was traditional and was cruel and oppressive (*zulm karti thi*). I had two children but my mother-in-law used to beat me and send me to my mother's home. After three children I had got operation done. One child died early. I felt that since he is not able to earn why should I bear more children. So I got the operation done. After that my mother-in-law said to my husband, this woman has become useless after the operation. You get the children here. As a result I did not see my children for 28 years. One son was 10 years old and the daughter was three years old. One day I had gone out to work, he picked up the children went to his mother's house. And when I used to go to my in-laws house, they used to beat me and wouldn't let me meet my children. There was no one in my natal family who had the courage to come with me to my in-laws house to get the children. But my mother gave me moral support, even though she did not have money. People used to be scared of the police, hence no one from my natal family come with me to my in-laws house. I was staying with my mother. Then my mother died. I got my brother married. But my sister-in-law started to say – why is she (referring to me) here. She said this even though I was supporting them economically. I used to do sowing work. When that work stopped, I started working where they make jewellery boxes.

Then I got introduced to Vimla didi. The Mahila Pragati Manch is like my family. I brought up my brothers daughter. My sister-in-law died. My niece is 27 years old. She does not work. She says why are you living here, go away. She has attitude. She says this even though I brought her up. And I used to contribute fully to the family's expenses. My mother had given me one room. I have built a room on top of that. I get rent from that and that is how I manage my expenses. Earlier I used to work, but now I am unable to work. The room is in my name. If the room had not been in my name, my niece would have driven me out. I used to work with young girls as part of the NGO, but my niece would never join. My sister-in-law was also very stubborn. She was ill but would not take any medicine. Then her brothers took her to the village and she died there. She took her sons with her to the village. They live there. My niece called her brothers to Delhi saying that Aunty has occupied father's house. When they came, I showed them the papers and said that your father sold his share and now both live here. After that they did not come. Even if they come to Delhi, they do not come here, they only visit my sister.

My in-laws used to stay in Pratap Bagh. My mother-in-law would not allow me in. she would not even allow me to talk to the neighbours when I went there. She told my children that you mother left you and ran away. Now the children talk to me. My husband did not earn properly. He would earn some days. My mother-in-law even told my husband's younger brother – you leave her, I will get you married again. She was like that with everyone. Now, no mother-in-law can say that to her daughter-in-law. The daughter – n-law will turn her out. Now there is fear of the law. In the earlier days we used to be scared of our mother-in-laws, they used to beat us also. My husband did not have a good upbringing. My mother-in-law got my children married at a very young age.

My biggest worry is that I have no one to assist me. If I am sick, there is no one to even give me a cup of tea. My daughter says come and live with me, but I have everything here. She stays in Haryana. But my son never asks me to come and stay with him. I get a bit of rent and the old age pension. I have a ration card.

Case study 3: Maya (Name Changed)– Husband in jail

Maya's mother was also present during the interview.

Maya is 33 years old. She has studied till 10th and passed the exam in Delhi. She has two children, a son - 13 years and daughter 9 years old. She has been staying with her parents for the last 10 years.

Mother – I had 5 daughters to marry. So I got her married early. The boy's father was in government service and they had a 25 sq.yards plot. We asked them – what does the boy do? They said that he is learning computer. They lied to us. My daughter got married and after 15 days he was in jail. He was caught stealing someone's mobile. So he was taken to a prison. He came out the same day. My son got to know from someone that our son-in-law was in jail. When I got to know, I called my son-in-law and asked him if he had gone to jail. He said yes I had gone to jail because I had slapped a lady constable as I had crossed the traffic signal. After some time he was caught for stealing earrings. Then he again was in jail, and this time I paid the lawyer 4000 and got him out on bail. Then we realized that this was his way. This was in 2010. Then he murdered a man in 2014. After that my daughter came back to our house. His mother sold the 25 sq.yd plot in Nand Nagri and bought a 50 sq.yd plot in Sewadham. When she bought the new house, she gave money to all of her daughters, but did not give anything to the granddaughter (son's daughter).

Maya - When the property was sold, I objected. I said why did you not give anything to my children? I said that you also have a shop. Give me half of that. My husband's sister also was using it. I said that I will earn my living through that. When I said that my mother-in-law and my husband's sisters and their children beat me up. Ten people beat me up. I got injured on the head.

Mother- Even I was present there. We also complained to the police, but the mother-in-law used to pay the police and the police used to take her side. She paid the police Rs.20,000. Once the mother-in-law had filed a case (against me) in Gaziabad as Sewadham fall in Gaziabad. The S.I. called me and said come to the police station with your daughter. He said marry off your daughter – I said you are also a human, if your son-in-law turns out bad, how would you feel? He threatened me that you can go any part of Delhi or U.P., I won't allow any case to be registered by you.

Maya - I filed for divorce. I said that I don't want to live with him. He said that even he is ready. I filed in 2018, before lockdown. But then he would not turn up on the date of hearing. He used to say that he wants more time. It was a year since I had filed for divorce. I said to the judge – the kids are with me, I am spending money on them. And he still wants time to think? He will ask for 2-3 months more. I told the judge that I am withdrawing the case. Outside the court he used to say that he would give me a divorce and make my life miserable. But in front of the judge he would say I need more time. I knew that he will not give me a divorce, he does not come on the given date. Then I said to the judge that I will take the case back. I took the case back because he doesn't have anything to give. He is in jail. Now I know he is in jail but I do not have his address. The marriage was not registered.

Maya - My in-laws had a ration card but my name was not entered in it. I have a voter card but the address is of my mother's house. I have a adhaar card, on my mother's address and it has my husband's name. My children also have aadhar card which has my mother's address, and their father's name is mentioned on it. In the school, they call the father, but we had told in the school that he is not there. There is nothing to

hide. Because I have support from my family, I am able to bring up the children. My son had seen my husband, but my daughter has never seen her father.

Mother - One day the police came looking for him as he had run away from police custody. The police came and took my daughter. The police came from Jafrabad. I said that you can't take my daughter like this, even I am coming. I told the police, we have no relations with him and if he comes here, we will ourselves call you. And when he came, we immediately called the police at Zafrabad.

Mother – Here the family consists of parents, my son and his wife. It is a small house. I have built 3 floors. But my son also drinks. He is manner-less. My daughter-in-law is okay so far. I can't say about the future.

Maya - I do worry about the future. My mother-in-law has done nothing for me. And my mother is concerned about my brother's wife. If even you go away just like that I know that my brother will not let me stay here. Someone has to tell me/ guide me where will I stay? Even I keep falling ill a lot.

Mother – Her father drives a rickshaw. Even he keeps thing about her future, He things it would be good to get her married again. We are not that well-off to get her a place to live or help her start any work of her own.

Maya - I don't have a job good enough that I can live on my own. The children are growing up and their expenses are also growing. If something happens to me, who will look after my children and if something happens to them, I don't have enough money to spend on them. I have started working in a school since a month. I only get Rs.5000. But I felt that I should start somewhere. My children are studying in a private school through the EWS category. My name is in my parents ration card. I am also enrolled in Civil-defense, but you are not paid for it.

Maya - My in-laws tried to mentally torture me. Once they made me drink kerosene. There was a live electric wire near the gate and twice I got an electric shock. We had refused for this marriage, but my husband said that I will only marry her, no one else. He even got a photo clicked with me.

Mother- I had given my daughter everything in marriage, except a mother-cycle. Later her sold everything and spent the money. All her jewelry, brass utensils, things I gave to the grandchild, everything. Of all the things I had given, I only got back a TV and a cylinder. The gas was in my mother-in-laws name. Modi had started a gas scheme, so I had gone to the gas agency, but they refused. My son says, get her out of this house. Get her married quickly and get her out.

Maya -My brother will push me out of the house. As long as my parents are there, they will help. My son was in hospital, my parents got him treated. My worry is that if something happens to me, who will look after my children. I have two unmarried sisters. They are not earning either. They are graduates but are not able to get a job. And if a job is available, they ask for money. I was getting a job in a hospital, but they were asking for 20,000 and I didn't have so much money.

I am worried about the future. My brother says – give her the land in the village. It is a small piece of barren land. But there is no livelihood there. Here in Delhi, I can at least wash vessels and earn a living. I was working as a maid in homes, but kept falling sick. So I left it since you have to go to different places. In the school, it is at least in one place. My mother-in-law has also expired. Even if I want to file for divorce, there is no where to send the summons. Two of his sister's don't take the summons, and I don't know the address of the third. She lives on rent. So you see, my rights are nowhere ? *kis se mangu apna haq* ? (From whom should I demand my right?)

Rajasthan

Case Study No. 1

Type of Single Woman: Abandoned
Category: General

Education Level: 8th Grade

Name: Uma Devi Sharma, (name changed)

Age: 44 years

Residence: Kota

Uma Devi's husband works in the electricity department and holds a government job in the Atru area of Baran district. She is an abandoned woman with three children. Approximately ten years ago, her husband left her. She is a homemaker. At the time her husband left her, their three children—two sons and a daughter—were very young. Presently, her daughter has been married for three years, and she now lives with her two sons.

Uma Devi's husband always had a suspicious nature. He never allowed her to talk to anyone or step out of the house. He would often engage in violence and physical abuse, even threatening and intimidating the children. His workplace was in a small town with no good schools, which hampered the children's education. Therefore, in 2014, he arranged for a separate rented room for Uma Devi and the children in Kota and got the children admitted to school. From 2014 to 2016, her husband would occasionally visit Kota, providing groceries and financial support. However, after two years, he completely stopped coming and even restricted Uma from visiting him at his workplace. Gradually, he also stopped providing groceries and money. This made it extremely difficult for Uma Devi to take care of herself and her three children. Later, she discovered that her husband had been in a relationship with another woman, whom he had brought to his private residence. This woman also had a child.

When Uma learned about this, she was devastated. With little understanding of the law and societal norms, she sought advice from her family, who suggested filing a report at the women's police station. Accompanied by her children, Uma registered a complaint. Her husband, being very cunning, feared losing his job and proposed a settlement. The police and the people at the Lok Adalat (People's Court) facilitated a compromise. It was agreed that he would provide ₹5,000 per month, cover the children's expenses, and visit his family. Additionally, Uma was made to sign an agreement stating that all cases would be withdrawn, and no further appeals would be filed. This case and its proceedings lasted for two years, during which no financial support was provided. Her in-laws sided with her husband, while only her family supported her.

Uma's family includes her parents, three sisters, and a brother. While she has a share in the family land, her brother manages it and supports her financially. None of the sisters have renounced their rights to the land yet. After the settlement, her husband began providing ₹5,000 per month starting in 2016. However, living in Kota on such a small amount, especially with the children's education expenses, was extremely challenging. Consequently, Uma decided to start working and opened a tiffin centre with the help of her family and some in-laws.

Uma's father-in-law owned 16 bighas of land. After his death, the land was transferred to her husband. Uma filed a case seeking her children's rightful share of the property, facing numerous challenges, including frequent disputes, lack of police action, and misleading advice from lawyers. Residing in Kota while the case was being heard in Baran district posed additional difficulties, including travel expenses, safety concerns, and lawyer fees. Despite her own poor health, Uma persisted. Her two sons have private jobs that help sustain the family.

After years of struggle, the court awarded her sons 6 bighas of land. However, her husband contested the decision, claiming the magistrate's ruling was flawed. Presently, her sons can cultivate the land, but her husband continues to harass them under various pretexts. This legal battle has cost Uma ₹2 lakh so far and has taken eight years. Her husband wants a divorce, but Uma refuses to grant one. He continues to live with his second wife and their son.

Through her efforts, Uma managed to marry off her daughter without her husband's involvement. She now lives with her two sons and has shut down the tiffin centre.

Challenges:

- Lack of knowledge led to frequent visits to offices and courts.
- The case being in another district increased travel expenses and posed safety risks.
- Managing the children's upbringing.
- Financial difficulties.
- Stress, anxiety, and insecurity affecting her health.
- Social stigma (as an abandoned woman).

Outcome:

After eight years of struggle, Uma secured a portion of the land. However, her husband has appealed the decision, and the case is ongoing. Based on the settlement facilitated by the Lok Adalat, she has been receiving ₹5,000 per month for the last eight years. Her husband, who is financially well-off, uses his resources to bribe lawyers and the police, causing delays in the legal process.

Case Study No. 2

Name: Seema Choudhary (name changed)

Age: 34 years

Marital Status: Widow

Family Status: 1 brother-in-law, 2 sons (aged 17 and 18 years)

Education: 10th grade

Husband's Death: 30th May 2022

Cause of Death: Heart Disease Category: OBC

Seema Choudhary is a resident of **** village/panchayat, Lohawat block, Phalodi district, Rajasthan. She got married in 2002, and her life was going well, filled with happiness. They had two sons who are now 17 and 18 years old. However, on 30th May 2022, her husband suddenly passed away due to a heart attack. This left her feeling lonely and without a stable livelihood, as she was entirely dependent on her husband's income.

Despite being educated up to the 10th grade, Seema was unaware that all property, including the house, agricultural land, and plots, should legally be in her name after her husband's death. About six months later, her uncle-in-law, Bhaktaram, her brother-in-law, Pappuram, and her brother, Pepararam, visited her and advised her to transfer the land in her husband's name to her own name.

Having been associated with the Single Women's Empowerment Organization for the past two years, Seema had some understanding of her rights. She agreed to transfer the land to her name. All the necessary paperwork was prepared with the help of her brother-in-law, uncle-in-law, and her brother, and eventually, 40 bighas of land were successfully registered in her name.

Seema did not have to struggle much for this process, as she received support from both her in-laws and her family. The process incurred a cost of ₹7,000–₹8,000 in the revenue department and took around 6–7 days to complete.

Now, Seema lives happily with her two sons, who are studying. She herself engages in agricultural work and labour to sustain the family. She considers herself a strong woman and believes that a wife should transfer the land to her name after her husband's death.

Key Learning:

With the support of her family and in-laws, Seema was able to claim her rightful ownership of the land.

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Case Study No. 3

Name: Mina Bai (name changed) Age: 58 years
Educational Qualification: Illiterate Marital Status: Abandoned
Family Status: One intellectually disabled daughter (aged 40) and herself
Livelihood: Pension and labour

Mina Bai, wife of Babu, is a resident of **** village/panchayat, Pindwara block, Sirohi district, Rajasthan. Both her parental home and in-laws' house are in the same village. Mina Bai's husband worked as an artisan. The couple had three sons and two daughters. However, after some time, Babu suddenly brought home a second wife. From that point onward, his behaviour towards Mina Bai worsened. Frequent quarrels and physical abuse became a part of her life.

Seven years ago, during one of these altercations, Babu fractured Mina Bai's hand. Since then, she has been unable to perform labour-intensive work. Her three sons continued living with her husband, while Mina Bai moved back to her parental home and has been living there for the past seven years with her intellectually disabled daughter.

At her parental home, she has three brothers and their wives, but she receives no help from them. If she asks for support, they taunt her the next day, suggesting she return to her husband's house. As a result, she lives independently, taking care of her disabled daughter. She spends her entire day looking after her daughter. Her husband neither provides her a place in his home nor supports her financially. At one point, Mina Bai approached her in-laws and requested a share of the agricultural land, but her husband insulted her with abusive language and sent her away, even telling her to take her sons with her. Since then, she has not been able to claim her right to land, either from her parental side or her in-laws.

Challenges: Legal Challenges: Mina Bai is unable to pursue a legal battle because her three sons continue to live with her husband, and she has the responsibility of caring for her intellectually disabled daughter. Economic and Physical Constraints: Her financial condition is poor, and her physical health does not allow her to visit courts or fight legal cases.

Social Challenges: Her husband refuses to divorce her, insisting she can live in his house but only with the second wife present. The prevailing social mindset in her village does not support women owning land. According to societal norms, women are only allowed to live in their husband's home and are not entitled to have property in their name.

In her village, there are no examples of land being registered in women's names.

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Case Study No. 4

Name: Radha (name changed) Age: 50 years Caste: Meghwal
Category: SC **Marital Status:** Widow **Educational Level:** Illiterate

Radha, is a widowed woman residing in **** village, Lohawat block, Phalodi district, Rajasthan. Her husband passed away four years ago. The land owned by her family is currently registered under her uncle-in-law's name. The family consists of another widowed sister-in-law, two sisters-in-law, and one elder brother-in-law, who is suffering from tuberculosis. The uncle-in-law has passed away, leaving behind approximately 4–5 bighas of land, out of a total of 8 bighas. However, the division of the land has not been formalized, as the uncle-in-law's sons are unwilling to proceed with the partition. Radha lacks the financial resources to initiate the land registration process. Although Radha is associated with an organization, her attempts to discuss the division of the land are often met with verbal agreement from the family. However, when it comes to taking action, such as visiting the revenue office or arranging the necessary funds, no one steps forward. This has resulted in a stalemate, with the uncle-in-law's sons continuing to utilize the land exclusively.

Challenges:

The land is communal, but its control lies with one individual. Although other family members are aware of the issue, they lack the financial resources and rely on each other to take the initiative, resulting in no action.

Efforts:

No concrete steps have been taken so far to claim the land. Only informal discussions at the family level have occurred.

Outcome:

Due to the lack of effort and resources, the land remains under the sole control of one individual, and its division among the rightful family members has not been achieved.

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Case Study No. 5

Name: Durga Bai (name changed) Age: 40 years
Category: Tribal **Marital Status:** Widow
Family Status: 2 sons, 1 daughter, 1 brother-in-law
Livelihood: Pension and labour work

Durga Bai, is a member of the Garasiya community residing in **** village, Pindwara block, Sirohi district, Rajasthan. Her family includes two sons, one daughter, and a brother-in-law. She currently relies on her pension and labour work for sustenance.

