

# **Achieving SDGs through land consolidation in rural regions of Uttar Pradesh state in India**

## **Abstract:**

Uttar Pradesh is a state in the northern part of India with 1,06,773 villages which account to 16.66% of the total number of villages in the country and the rural population in the state is 18.6% of the total rural population in the country (numbers are according to 2011 Census of India). These numbers signify the importance of sustainable rural development in the state so that the quality and standard of living of the rural community be improved.

With the increase in population, right to inheritance and frequent changes in land ownership due to sales, agricultural landholdings are fragmented to smaller and scattered units thereby lowering agricultural productivity. This problem is evident in developing countries like India. To overcome the challenges hurled by fragmented landholdings, nations around the world have employed land consolidation.

In India, “Land is a state issue”. Hence land administration, legislation and reforms related to land are under the purview of the respective state governments. Post-independence from British rule, all the state governments in the country, have focused on laying down various land reforms to improve the social and economic conditions of its population. Among them, Zamindari abolition is the most critical and successful land reform in the country. Apart from Zamindari abolition, among 29 states and seven union territories, 17 states and one union territories have enacted legislation for land consolidation. This is also an important act that is neglected by many states. Uttar Pradesh is the only state in the whole country that is still implementing it for 64 years from the time of its inception and is unarguably the largest entity in the world that is undertaking land consolidation at a bigger scale.

Land consolidation act of the state is limited to rural regions. Apart from consolidating fragmented landholdings of every owner in the region, the land consolidation act of Uttar Pradesh is designed to achieve sustainable development goals (SDGs) way before they are being adopted or discussed. In order to observe the complete picture of how land consolidation is contributing to achieving SDGs targets over the years in the state of Uttar Pradesh, the study is conducted in two different scenarios. Firstly, the study is carried in villages where the process is underway and secondly in villages where the process is completed. All the villages in which study is carried are located in the Kanpur Nagar District. Grounded theory approach has been employed in this paper. Interviews have been conducted with the land consolidation officials and with the general public in the villages. Subsequently, the data is coded and analysed.

One of the findings of the study is that the land consolidation officials in the state are not mindful that the consolidation process employed in the state is contributing to the accomplishment of SDGs. However, they are bestowing to its objectives. It is also understood from the study that the SDGs are not attained to their fullest during consolidation. For example, during the consolidation process, there are provisions to provide land for public purposes like hospitals, schools, roads. The next step towards the development of these public utility services is not known or not defined. Hence, it can be understood from the study that the current land consolidation process provides a base for these goals to be accomplished. The government in

place has to make necessary changes in the current land consolidation policy so that the goals can be achieved in totality. The suggestions are that the Department of Land Consolidation should not only have provision to delineate the lands for a particular purpose, but also should also be given the responsibility of developing/constructing of the public facility. The land consolidation process can be connected with “Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)” and development activities that are relevant to SDGs through land consolidation can be carried out. MGNREGA is law in India that guarantees “*the right to work for at least 100 days in a financial year*” to improve the rural livelihood.

Irrespective of the goals which the land consolidation process is capable of attaining, the Department of Land Consolidation, Uttar Pradesh is perceived as the department that consolidates the land holdings in a village and provides a final settle record to the Revenue Department of the state. Therefore, for the state to achieve the targets of SDGs by 2030 as suggested by the United Nations, the state government shall make necessary policy changes and build on the outputs from consolidation process to carry out development activities in rural regions. Similarly, other states in India which have consolidation acts shall realise the importance of land consolidation in attaining SDGs and take necessary steps in implementing the process. Along with the state governments, Government of India shall also recognize land consolidation as a tool by which SDGs can be achieved and take necessary steps to support the states in implementing it.