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Women's perceptions of land ownership: a case study from Kutch District, Gujarat, India

Gouthami and Meena Rajgor

In August 2005, a campaign was initiated in Kutch District, Gujarat, India, to obtain government land for landless families. Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan (KMVS), a grassroots collective of rural women, supported women's land and property rights in the context of the campaign. In this article, we assess the impact of this campaign on women in Kutch, given that the applications for land were filed either in their own names or along with their menfolk. Land is yet to be handed over to the families, yet the process of claiming it has, in itself, clarified women's views about the relative importance of property rights for their lives and position in society. The process of discussion that KMVS initiated has also provoked some of the women to take a first step in owning property by speaking up within their families.

Introduction

Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan (KMVS) is a grassroots collective of rural women in Kutch district, which covers one-quarter of the state of Gujarat. Since its inception in 1989, KMVS has heralded a movement of social change, especially for rural women. KMVS has a presence in 257 villages, and works with around 10,600 women. It has tried to address critical issues that touch the everyday lives and livelihoods of these women, and the larger communities they belong to. In the process, KMVS and its women members have developed an understanding of women's empowerment as a spiral of increasing securities. These securities offer women protection against illnesses, droughts, and violence, and enable them to develop a growing ability to articulate their views, and receive acknowledgment and recognition in the community. This in turn enables women to effect change in the socio-cultural fibre of the community, as well as to make a positive and visible impression on the economic and political life of the community.

In the initial stages of the work of KMVS, drought was identified by women in Kutch as a major issue affecting their lives. In response to this, several programmes related to land improvement and eco-restoration were initiated. Over time, the

women's collectives felt that there was a problem in that while they were doing the work on land improvement, the ownership and control of the land still remained with the men, and that this needed to be addressed. There was a need for property to be in women's names as well. Thus, KMVS initiated new work relating to women's land and property rights. This article focuses on KMVS' experience in this area.

In 1993, a constitutional amendment was brought about in India to ensure that 33 per cent of the seats in local government institutions were reserved for women (Nanivadekar 1998). Often, elected women representatives are spouses, sisters, daughters, etc. who are elected for one term and merely do what their menfolk tell them to do (*ibid.*).

KMVS is also working with elected women representatives to ensure that they are aware of the rights and duties of their position, and are able to work towards village development with a gender perspective. They are brought together as part of a forum formed by the Panchayat (local government) Knowledge Centre of KMVS that brings together past, present, and potential future women leaders at the local government level for purposes of capacity-building as well as advocacy on development issues. Since land- and property-related issues are part of the *Panchayat's* work, the property-rights campaign work within KMVS also sits in the Panchayat Knowledge Centre.

Zameen Bachao Andolan (ZBA) (Save Our Land Campaign)

'On May 17, 2005, Gujarat issued a Government Resolution to bring wastelands under cultivation inviting big corporate houses and rich farmers for the same, thus marking the beginning of corporate farming in a big way in the state. The Government Resolution has the provision of giving wastelands up to 2,000 acres for a lease period of 20 years . . . the first five years are rent-free, after which a varying rent from Rs.40 to Rs.100 (US\$ 1 to 2.5) per acre shall be levied' (Bharwada and Mahajan 2006, 313).

Fifty-six per cent of Kutch is covered by salt desert: the Great and Little Rann. Only ten per cent of cultivable land is irrigated (Sahjeevan 2006). The new government resolution therefore had serious implications in Kutch. People's movements, community-based organisations, and NGOs came together to protest against this resolution, as the same government had yet to implement a previous resolution that stated that wastelands¹ would first be given to the landless, and given for corporate farming only if there were no takers for the offered land. The state argued that it had only taken this step as it was no longer receiving any applications for land.