Although she has access to half a bigha of land, it is not registered under her or her late husband's name. The land is still registered under her late father-in-law's name. Durga Bai has been associated with an organization and has been making efforts for the past two years to have the land transferred to her and her children's names.

She managed to retrieve old land records, obtained copies of various documents, and secured a death certificate for her husband. However, the land is registered under her late uncle-in-law's name, who had two wives and six to seven children. The lack of consensus among all these family members has prevented the land from being transferred to her name. Despite spending approximately ₹8,000–9,000 on documentation, no one is willing to contribute financially or support her efforts.

Issues:

- The land is registered under her uncle-in-law, who had two wives and six to seven children, creating a complex ownership situation.
- Lack of agreement among the extended family members makes transferring the land to Durga Bai's name a significant challenge.

Challenges:

- Durga Bai is fighting this battle alone.
- She cannot gather all the extended family members together, as they do not value the importance of having their names on the legal documents.

Outcome:

Despite investing money and time in preparing the necessary documents, Durga Bai has been unable to transfer the land to her or her children's names due to family discord and lack of cooperation.

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Case Study No. 6

State: Rajasthan

District: Kota

Block: Etawa

Name: Tulsi Bai (name changed)

Age: 45 years

Category: Widow

Tulsi Bai, is a poor widow from Panchayat ****, Tehsil Etawa, District Kota. She has two children and has been widowed for the past two years. Her husband, who worked as a labourer in Jaipur, passed away there. After his death, she has been burdened with significant responsibilities. Being illiterate, she has no stable source of income.

Her in-laws own 12 bighas of land, out of which 4 bighas have been allotted to her and her children. However, her brothers-in-law and elder brother-in-law are not allowing her to claim her share of the land. Her father-in-law has passed away, and although her mother-in-law is alive, she sides with her sons, ignoring Tulsi's concerns. The family does not respect her opinions, forcing her to work as a labourer to survive.

After becoming a widow, Tulsi attempted to claim her share of the land. She organized a meeting with five village elders (panchayat members) and requested their intervention to allow her to cultivate her portion of the land to support her children. The elders ruled in her favour, but her brother-in-law dismissed their decision, stating that it was a family matter and they had no right to interfere. Consequently, no action was taken. Until recently, Tulsi was unaware of any organizations that could assist her. She learned about one through a member named Neema, who provided her with preliminary information.

On September 3, 2024, a group discussion involving 14 participants took place, and Tulsi shared her plight. She emotionally recounted her struggles, saying, "How often do women in their in-laws' house get their rightful share of land? Look at me—I have been widowed for two years, yet I haven't received my husband's share of the land. I am not even allowed to plant crops on the land because my husband had taken my mother-in-law's jewellery to Jaipur before his death. He never told me what he did with it. Now, my brothers-in-law are demanding the jewellery back, which I know nothing about, and are withholding my share of the land as leverage."

Challenges

- Her husband worked away from home before his death, and she has no knowledge of his possessions or financial status.
- Her brother-in-law refuses to give her access to her share of the land and is demanding the return of jewellery her husband may or may not have taken.
- Her mother-in-law sides with her sons, leaving Tulsi isolated.
- Being uneducated, Tulsi is unaware of her legal rights and lacks knowledge about the processes to claim them.
- She is alone, and no one is willing to listen to her or advocate on her behalf.

Outcome

Despite her efforts, including involving the village elders, Tulsi has been unable to secure her rights. During the group discussion, she was introduced to an organization that boosted her confidence slightly. Moving forward, organizational efforts will focus on securing Tulsi's share of the land through collective action and providing her with emotional support to strengthen her resolve in fighting for her rights.

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Himachal Pradesh

Case Study - 1

Name: Saraswati Devi (Name Changed)

Marital Status: Widow

Age: 55 years

Caste: General Category

District: Mandi, Himachal Pradesh,

Saraswati Devi, a resident of **** village, shared her story. She mentioned, "I have one daughter who is married. My husband was an alcoholic and squandered all our land and earnings on his addiction. Whenever I objected, he would retort that he wasn't using my father's money. Hearing this, I would stay silent. He eventually fell ill and passed away. We received funds from the panchayat to build a house, and with that money, we built one room, which is all I have now. This room is where we eat and sleep. We have no farmland. I survive on the widow pension I receive."

Case Study - 2

Name: Usha Devi (Name Changed)

Marital Status: Widow

Village: Guhan

District: Mandi, Himachal Pradesh,

Usha Devi, a widow from **** village, narrated, "I have two children who are in college. The land is in my father-in-law's name, and we live in the house he built. My mother-in-law, who was very kind, passed away a year ago due to cancer. She had requested that a small piece of land be transferred in my name, and as a result, two biswa (local land measure) of land was given to me. However, such a small piece of land isn't enough to build a proper house. When I ask my father-in-law to transfer more land in my name, he says it is yours today and will remain yours tomorrow as well. Hearing this, I remain silent."

Case Study - 3

Name: Daya (Name changed)

Marital Status: Abandoned Woman

Age: 35 years

Village: Lohra

District: Mandi, Himachal Pradesh

Daya, an abandoned woman from **** village, shared, "I got married at the age of 15. Within three years of marriage, I had two children. My husband and sister-in-law would verbally abuse and physically assault me over minor mistakes, and this continued for 15 years. I reported the incidents to the panchayat and the police, but they only tried to mediate and sent me back. Then I learned about the Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan and filed a domestic violence complaint there. Despite efforts by the organization's women to resolve the matter, my husband refused to reconcile and demanded a divorce. Even my family would say that husbands behave this way.

Eventually, I decided to step out and look for work. I found a job but didn't receive any financial support from my husband even after filing a maintenance case. My father had transferred my inherited land to my brother, who now doesn't speak to me. Meanwhile, my husband continues to threaten to kill me and says he won't provide financial support but is willing to divorce me. The organization has become my family now. I worry about where my home is and what will happen to me."

Case Study - 4

Name: Reena Devi (Name changed)

Marital Status: Widow

Age: 35 years

Caste: Scheduled Caste

District: Mandi, Himachal Pradesh

Reena Devi, a widow from ****, described, "In 2020, my husband had an argument with my father-in-law and, in anger, he hanged himself. He was the only earning member of our family. I have two children, and their upbringing has become very challenging. I have not received any government assistance. Everywhere I go, they ask for the post-mortem report, which I don't have.

A woman suggested me to connect with the Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan (ENSS). I shared my story with their worker, who advised the panchayat head to include my name for housing assistance. However, the head said I have no land in my name. The organization approached my father-in-law, but he refused to give me any land and even threatened to take back the agriculture land I was using. I now work as a housemaid and use that income to support my children." ENSS- HP is still helping me to find ways in getting my rights.

Case Study - 5

Name: Anita Kumari (Name changed)

Marital status: Husband in jail

Age: 36 years

Caste: Scheduled Caste

District: Kangra, Himachal Pradesh

Anita Kumari shared, "I married in 2007, but five years later, my husband was jailed for murder. At that time, my two children were very young. Now, they are in the 10th and 8th grades. I pursued further education and secured a job as an ASHA worker. However, I endured countless struggles and societal taunts. My husband had a single room, but after he went to jail, my brother in law and sister-in-laws (*jeth and jethani*) evicted us. I now live in a rented house and take care of my children.

Despite my hardships, I haven't received any government benefits. It feels like my husband committed the crime, but we are the ones paying the price. He is in jail, but we are left to face society." Case is with Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan- HP and they are helping her in her struggle.

Case Study - 6

Name: Rameshwari (Name changed)

Marital Status: Unmarried

Age: 58 years

Caste: Other Backward Classes

District: Kangra, Himachal Pradesh

Rameshwari, an unmarried woman, shared, "I come from a poor family. My parents passed away and we are three brothers and two sisters. All my brothers and sisters got married. After some time my parents also passed away. I was not considered suitable for marriage due to my appearance. My parents did not have any agriculture land. With passing of age difficulties were increasing. With no one to depend on, I approached the MLA and was granted five marla of land in *** Panchayat. However, locals opposed my attempts to build a home there. One day I would go there and put my sign board on the land, but next day some people burnt that board.

Despite the challenges, I managed to build two shops and started living there. I got some financial support from the local MLA to build the house. It was through Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan meetings that I learned about pension benefits for unmarried women and applied for it. Now, I work at my shop and live a modest life, though I remain unwell."

Case Study - 7

Name: Kavita (Name changed)

Marital status: Divorced

Age: 37 years

Caste: Other Backward Classes

District: Kangra, Himachal Pradesh

Kavita narrated, "I am the youngest of five siblings. I married with great celebration and had completed my graduation. My husband works in a company in West Bengal. Everything was going well. I would have migraine pain. A month after our marriage, my in-laws took me to court in Kangra without informing me and had me sign some papers. A month later, they dropped me off at my parental home. My mother was cancer patient and was ill. I received a notice saying that they couldn't keep me anymore. Along with that

I received divorce documents through a lawyer. My divorce was processed through mutual consent within one and half year

I eventually underwent brain tumour surgery but was left alone as my parents passed away. I live with my brothers now. With no land or home of my own, life feels hopeless."

Case Study - 8

Name: Ramni Devi (Name changed)

Marital status: Divorced

Age: 33 years

Caste: Scheduled Caste

District: Kangra, Himachal Pradesh

Ramni Devi is a resident of **** village, and her in-laws' house is in Matru. She lived there with her husband, two children, and her in-laws. Her husband worked a private job in Manali. However, her relationship with her in-laws was strained, and her husband sided with them rather than listening to her.

Ramni got married at the age of 20. She mentioned that her husband was suspicious of her and created problems even when she spoke to her parents on the phone. He would fight with her over trivial matters and prohibited her from leaving the house, saying he would bring home whatever she needed.

For a long time, Ramni did not share her struggles with her parents. However, one day, when she was visiting her maternal home, her husband came there drunk late at night and started abusing her. When her parents intervened to calm him down, he got into a physical altercation with her father. Despite this incident, her parents forced her to return to her marital home to avoid societal judgment.

After returning, the situation worsened. Things escalated when her husband stopped giving her food after the altercation with her father. Unable to bear the harassment, Ramni returned to her maternal home, but her in-laws did not allow her to take her children along.

Ramni's parents filed a case in court, and both families were summoned for discussions. Eventually, her husband filed for divorce and refused to let her have custody of their children. He also did not allow her to meet them. Distressed and scared, Ramni confined herself to her room in her maternal home. Over time, even her own brother and sister-in-law started treating her poorly, pressuring her to return to her marital home.

Ramni attended a quarterly meeting of the Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan, where she shared her struggles. With the organization's support, she decided to proceed with the divorce to free herself from the constant harassment. After the divorce, Ramni did not receive any share in her in-laws' property or her maternal property. She began working at a shop but continued to face hostility from her brother and sister-in-law. Eventually, her aunt took her in and arranged work for her in Dharamshala, where she now lives and works at someone's house. ENSS is consulting a lawyer to support her in getting her rights.

Single women struggle for their land rights. Nalgonda District Telangana

Case 1

Parvati (name changed) is a single woman who lives in ***** village of Chandampet *mandal*. She is from the backward class community. She was married at the age of 16 years to Suresh who was a lorry driver. At the time of marriage her father gave her 1.5 acres of land along with her the *patta* title (ownership papers). Her father gave her and her brothers equal share in land. All of them received 1.5 acres each. Her 4 elder brothers now want to grab her land back.

Parvati was living with her husband and had one son. Subsequently, her husband got a job in the Road Transport Corporation of the state government. Two years after he got the job, Suresh started harassing her regularly. He abused her verbally and physically. Parvati could not bear the torture and was forced to return to her parents' village. Suresh abandoned her and married someone else. Since 2010, Parvati has been living alone in the same village as her parents and brothers. The brothers were mean to her and tried to force her to go back to her husband. They harassed her landlord who gave his house on rent to her. The brothers would trouble her every day so she moved away from her community to the *dalit* section and rented a house there. She survived as an agriculture laborer and sent her son to the local school. Now the son, Ganesh is studying for his intermediate course.

In 2015 her father passed away. Since then her brothers are constantly demanding her to give back the land at a throw away price. The land is currently worth Rs 27 *lacs* while the brothers want to pay her Rs 1 *lac* each (total Rs 4 *lacs*). They also verbally abused and beat her up twice. Their families boycotted her and did not invite her for any family functions. In spite of this she continued to live in the village and make a living on daily wage work. Due to support from Gramya staff who helped her by their presence and encouraging her not to be afraid. She was afraid she would be killed after her brothers attacked her and broke her leg.

Parvati filed a case against her husband for maintenance in 2011. She fought the court case for 8 years and finally started receiving alimony of Rs 5,000 for both her son and herself. While her brothers' torture continued she went to the local police station with her complaint. The police did not support her in any way. She came in touch with Gramya staff who accompanied her to lodge a complaint once again at the police station. This triggered the village elders to intervene and make a settlement. Village elders insisted that the brothers should stay away from Parvati. After this intervention, single women in the village came together to form a group and support each other in the future. Parvati also joined the single women group in the village understanding the need for it.

On encouragement from the organization, she applied for a double bedroom house in the village in a government scheme and has now received the title. She is living in it now. She receives pension of Rs 2016 as a single woman. After 14 years of struggle, Parvati is now able to live with dignity as a member of the single women's group.

Case 2 Lakshmi (ST)

Lakshmi is 32 years old and has three children, 14, 12 and 10 years old. The youngest is a boy. She and her husband Vasu lived in ****, Nampally *mandal* of Nalgonda district. They owned 2.75 acres of land. Vasu leased in 3 additional acres to increase his income through agriculture. He also dug 3 bore wells which did not yield water. His cotton crop did not yield as expected due to which his loans went up to Rs 6 lakhs. Finding no means to repay his loan he committed suicide by drinking pesticide. This was in 2017. Lakshmi continued to live in the village and did wage work for survival. After Vasu's death, her mother in law and brother in law Raghu, both harassed her and beat her to give up her share of land and leave the village.

While Lakshmi demanded that the her husband's land should be transferred to her, the mother in law refused with the comment that she may run away and get married again. They refused to transfer the land to Lakshmi who was the rightful owner. Gramya staff met her first in 2017 when she shared her problem. She joined the single women farmer group in her village. She started going to meetings regularly and gained confidence to deal with her problems. She went to Delhi to share her problem of husband's suicide. She became active in the Rythu Swarajya Vedika which is a platform to support farmers. She became active to demand her rights and ex gratia amount of Rs 6,00,00 as promised by the state government. She started visiting the District Collector and revenue officials to look into her case. She filed a case against the state government for not releasing her ex gratia amount. After a long struggle when she and other single women campaigned at different fora she finally received her compensation of Rs 6 lacs in 2022. The single women group and Gramya staff accompanied her to discuss her property rights at the village *panchayat*. The elders called her mother in law and brother in law to discuss transfer of *patta* to Lakshmi. After negotiations they agreed to give her the share. They first agreed the settlement on white paper and after 2 months transferred the land in her name. The expenses of Rs 25,000 were borne by Lakshmi. Currently the value of the land is Rs 37,50,000.

Lakshmi is now cultivating her land. Not only that, now she is leasing in her brother in law's land for cultivation since he has moved to Hyderabad to drive an auto and make a living. She received financial support from an NGO to set up a village shop. When she did this a man who was running another shop came and threatened her to shut down. The single women group stood in support of her and sent away the trouble maker. Her shop is running now and she earns Rs 300 to 400 a day from it.

Lakshmi now feels that after 7 years of struggle she is strong and peaceful and has a support group.

Case 3 Chellamma (BC)

Chellamma (name changed) is 38 years old and lives in **** village, Devarakonda *mandal*, Nalgonda district. She has 2 daughters aged 18 and 17 years. Her husband Krishna was a farmer and passed away 14 years ago due to excessive drinking. The family owned 2.50 acres of land. While her mother in law retained half an acre, she and her brother in law, Shyam were entitled to one acre each. Shyam secretly had the total land transferred to his name.

When Chellamma came to know that he had taken away the land, she started asking him for her share of 1 acre. Shyam refused to acknowledge his wrong doing and insisted all the land was owned by his mother. When she continued persisting and asking for her share and to see the documents, he became very angry and on two different occasions he beat her up when she was working in the field. Chellamma decided to cultivate her land in any case. She hired a tractor for ploughing and prepared her land to grow cotton. This escalated into a huge conflict when her brother in law protested. The issue became public and Chellamma took the matter to the *Panchayat* elders. They asked for the ownership papers which Shyam refused to share and avoided coming to meet village elders. The matter was taken up several times for a year regularly but Shyam refused to come to the meetings. Chellamma also took the matter to the single women in her village. Twelve members were active in the group at the time.

The single women sat together and discussed their strategy. They decided to protest peacefully every day in front of Shyam's home. They demanded to either see the papers or to ensure that Chellamma received her share of land. The protests continued for a week where women sat peacefully from early morning to late night and did not allow him to leave the house. After one week Shyam decided to give in. He came out of the house and promised to give Chellamma's share to her. He asked for one month's time to do the paper work. Meanwhile he wrote out an agreement to give the land on plain paper. After six months the land was officially transferred to her.

Chellamma's mother in law supported her through out her struggle. This angered the son and he refuses to talk to his mother

The conflict continues because earlier the brothers had shared water from one borewell which was located on the land belonging to Shyam. Now he refuses to share the water with the sister in law.

Chellamma had her daughter married at the age of 16 years and had to take loans for the same.. She also suffered crop loss due to low rainfall that year. Now she has to repay a loan of Rs 4 lacs. She has left her land fallow and migrated for work to Hyderabad. Currently she is earning Rs 18,000 per month. Her younger daughter is now studying at the intermediate level. She goes to a private college.

Currently the land is valued at Rs 28 lacs and she hopes to cultivate it in the future.

