

RDI and Micro-Land Ownership

Helping India's Rural Poor

INDIA

"Before I had land rights, I was nothing. I had nothing. Now, my land is better than gold."

- Land beneficiary, Karnataka

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"Achieving land rights empowers families – from creating their own food sources to giving them the means to become agricultural entrepreneurs. Experience and analysis from RDI shows that even the smallest garden plot can make a big difference."

- Dr Daniel Gustafson,
Director, Food and Agriculture
Organization Liaison Office, North
America

www.rdiland.org

About RDI

The Rural Development Institute (RDI) is an international non-profit organization (NGO) working to secure land rights for the world's poorest as a critical component to alleviate global poverty. RDI is a global pioneer in using the law to create land ownership opportunities to create the foundation for global poverty alleviation. Over the past 40 years, RDI has worked in more than 40 countries helping more than 400 million people secure land rights. For every dollar contributed, on average RDI has secured land rights for six families. RDI, headquartered in Seattle, Washington (USA), was founded by Roy Prosterman, Professor of Law Emeritus at the University of Washington.

RDI in India

Most of India's poorest live in villages where land is the primary source of status, income, shelter, wealth, credit access and upward mobility potential. Landlessness is the best predictor of poverty in India, so poverty alleviation strategies must include land access as a key component. RDI first became engaged in India in the mid-1990s. Since then, RDI has been working closely with the central, state and local governments to secure land rights for India's rural poor – and demonstrating that a little bit of land can be a step out of poverty. Today, many Indian policy-makers are taking an increased interest in land issues as India's national, state and local governments are embracing RDI's recommendations to help provide economic and social opportunity through secure land rights. By giving rural landless families ownership of a plot of land as small as one-tenth of an acre – big enough for a house, garden, a few animals, and a home business – micro-land ownership is proving to be an effective and viable tool

A little land makes a big difference

RDI's research of more than 900 families in the states of Karnataka, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh found that ownership of micro-plots of land provided rural landless families with significant benefits:

- **Improved status:** Families experience improved status, pride, hope for the future and ties to the community.
- **Better nutrition and health:** Families can produce all of their fruit and vegetable requirements, and most of their dairy needs on a 10th of an acre plot, greatly reducing hunger.
- **Increased income:** Families can sell their excess production from gardening and animal husbandry in the market, producing an annual supplemental income of up to \$200, the equivalent of what an agricultural worker makes in a year.
- **Source of Shelter:** Micro-plots are sufficient in size for a family to build a home, creating physical, economic and psychological shelter.
- **Insurance against economic shocks:** Families are better equipped to withstand economic shocks, such as an illness or drought, with improved income, nutrition, and assets.

"It is my view that when cultivators have ownership of the land, agricultural production increases. Since the distribution of micro-plots in West Bengal, production has gone up significantly and West Bengal is now a food-grain surplus state."

- Dr. P.K. Agrawal, Principal Secretary of Land & Land Reforms Commissioner, Government West Bengal

- **Increased access to credit** through ownership of land, an asset.
- **Empowerment of women** through land rights and control of income generated from the land.
- **Hope for the future:** The supplemental status, opportunity, income, and food that comes with the durable asset of land changes attitudes about the future.

RDI Activities in India

- ▶ **Work with State Governments:** Today, RDI and Indian partners are working with the state governments of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Orissa and West Bengal to develop, help implement and monitor micro-land ownership projects involving up to 12 million people. These four states are committing more than Rs. 5 crores (\$13 million) per year to provide landless families with micro-plots. RDI's promotion of micro-plot programs also is generating interest among the state governments of Bihar, Gujarat, and Uttar Pradesh.
- ▶ **Policy Briefings and Workshops:** The growing interest in micro-land ownership is due, in large part, to ongoing policy briefings and workshops by RDI and Indian partners to share research findings and raise awareness among senior government officials, NGOs, researchers and donor agencies on micro-land ownership and other pro-poor land policies and programs. In the past few years, RDI has helped organize 13 workshops in 9 states with more than 1,200 people in attendance.



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► **RDI co-sponsored a National Conference on Land Policy and Administration for Poverty Reduction** with the Government of India, the World Bank, the UK foreign aid agency (DFID) and the United Nations Food & Agricultural Organization (UNFAO). For the first time ever, the conference brought together the Rural Development Minister of the Government of India, prominent central government and senior state government officials with international and domestic land experts and civil society activists. It was the first major land reform conference in India to include such a wide range of stakeholders.