Civil-society groups rallied around an octogenarian follower of Gandhian ideals, Chunnibhai Vaidya, to protest against this resolution, under the banner of *Zameen Bachao Andolan (ZBA)*, meaning 'Save Our Land Campaign'. After several smaller protests from August 2005 onwards, on 17 May 2006, a *dharna* (large protest) was organised on the main highway and railway track into Kutch, bringing together about

2,500 women and men, who blocked traffic for about an hour. Both the authors were part of this *dharna*. The police forcibly removed all the protestors in trucks, and later released them.

Land is critical to livelihoods in Kutch. In Kutch, approximately 66 per cent of adults aged 15 to 59 are workers, and 82 per cent of them are in the field of agriculture. Around 15 per cent of the families are dependent on livestock for their livelihoods. In Kutch, 12 per cent of adults are classified as cultivators, while around 16 per cent are classified as agricultural labourers (2001 Census, Government of India²). In the socio-economic survey conducted by the government of Gujarat in 2002–2003, around 68 per cent of the families in Kutch District are classified as landless. The main crops are *bajra* (pearl millet), *mung* (green gram), and *guar* (pulses).

Following the *dharna*, a meeting was arranged with officials from the state government who agreed to ensure that applications from landless people would be considered, while the new resolution would also be implemented simultaneously. Applications submitted to the district authorities previously had not progressed; the State had not taken the process forward, by measuring out and allocating land to the applicants. But after the *dharna*, the district authorities immediately announced that land measurement would take place in two *talukas*³, Mandvi and Abdasa, in Kutch.

As part of the campaign, from August 2005 onwards around 10,000 applications were filed for land across Kutch District by NGOs such as *Ekal Nari Sangathan* (Single Women's Collective), *Gram Swaraj Sangh* (Village Self-Reliance Collective), Marag, Cohesion, KMVS and its associated women's collectives, the *Abdasa Mahila Vikas Sangathan* (AMVS) (Abdasa Women's Development Collective) and the *Ujjas Mahila Sangathan* (Light – as Opposed to Darkness – Women's Collective). In Abdasa *taluka*, 500 applications were filed by the AMVS.

Following the *dharna* and the announcement of the land measurement, the forum of elected women representatives in Mandvi *taluka* initiated a campaign to file applications for land. With the support of KMVS, they organised village-level meetings, and ensured that a thousand applications were made by landless people to the district authorities.

Our research

The work on land and property rights within KMVS received a great boost due to the ZBA. In the wake of it, we decided that KMVS' Panchayat Knowledge Centre should undertake research into the ways in which activities around the ZBA and its aftermath were benefiting women. We planned to use this research to assist us in our planning for future work on women and property rights. While it was too early to study the impact of KMVS' own work on property rights, we were trying to learn from the strategies adopted by other NGOs who had taken part in the ZBA.

The authors of this article led this research: Meena Rajgor as anchorperson within KMVS on women and property-rights issues, and Gouthami as Executive Director of KMVS. Gouthami provided support to Meena Rajgor and the Panchayat Knowledge Committee in taking the work forward. We hoped that this research would also serve the purpose of documenting the work of the organisation.

We met with six groups of women across Kutch district. We were trying to cover different types of groups, but due to various constraints explained later, we could only cover six groups.

Five groups had been associated with or brought together by NGOs. One group was not a formal group, and had had no previous association with an NGO. They were from a village, Ghodalakh, that had been selected by the district authorities for land measurement. Two of the groups consisted of women who took part in the ZBA, who became motivated to apply for land during the campaign. They were associated with an NGO named Cohesion, working in western Kutch. Two of the groups consisted of elected representatives of the local government, who are only now beginning to assert their roles. They had been elected in December 2006 to their current positions, and were all from the 33 per cent of constituencies which were reserved for women. These women leaders had not taken part in the ZBA, but the activities of mobilising applications after the *dharna* had made them aware of their rights to property, which they were now trying to assert.

Another of the groups involved in our research consisted of women with whom KMVS had worked with for the last 14 years. They took part in the ZBA, and were actively trying to get land in their names. The group from Ghodalakh consisted of women who have benefited from the ZBA, though they did not understand why the state insists on allotting land in the joint names of the female and male heads of household⁴.

By means of this selection, we had come up with a range of groups to participate in our research: one with whom KMVS had had a long association; two with elected women representatives who had just come into contact with KMVS; two associated with another NGO; and one group which had had no association with an NGO. Unfortunately we were unable to include a group from *Abdasa taluka*, where the women's collective associated with KMVS was based. This collective, *Abdasa Mahila Vikas Sangathan*, had been active in ensuring applications were filed during the ZBA.

With each group, we discussed the following questions:

- The ZBA – were they aware of it? Did they take part in it? What happened after the *dharna*?
- Land rights for women – why is this issue important?
- Why land, why not other assets?
- Has ownership of land made a difference to any women they know?

The discussions with groups ranged in length from half an hour to two hours. As is usual while talking to women, time was limited. Not only do women always have responsibilities at home to get back to, but this region had had unusually good rains at the time of the research, and everyone was eager to get back to agricultural work.

It was also the beginning of the Hindu festival season, which starts during the month of Shravan (15 July–14 August), when a fair is held each Monday at temples dedicated to the Hindu God Shiva. On the eighth day after the new moon the birthday of the Hindu God Krishna is celebrated for two days in Kutch with processions, family gatherings, and fairs. The women (of course) are responsible for all the extra work such as preparing sweetmeats, savouries, getting the house cleaned thoroughly, hosting friends and relatives, and so on.

The following section analyses the insights which we gained from discussions with each of the groups.

Women and land rights: insights from the research

Group One: 'Land ownership is not important for women'

The first group with whom we met consisted of eight women in Ghodalakh village in Mandvi *taluka*. The village has a population of around 60 families. They all belong to the Rabari community, whose main occupation is cattle herding. The women take care of the cattle, while the men buy and sell them. However, ownership of the cattle is seen to rest with the men. These families do not own land, and keep their cattle either on their homestead land, or on the village's common land.

This village had been included in the drive by elected women representatives to file applications for land, though the villagers had not participated in the ZBA. The women we talked to there had not even heard about the ZBA or the *dharna*.

The applications from this village had been accepted a year ago, though the process of measuring the land and clearly marking its boundaries was yet to happen. Overall, in Mandvi *taluka*, 1,300 applications were filed for land. The group of elected women representatives with whom KMVS works had filed 1000 of these applications. Half of these were in the name of women, and the other half were in the joint name of male and female heads of household. Of the total 1,300 applications, 171 were approved in the name of women alone, and 453 were approved in joint names.

Almost all the applications that were approved in only women's names were cases where the women were widowed. There appears to be a clear bias against women who apply for land in their names while living with their husbands. One possible reason could be that the state would then need to scrutinise the application more closely, to ensure that the legal limit on land ownership continues to be maintained while allotting land in the woman's name. However, the question of whether there is

discrimination against married women claiming land in their own names needs to be explored more.

We spoke to women who had applied in joint names with their husbands. The women were in a rush to go, because of the festival preparations, but they spent an hour with us. They had come to talk to us because they thought that we would speed up the process of getting them control over the land. They told us that they had hoped to till the land during this agricultural season, and were quite disappointed that they were still not in possession of the land.

Women in this first group did not seem to care about the principle of land ownership in their own right. They reported having no idea why they were getting land in joint names with their husbands, and they were not particularly worried whether they had land or any other property in their names. It seemed to be an unnecessary hassle to have to go to the nearby town to sign the papers needed to get access to the land. They felt that they would have equal rights to the land even if it were just in their husbands' names.

When they were asked if it made a difference to a widow or a woman who was at the receiving end of domestic violence to have land in her name, the women in this group seemed surprised by the question, and went off into a long discussion amongst themselves. They were trying to recall any cases in their small hamlet of 60 families where a woman has suffered because she did not have access to land.

The group were also of the opinion that having land in a woman's name did not make a difference, because any decisions regarding the land – what crops to sow, where to sell the produce, and where to buy the inputs – were all made by male relatives. The women themselves would wait for a male relative to give them advice, before they would take action. This was especially true for the women whose husbands were in the Gulf – all the work was done by the women themselves, but on the advice of male relatives. None of the women had tried to break out of this mode of working, and saw no reason to, since they reasoned that women did not lose in the process. They felt that they were fortunate to be part of a community where a widow, or a woman whose husband has gone to the Gulf countries to work, will be looked after by the men in their community.

We noted that the women's discussion was frequently interrupted by two men who were sitting in a room inside, and the women agreed completely with what they were saying.

Group Two: Comparing gold jewellery to land

The second group with whom we met consisted of about 12 women, all of whom had been elected as representatives at the local government level in December 2006. The women were all from the Patel caste – a land-owning, entrepreneurial caste who are found around the world. They were not aware of the ZBA, but wished that they had been a part of it.

One of the women, Urmilaben Patel, was very intrigued by the whole discussion, and focused throughout the discussion on understanding the steps involved in getting land in her name.

It emerged from the richer women amongst this group that they all had property registered in their names to get around the tax laws. There are two major reasons why property is bought in women's names in rich families. The first is that this leaves the men free to take loans, without fear that the land will be taken if they default, as it is not in their names. The second reason is to evade tax, by using profits from other businesses to buy land in women's names. The women concerned were quite clear that they had no control over any of the property in their names, and many were not even fully aware of what property *was* in their name. After the discussion, they said they felt that they should ask the men in the families about the details. However, they felt that women in their community really did not need land or property in their name, reasoning that their community took good care of women who were widowed or thrown out by their husbands. All the women in the group agreed on this issue, and felt that there was really no need for women among the Patels to own property – at least, not for security reasons. The discussion, however, appears to have raised their consciousness since they agreed that they would definitely ask for more details from their families about property in their names.

All the women present at this discussion were wearing a lot of gold jewellery. We asked them about that, in an effort to draw their attention to the contradiction of owning gold as individuals but not owning any resource connected to livelihoods which they could transfer or sell. They all said that it belonged to them, but when the jewellery was bought, the receipt was made out in either their father's name or their husband's name. They were free to sell the jewellery, for a family crisis. However, jewellery was not something that could be sold to purchase another luxury item. We suggested that they might do this, and for the sake of the discussion they considered it, but then laughed heartily at the end. For example, if they wanted to buy a new fancy mobile phone (the latest craze, even amongst rural women), they would not dare to sell their jewellery for that. Any sale would have to be agreed to by their husbands first, and they found it strange even to consider selling their gold to make what they saw as a frivolous purchase. The issue is that gold jewellery has a very serious cultural meaning. It is intended to be symbolic of a woman's membership of a good family, and of her conformity to wife and motherhood norms within her society, and is not in any way seen as an asset which can be bought or sold except in a crisis in the family as a last resort.

They had not given much thought to the idea before, but during and after our discussion, they concluded that owning property could give a woman a lot of security in life. Unlike jewellery, land has a practical economic use, as well as being an asset which can be sold in times of crisis. The women in this second group agreed that they

would work on identifying women in their villages who could have a better life if they had access to land, such as widows or destitute women.

Group Three: Giving land to daughters-in-law, not daughters

The third group we met was in Vang village in Nakhatrana, another *taluka* in Kutch. Vang is a Rabari (cattle-herding) village. We reached the village when it was receiving water, after having had none for three days – so most of the women were busy collecting water, and could not attend the discussion.

In the end, we met with six women, all of whom had been active in getting land in their names. They had come to the ZBA demonstration, and started the process of getting land in their names after that. The group reported having been inspired by one of their members who had been widowed, and who had had a tough time in life after that. They all felt that she would have had a better life if she had owned land in the first place. We asked them if land was a worthwhile asset, given that Kutch faces drought three years out of five. They responded unanimously that it made sense, because even two years' good harvest out of that three makes a very big difference in feeding their families over the entire five-year period.

It was interesting to note that, while women had wanted – and obtained – land in their own names, and said that they would at some point transfer land into the names of their daughters-in-law, they were not keen on giving land to their daughters. The reason they gave was that their daughters would be married outside their villages, so there was no point in giving them land, as they would not be able to till it, or look after it in any way. Even if the parents were to look after the land, they reasoned, the in-laws might use it as an excuse to create problems. So they were not willing to explore the idea of giving their daughters land.

We queried this: why would they not give their daughters land, given how precious land was? All the women wore gold jewellery (valued at up to Rs.50,000 (\$1250) by them) all the time. They assured us that they would give their daughters gold as a gift, equal to the amount of land that they would give their sons. However, when asked how useful the gold was for them, they said that while it was a kind of fall-back option, land was really what they wanted, since it could bring them income in the long term. After this discussion, the women finally relented, saying that they would consider the question of giving daughters land more seriously, and discuss it with their families.

Giving gold is more culturally acceptable than giving land to a daughter. When a daughter is going to her in-laws' house, it is important that she is seen to conform to existing social norms. So even if the family were rich, giving land would be seen as crossing a line even though both land and gold can be seen as merely economic resources. Land is seen as a means of sustaining life and it could be construed as an insult; as if the in-laws were not able to sustain the daughter who was coming to them. Therefore, while women are willing to violate some social norms and take such risks

themselves or for their daughters-in-law, they would be very careful about the message that they would give while taking such a step with their daughters.

Group Four: Owning land brings self-respect

The fourth group we met with was in Sukhpar village, Rapar *taluka*. It consisted of eight women, all belonging to the Ahir caste. Ahirs are a politically powerful community who keep cattle and are businessmen in the cities. All the women we met had taken part in the ZBA. The NGO Cohesion had been working in this area since the earthquake of January 2001, building up women's groups. Unfortunately, in these areas, the land measurement and allocation activities had not yet taken place. Thirty-four families have applied for land in the joint names of male and female heads of household, following the activities of supporters of ZBA from Sukhpar village.

Initially, the women in this group felt that as a first step they would be happy with land in joint names with their husbands. At least this way, they would be sure that the land would come to them in the event of their husbands' deaths. They were quite confident that as long as their husbands were alive, they would not have any problems. They reasoned that in their village, if there was conflict between husband and wife, the village intervened to sort out the issue. However, if the husband still insisted on getting married a second time, then the first wife got a share in the property, given in her name. Also, if a woman was willing to get married to a man with a disability, then the man's family would transfer property into her name. In this community, as in some others, the tradition of looking after widows, orphans, and other vulnerable people is very strong. In such a community, if women left alone were to try and earn a living, it would be an insult to the entire community, and would not be allowed.

However, the women in this group were clear that they want land in their own names. One of them said that as long as she was able to work and contribute, her family would look after her; however, once she became old or if she became disabled, they would ignore her, unless she had land in her name. For her, it was a form of insurance against old age. Another felt that she would be able to till her own land and grow sufficient food for her needs at least, reducing her dependency on others.

A third, Rambhiben, has been a widow for the last 30 years, and has a son. She has land, but it is still in her husband's name. She manages the land entirely, and is a little unhappy that the land is still not in her name. She is also worried that someone else will illegally transfer the land into their name. Cohesion's staff have been following up the paperwork with the district authorities. Cohesion staff told us that in their view, Rambhiben is very timid and was unable to talk to officials and take forward the work related to transferring the land in her name on her own. So she expressed the feeling that she has no one to take forward the case and then admitted that while the Cohesion staff were very helpful, she herself was unable to speak in front of the official involved. It did not help that the official concerned was a difficult person as well!

As a way of getting around the resistance of the men in the initial phases, one excuse that the women said they often gave was to tell their menfolk that they could only access government schemes, loans, and so on, if the land was in their name.

Case Study: Valiben Naagdan Ahir

Valiben became a widow at a young age. She has a daughter. When she was widowed, her brother invited her to come and stay with his family. However, since she had land in her name, she decided that she could raise her daughter by herself, without any support from others in her family. She leased out the land, as she was unable to till it herself, and was able to support her daughter and herself with that income. She told us: 'I had land in my name, and so I am able to live with self-respect'. She shares the produce from the land with her (now married) daughter. Her nephews on her husband's side consider themselves heirs to her property, and she agrees with them publicly. However, the land continues to be in her name, and she says that she will not transfer the land while she is alive. When asked if she would eventually give some of the land to her daughter, she said, 'To change the norms of society, a first step has to be taken', and left it at that.

The views of this group were interesting regarding intergenerational transfers of resources from mother to daughter. While the group saw the gender issues inherent in the issue of ownership of land in relation to themselves, they did not seem to feel that these issues, which would be faced by their daughters also, could be addressed by their own actions as mothers. They said they would not share the land with their daughters. They justified this by saying that the village would not allow a son-in-law to till land in their village. So, even if the land were to be legally owned by a daughter of the village, she would not be able to use it or own it in a 'social' sense. Like the other groups, they reasoned that they had, anyway, transferred resources of significant value to their daughters – in the shape of jewellery and embroidered clothes as part of the dowry. They did not feel that they owed their daughters any more than that, and pointed out that they would ensure some of the benefits of their own land ownership would go to daughters – they would definitely share the produce during a good year.

Group Five: Gaining independence will gain women respect

The fifth group consisted of representatives of a larger group of 100 women from Rapar *taluka*, who took part in the ZBA. They wanted land to be distributed to poor women first, before big corporations. The women felt that the state needs to allot land to poor landless families and the land should not be totally uncultivable, as that would push the poor into selling the land immediately, or leaving it fallow. These women have come together and have applied for land, and are waiting to see what steps the state will now take.

The district authorities have, as discussed earlier, initiated the task of measuring land in some of the western *talukas* of Kutch District, before allotting land. Yet in the

eastern *talukas*, including in Rapar, the measurement process has not even been announced as an intention, up to the time of writing. This has not discouraged the women, though, and they have gone ahead with their applications for land. In Rapar *taluka*, around 450 women will be applying for land. Already, 57 applications have been filed from this village. The women we spoke to are convinced that there is sufficient land available that could be allotted to them. They feel that owning land will increase their courage and self-respect, as it would end their economic dependence on others. They see this as potentially strengthening their bargaining power in marriage as it will help them to protest when their husbands try to beat them. They will also get more respect in society at large. This was summed up by Halimaben Dawood Sodha when she said that: 'If land or property is in women's name, then we feel secure and we get courage. Also, we would face less violence'.

Group Six: To survive in this world, women cannot trust men

The last group that we met was a group of nine elected women representatives in Mandvi *taluka*. The meeting started with a clear statement by one of the women, Lakkiben, that set the tone for the rest of the discussion. She stated that men cannot be trusted, and therefore women must have land and other property in their own names to survive in this world. Subsequently, we were surprised to learn that Lakkiben was in fact happily married with two daughters, and she had already given a share of her land to her daughters, even though they were married in villages outside her own. She was also unique in that she came to Mandvi town to sell her produce on her own, without her husband in tow.

This group had become active after the ZBA, though they had not participated in the *dharna*. They had motivated women in their own villages as well as in neighbouring villages to apply for land, and around 1,000 applications had been filed so far. The land had been measured out, but possession had not yet been handed over to the applicants. This group continues to pursue the matter actively through the elected representatives at the *taluka* and district levels, as well as through the district authorities. They felt that land ownership is essential for women as it ensures the security of the women as well as increases the respect that women get. While other forms of assets such as gold, houses, and so on were useful, land was the only asset that would give them regular returns. 'Land is our mother!' summed up Lakkiben.

One amongst the group, a Rabari woman, is a widow. She took part in the late stages of the discussion, clearly stating that she is glad that she has land in her name. While it is true that her male relatives take all major decisions with regard to the land for her, she felt that the fact that the land was in her name ensures some basic respect for her, and in particular leads her sons to treat her well. She had faced pressure to transfer the land directly to her sons after her husband's death. But she had not relented, and advised the others also not to give in on this issue.

This group again brought out the caste variations in land ownership, degree of control, and involvement of women in economic activities and family decisions.

Conclusions

Initially, we were hoping that we would be able to study the economic and political impact of land ownership on women following the ZBA. However, as we have said, none of the applicants have yet received land: the processes of attempting to gain possession are lengthy, and we will monitor their progress in future. A campaign such as the ZBA was useful in raising levels of awareness, but a lot of work still needs to be done to ensure that the state actually hands possession to women and men and they are able to get the benefits of that.

It was clear from the different awareness of the importance of land to women's lives that there needs to be some awareness-building before activist agendas emerge (Agarwal 2003). When we started the discussions, we were merely trying to understand what difference the ZBA had made to the women. However, we soon realised that the questions themselves triggered larger discussions within the group, and in a couple of cases led to further action by the group. While we did not anticipate this, (surprisingly), we feel that we could use this method consciously in future, initiating structured discussions within a group, and letting the group decide on future action through this process if they feel the need to do so.

Apart from the first group, all the other groups felt that legal ownership was the overwhelmingly important issue regarding women and land in Kutch. Issues of access, social ownership, *de facto* control, and so on, were all considered by the women we spoke as secondary to the issue of whether the land was actually in their names or not. Having their names on the land title meant more to them than just the economic benefits that it could bring. And they were all in agreement that no other asset could bring them the same sense of self-worth, security, or respect within the village.

However, it was very interesting that in apparent contradiction of this strong understanding, there was a reluctance among women to give land to their daughters, though they were quite willing to give land to their daughters-in-law. We have shown that this was in part due to pragmatic doubts about whether daughters who have moved away to marry could farm land they are given. But it is also due to concerns that in transferring land to their daughters, mothers would place them at risk of reprisals from in-laws who do not share a commitment to transferring land to women. The women who do this are taking the practical step of working within patriarchy. Does this matter, we wondered? Perhaps we were being guided merely by logic and idealism.

The need for awareness-raising need not stop civil-society organisations or the state from going ahead and ensuring legal ownership of land to women as part of economic

upliftment programmes, as announced by agencies such as the *Gujarat Aarthik Mahila Vikas Nigam* (Gujarat Women's Economic Upliftment Corporation), and the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, who provide training and loans on agriculture but not the means to own land. On our own part, the next step for the Panchayat Knowledge Centre of KMVS will be to translate this article into Gujarati, and share it with all the respondents. The Centre has already initiated steps to start working with 15 poor women who will be allotted land (through the process discussed in the article) in order to ensure that they are able to till the land and profit from the process so that they do not give up the land under duress.

The process of structured discussion that proved useful in raising consciousness amongst the elected women representatives will be continued with the forum of elected women representatives in the other *talukas* as well. In addition, the women's collectives associated with KMVS will initiate similar discussions in selected village-level self-help groups, where they feel that the participants are ready to take up issues related to property rights.

Finally, this article will be also discussed in a brainstorming session within KMVS, and the Working Group of Women and Land Rights Organisations in Gujarat (WGWLO) to generate more ideas and formulate a strategy for the next three years.

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Notes

- 1 'Wastelands' is a classification of land by the Revenue Department, with some of it still suitable for cultivation.
- 2 www.censusindia.gov.in (last checked by authors October 2007)
- 3 A *taluka* is an administrative unit in India. Kutch district is made up of ten *talukas*.
- 4 From 1987 on, the Gujarat government's policy has been that all land and property allotted by the state will be given in the joint names of the female and male heads of household.

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