Case 4 N Ratnamma age 33 years and caste BC

**** village, Neredigumma Mandal

Ratnamma (name changed) was married in 2011 at the age of 19 years. She had completed class 12. Her husband Raju lived in the same village and was a taxi driver. In 2012 she gave birth to her daughter, Pravasthi. In 2013 her husband went to visit his family and drank a lot. He had earlier quarreled with her family and later with his own family. In anger and frustration, he committed suicide. At the funeral, her father did not allow some ceremonies such as breaking her bangles because she was only 22 years old. This angered her in laws. Ratnamma has 2 brothers in law and one sister in law, as well as both the parents in law. They took away her baby and threw her out and refused to give her any share in property.

Ratnamma lived with her parents in the same village and learnt sewing to make a living. She also did daily wage work to support herself. The case was taken to village elders who made the family return her one - year old daughter to her. After 2015 when her father in law died Ratnamma asked for her share in property. The family did not give her anything. The 5 acres they owned was divided between two brothers with each receiving 2 acres and one acre was given to the mother. There were continuous disputes whenever Ratnamma asked for her share. This continued for three years. Ratnamma started working as a volunteer with a local NGO, Gramya.

In 2018 she shared her problems with the organization. At the time Gramya supported her by calling all village elders to resolve the dispute. The family members would come erratically and separately so no decision could be made. After one year the elders decided that Ratnamma and her daughter would become joint *pattedars* (owners) in the one acre owned by the mother in law.

Ratnamma still had not received a fair share. She found that the family owned a housing plot and demanded that she be given the same. This was in 2019. Five single women in the village supported her. They went to all village level meetings of elders to demand the house site since Ratnamma did not own a place of her own. Her voice was strengthened. Ratnamma was again beaten up by her mother in law and sister in law. However, with the support of single women she could stand firm and negotiate. Finally, the family gave her the housing plot in 2019.

Ratnamma took the suggestions of single women and started cultivating on her one acre of land. She was growing red gram and cotton. She managed to get a profit of Rs 15,000. She receives widow pensions and government investment support of Rs 10,000 per year for her agriculture land. Her land was developed under the MGNREGS, where large bushes and rocks were removed, and the soil condition improved. Her father now supports her to cultivate the land. The land value is now estimated to be Rs 10 lacs.

Case 5 - Surekha, 36 years old Caste SC

*** village , Mandal Konda Mallepally

Surekha went to primary school and was married at the age of 16years. She was married in 2006. Her husband was a lorry driver who met with an accident in 2008. She took a loan of Rs 2,00,000 and had him treated. She gave birth to three children who unfortunately passed away. In 2013, her husband Bhanu quarreled with his brothers and committed suicide by hanging himself. To avoid a legal case they started blaming her for his suicide. Surekha continued to live with her in laws after her husband's death. She had 2 brothers in law and one sister in law. All household members harassed her in many ways, but she continued to live with them. Both the brothers in law tried to sexually molest her at different times and she was forced to leave the house and return to her parents in 2016.

Her in laws owned 7 acres of land and they did not give her anything. After she left the house her elder brother in law Ramulu, secretly had 1 acre of land transferred to his mother and the rest 6 acres in his name. He did not give a rightful share either to Surekha or his own brother Muthyalu. Muthyalu came to Surekha and shared the news of land transfer. Surekha took the matter to the village elders but Ramulu denied and showed old papers which were not valid. Surekha with support from Gramya went to the revenue department and found out that the land had been transferred to Ramulu. Surekha once again went to the village elders with proof and filed a police complaint. After a year- long struggle, in 2017 she managed to get 2 acres of her share transferred to her name. Since Surekha does not live in ***, her in laws village, she tried to lease out her land. Ramulu and Muthyalu did not allow farming on her land and chased away her tenants. When she asked them to pay the lease amount and cultivate, they refused. As a compromise she is currently leasing out her land to her sister in law who pays her Rs 3,000 per acre which is below the market rate.

Surekha continues to live with her own family and has bought 1 acre of land in her own village. She is cultivating this land and gets three crops, cotton red gram and paddy. She also receives investment support of Rs 30,000 from the state government for her three acres.

While her brothers are supportive of her in some ways they expect her to give her property to them. The three brothers quarrel occasionally because she has adopted a girl. Surekha has had a life of struggle but she continues to live with dignity. She had to spend Rs 1,50,000 for her struggle to gain her share of property. Her land is very valuable because it is close to the highway. It is worth Rs 1.2 crores.

Case Studies from West Bengal

Case Study 1

Widowed single woman-khashmahal land²⁵-problems with in-laws regarding inheritance after husband's death and consequent increase in income through livelihood trainings provided by the NGO. Single women's organization intervened-unofficially-violence stopped immediately. Process for registration was not happening then, after some pressure from the single women's group process was started in 2020 but came to a standstill due to COVID 19-Finally *parchi* for landownership has been released from the panchayat in 2023, final registration yet to be done. Total expenses incurred Rs.7000.

Sita (name changed), a 46 years old widow living in the Lower Bara Mangmaya region of Rangli Rangliot Block of Darjeeling district had been facing physical, verbal and psychological torture from one of her brother-in-laws. In 2019 she reached out to the Lopchu Peshoke Ekal Mahila Sangathan for help and support. She lives on Khashmahal land, which is designated for tribal and local community ownership. She had received one of our pamphlets in 2018 when a single woman's march demanding pension for all single women was held in the Darjeeling town. Through that she had also attended livelihood trainings on mushroom cultivation, which helped her considerably raise her income. She became a widow 7 years ago in 2016 and has 2 children both of whom are in college currently.

Her problems started immediately after her husband passed away since one of her brother-in-laws felt that she would take over their entire property. Her father-in-law had paid for all the land but it was registered in her husband's name. Although she had assured that she would divide the land equally the brother-in-law kept physically harassing her, verbally abusing her and calling her a loose woman and torturing her psychologically by tarnishing her reputation in the village with his loose talk. The communities in the North of Bengal who live in Darjeeling and belong to the ST and OBC groups are very close-knit community-based systems where everyone knows about every-one else, on the occasion of a death in one house an entire area shuts down as the entire community visits the family of the deceased and helps them out and word spreads like wildfire as everyone knows everyone within that contained space. It was thus becoming difficult for Sita as a single woman with all the talk going around and her husband having recently expired. The community is headed by a *Samaj* that unofficially, locally looks at issues in the villages and even they could not resolve the matter.

On the day she contacted us, her brother-in law had come up to her house around 8-9 pm in the night, destroyed a newly constructed bathroom she had built (they never had a toilet before this as there was not enough money in the house and after the livelihood training she was earning enough to build one for herself) and tried to attack her inside her own home. She managed to close all the doors and

²⁵ This was transferred under the Land and Land Reforms Act of West Bengal after Independence. Before independence it was a revenue administration system and transferred to a welfare administration system after independence. Khashmahal land is primarily owned by the government and leased out by them, hence making everyone living on the khashmahal land a tenant, technically liable to pay rent as and when the government demands. Currently many live on these lands for generations and do not pay any lease. This land is also not heritable. Within this, Raiyat land is a form wherein the land is heritable and the tenant can use the land for agricultural, grazing purposes for income generation. Currently there is no lease to be paid, however some fee is demanded during processing of inheritance. A raiyat is also different from a tenure-holder of khashmahal. A raiyat directly holds land from the government while a tenure holder would hold land from a proprietor or another tenure holder. Sita is a Raiyat holder. In the hills of Darjeeling, it is synonymous to owning your own plot of land rather than living under an NOC inside tea garden lands.

windows of the building and because he could not break down the doors he finally left in the middle of the night. The *Sangathan* intervened along with the *samaj* in the area- Lower Bara Mangwa Kalyan *Samaj* and the brother-in-law has not tried to do anything else after that. Through the organization, other single women were mobilized in the area to form a group and take a stand against such violence and in 2020 the process of division of assets was started by Sita with the help of her father-in-law. Initially the brothers of her husband had wanted to oust her from her land and take the entire land for themselves and because she refused to do that they became violent towards her.

She did not have a marriage registration certificate so the *Samaj* certified her marriage and she had to pay Rs.1500 to the *panchayat* for an affidavit stating her claim over the land as the wife of her husband. Currently in 2023 the *panchayat* has released the *parchi* of division of land and she mentioned that the cost is around Rs.5500 however her brother-in-laws (there are 5 in total with only one being violent towards her) have paid it and she did not need to pay anything else. They are still awaiting registration of equal division of land. She had a house that her husband had built but she has renovated it through her income from being an agricultural help and growing mushrooms and vegetables from the livelihood trainings provided from LPEMS.

Currently she is working as a domestic help, supporting her son through college in Mumbai where he is studying Mass Communication.

Case study 2

Unmarried pregnant single woman, almost ousted from village and paternal home in the tea garden by family and community members due to her pregnancy. Lopchu Peshoke Ekal Mahila Sangathan intervened- Sunita stayed on with her son- a tea plucker's job was found for her by her sister-in-law- she has her own house in her father's compound right now.

Sunita (name changed), a 33 years old unmarried single mother was almost ousted from her family home in the Lopchu tea gardens due to her getting pregnant twice, without being married. She had had her first child at 22 and her second child when she was 29. While her first child had been adopted within her distant cousins the second child continues to live with her in her family home.

The land of her maternal home is owned by the Lopchu tea estate and before the 2000's, the tea garden was responsible for building homes and providing health benefits for its workers since workers lived within the gardens that sprawled thousands of acres. Sunita's family have been tea pluckers for generations and while they had homes built within the garden, since 2006 the tea garden stopped giving houses to its workers and instead mandated getting a NOC-No Objection Certificate for building their own homes with no help from the Tea company. It is under such NOC that Sunita's father had built his home. Such kinds of NOC have become very rare since 2022 along with housing NOC under IAY (Indira Awas Yojna) also declining making the demand of such pre-existing land/homes rise, especially amongst tea garden workers. Unofficially these pieces of land are also sold amongst community members along with transferring of NOC, unofficially. While it is not legally inheritable, yet socially and according to the rules of the *Samaj* (the local community heads of the village) off-springs do inherit these houses and unofficially sell them too.

In 2016 Sunita was already a part of the Lopchu Peshok Ekal Mahila Sangathan and had participated in the Takdah Chalo rally earlier. She was not earning yet, insisted on bearing her child and bringing it up. Before joining the movement, she had been pregnant once earlier while she was living and working in Bangalore as a domestic help. She was left by the man she had her child from and she refuses to talk about him even to this day, and she came back to the village to live. This first child she had already given away for adoption within her relatives.

Her second pregnancy made her family and the community elders try to evict her from the village as well as her own home (which is her father's property) and then, later, to marry her off to the father of the child forcibly to get her out of the village and her father's home. She was being socially ostracised for her pregnancy along with being verbally and physically abused by her own brother, who had come home during this situation and did not want a "sexually loose woman" in the house. The family members as well as the villagers wanted to get rid of a woman whom they deemed to be immoral and the *Sangathan* then took up the case and discussed about what could be done. Interestingly the moral angle of the case did not preoccupy the single women's organisation—they were more concerned with how the organization could support the single woman, ensure a safe delivery, secure Sunita's livelihood so she could look after her child as well as prevent her being ousted from her home and village. A group of women from the *Sangathan* visited Sunita and supported her through the child birth and after. Meetings were held with the '*gaon samaj*'-the village elders multiple times to ensure that no violence comes on to her in this situation and due to the intervention of the *Sangathan*, currently Sunita works in the tea garden and lives with her father in her own home. Her brother lives in Siliguri and has not raised the issue of throwing her out of the home after the intervention. She attests that it is only because of the *Sangathan* that she has been able to hold on to her own home and lives with her father and child currently. There are no official documents that anyone has ownership of these homes and there are thousands of tea garden workers who live inside the garden with no right to the land or the homes whatsoever; the situation of single women being the worst amongst them.