► **Advocacy and Legal Advice:** RDI assists in providing advocacy and legislative input toward enactment of laws allowing sharecroppers to own land.

The RDI Program: How it Works

► **Partnership Approach:** RDI's research findings are disseminated at state-level land policy workshops. If state governments show interest, RDI works with them to develop a micro-land ownership program. Land near villages is purchased at market prices and divided among landless families. After the families obtain land, RDI and its partners remain involved in implementation, monitoring progress, and facilitating partnerships with local NGOs, who can help the families make the most of their micro-plots by explaining how to grow the most nutritious foods, teaching them farming techniques, educating them about organic fertilizers and assisting with irrigation. RDI and its partners keep in close communication with the state and local officials as well as the beneficiaries, providing assistance along the way.

► **Working with States to Change the Law:** Most Indian states either prohibit or highly restrict farmland leasing in a misguided effort to protect the poor. Research by RDI and others shows that such laws harm the poor by restricting their access to land as well as decrease farm productivity. RDI is working with three states to amend legislation so that poor families can effectively access land through leasing.

► **Land Rights and Legal Aid:** Millions of poor families in India still lack secure land rights promised to them by government land reform programs. RDI helped initiate a state-wide legal aid program in Andhra Pradesh that raises awareness about land rights and assists women self-help groups to navigate the government departments and courts to secure land rights.

► **Women and Land:** In India, where women comprise a disproportionate share of the landless, RDI is working to enhance women's access and rights to land. Working with NGO and government partners, RDI is helping to change state policy, legislation and programs to require government-distributed land to be granted

jointly to husbands and wives or independently to women and ensuring these rights for women are upheld. When women own land, generated income is more likely to go to improving the welfare of the family and women are more secure. RDI regularly conducts state-level policy workshops focused on how to increase women's rights to land, and the benefits of such policies.

Highlights of RDI Micro-Ownership Programs

► **Karnataka, My Land – My Garden program:** Karnataka is allocating \$4.5 million annually for a multi-year micro-land ownership program, with the goal of providing micro plots to 500,000 landless families. Land acquisition costs are projected to be about \$150 per family. RDI and its partners are conducting a local, intensive implementation pilot in several villages, monitoring the program progress and impacts across the state, conducting training programs for local officials who implement the program, and providing agricultural advice and assistance to program beneficiaries.

► **Andhra Pradesh, Indira Kranti Patham (IKP):** In the state of Andhra Pradesh, the government has helped landless women purchase up to one acre of irrigated land. In this program, designed by RDI and its government partner, 5,303 women have been able to purchase 4,539 acres of land. Additionally, an IKP legal aid and titling component has helped secure land rights for more than 136,000 poor families.

► **West Bengal, Cultivation and Dwelling Plot Allotment program:** In West Bengal, RDI promoted and helped develop a micro-plot program that aims to give land to 1 million landless families. RDI and a local partner are monitoring the early implementation process and working with the government to fine tune the program guidelines.

► **Orissa, Vasundhara program:** India's poorest state, Orissa, recently began implementation of a program to provide up to 1/10-acre plots to all the state's 250,000 rural landless families. RDI is working with the government to improve the program and its implementation.

► **Central Government:** Based on RDI's pioneering research and recommendations, the National Planning Commission adopted the micro-land ownership approach as central policy in the country's framework policy document, the Five-Year Plan. The RDI program should be suitable at the grassroots level to attempt to solve some of the issues listed as part of the targets of the 11th Five-Year Plan.



INDIA

Key Partners in India

- Omidyar Network
- John Templeton Foundation
- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- Capital Group
- Department for International Development
- World Bank
- United Nations Food and Agricultural Organizations
- University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore
- SEEMA
- Utkal University
- AME Foundation
- Institute for Social and Economic Change

“Secure access to even a small parcel of land helps poor families become self-sufficient by creating their own food sources and improving their social and economic status. RDI's efforts to secure land rights, especially women's rights, are catalyzing poverty reduction in India.”

- Dr. P.G. Chengappa, Vice-Chancellor, University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore