



Responsible Governance to Secure Land Rights of Single Women – An example from Odisha, India

Pranati Das, India

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Background

1. Why land rights matter for women, more so for “rural single women” in India
2. Odisha (an eastern state of India) – Progressive laws; Invisible exclusions of single women
3. Missing state’s mandate and major issues hindering single women’s rights to access and control land



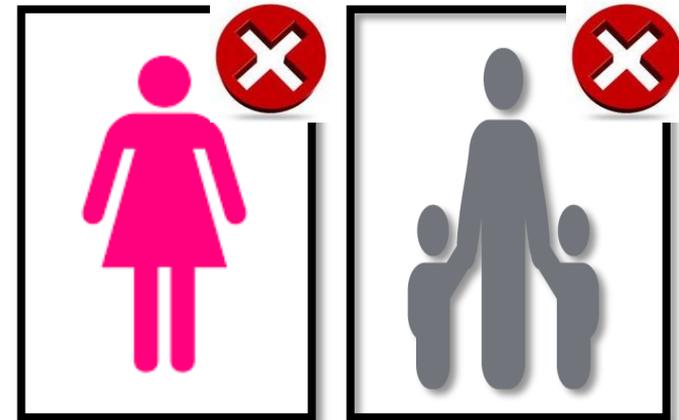
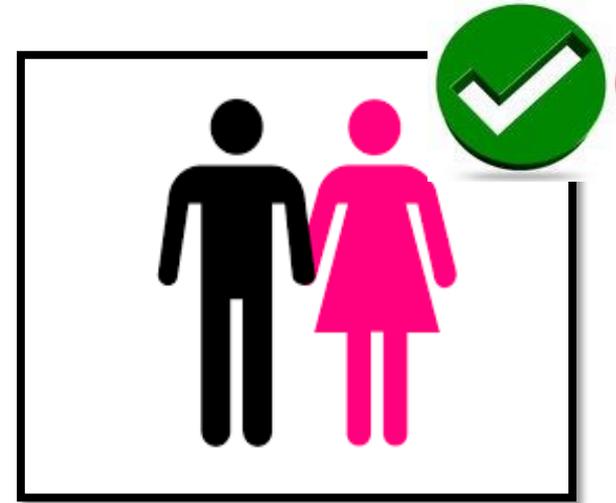
1. Why land rights matter for women, more so for “Single Women” in India

- a) Land right is fundamental to - improved income; better food security and education for children; giving women a voice within the family - empowerment (Prosterman, 2013)
- b) It's “power” to access and control not just piece of land, but access opportunities and live with dignity
- c) For “single women”, land –
 - provides identity, address and social security - subside vulnerability
 - builds ability “to form a viable, self-reliant household” (Giovarelli, 2009)
 - reduces dependence on natal or husband's family

2. Odisha - Progressive Laws; Invisible Exclusions

1. State land programs

1. Grant land titles to household heads, typically men
 2. Covers the wives and female household heads
 3. leaves behind an Invisible group – “rural single women” (single, divorced or widowed, live with relatives)
2. In strongly patriarchal societies, single women end up being absorbed by a larger household
 3. Unrecognized dependent status denies them rights to access and control land



3. Missing State's Mandate and Major Issues

Governance of tenure could be instrumental in securing land rights of single women, however –

1. State laws silent about single women's exclusive land rights
2. Absence of data about “single women” living within families
3. No mandate for single women's inclusion in state programs
4. No enumeration design to count them
5. No focus on addressing their inheritance rights through mutation and partition
6. Absence of gender lens among officials of land administration



Women Support Centre

An exclusively designed governance model

Landesa designed an approach that involved establishing a Women Support Centre (WSC):

1. Enumerate and include single women in state land programs;
2. Assist for inheritance rights through mutation and partition;
3. Help women benefit from government's social security and livelihood programs.



Reaching the Unreached

- Following a pilot, now 88 WSCs operating from *tehsils (sub-districts) in 7 districts*
- With an average of 25 per village, 200,000 previously “invisible” single women got identified
- 21% found eligible for land including
 - fresh land allocation
 - record correction
 - partition of family land

FOUR simple steps that changed governance

1. An “institutional space” within land administration to address land rights issues of single women
2. “Enumeration Design” to count the single women and their land rights issues – addressing data issues and inclusion
3. Management Information System (MIS) – database and dashboard indicators for progress tracking and monitoring
4. Capacity Building of 8000 Government Officials – adding gender lens to land governance

Responsible Institutional Space

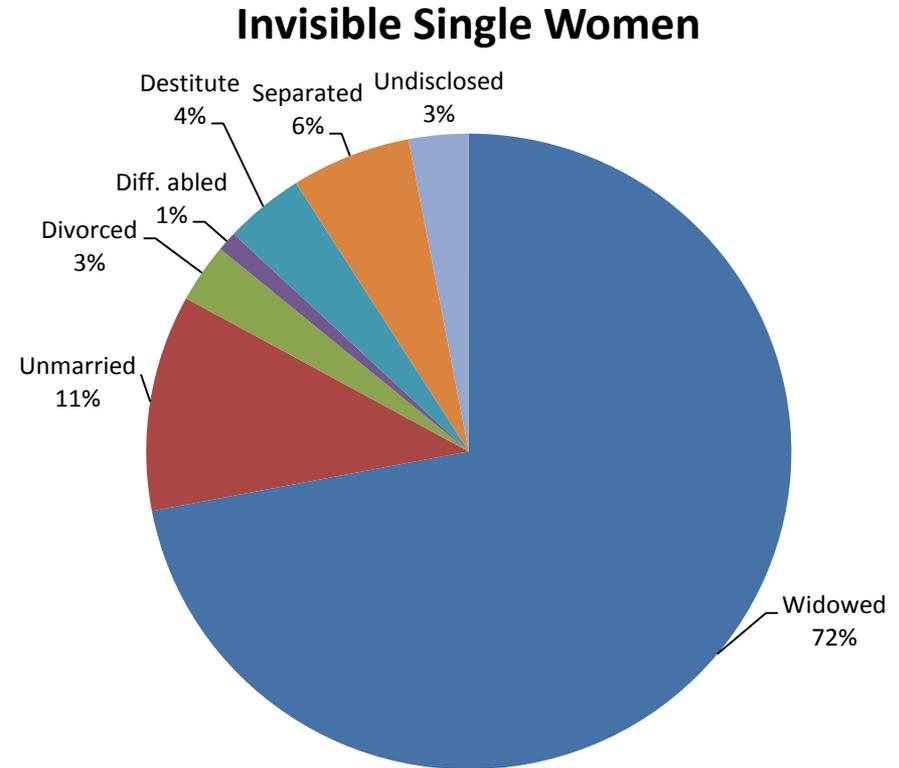
- Designated cell at each sub-district land administration office
- Female Nodal Officer
- Mandate to identify rural single women and assist them get exclusive land ownership rights
- Inter-departmental collaboration of Women and Child Development and Land Administration



Sl. No	Districts	WSCs
1.	Mayurbhanj	26
2.	Koraput	24
3.	Kalahandi	13
4.	Ganjam	11
5.	Gajapati	7
6.	Dhenkanal	8
7.	Sambalpur	9
Total		88

Establishing Enumeration Design

- *Anganwadi* workers (village level mother and child health and nutrition workers) tasked to identify the single women who had been left out
- “Invisible” single women made “visible”
- Database of single women created
- Land entitlement claims filed, verified and processed for titles



Challenges in Implementing the Model

- Absence of state's mandatory guidelines – scaling is slow
- Definition of family in Odisha Land Laws does not include single women
- Challenges in settling women's inheritance rights to land – lengthy process of mutation and social barriers for partition of family property
- Non - availability of leasable land
- Size of plot: allocation is less than 1/25 of an acre
- Procedural delay due to over-burdened multi-tasking land officials
- Lack of inter-departmental convergence
- District Legal Services Authority's lack of focus on land right issues of single women

We recommend: Small steps for a Big Leap

- WSCs at 314 sub-districts as a “women empowerment program” to provide land titles as a first step
- Review of processes of mutation and partition in line with Hindu Succession Amendment Act 2005
- Trainings and refreshment trainings on revised procedures to officials
- Land Legal Literacy training to officials and rural women
- Mandatory guidelines to District Legal Services Authority for emphasis on “free legal aid for land issues” to poor Single Women
- Policy reforms: revise definition of family
- Removing eligibility cap of 45 years for Single Women

**Single women need to be counted;
programs need to be responsive to their
existence and needs.**