

Workshop on ‘Right to Homestead Land for Landless Labourers in Bihar’

Deshkal Society in partnership with FES organised a workshop on ‘Right to Homestead Land for Rural Landless Labourers in Bihar, on 28th July 2012 at Hotel Patliputra Ashok, Patna. The workshop was scheduled for two sessions: First session deliberated on ‘Right to Homestead Land for Rural Landless Labourers: Nature and Magnitude of the Problem’, and the second session reflected on ‘Government Policies and Programmes on Right to Homestead Land: The Current Status of Implementation.



Initiating the first session, Mr. Sanjay Kumar, Secretary, Deshkal Society, welcomed all participants and introduced the themes of the workshop. He briefly narrated the status, achievements and gaps in providing homestead land to landless populace. Also, he detailed the findings of the report published by Deshkal Society on ‘Right to Housing and Homestead Land in Rural Bihar: Status, Issues and Challenges’.

Further, Mr. Sanjay Kumar invited Sri Jitan Manjhi, Minister for Department of SCs and STs Welfare, Government of Bihar to inaugurate the workshop. While inaugurating the workshop, the minister was candid enough to admit that providing homestead land to every landless person is an enormous task, and it requires sustained energy and focus



to resolve the problem. He emphasised the need for inter departmental cooperation, involving Department of SCs and STs Welfare, Department of Revenue and Land Reform, and Board of Revenue. He welcomed initiatives taken by Deshkal, and encouraged all involved organisations to conduct surveys and develop a structured action plan – based on surveys’ findings – and submit it to the Chief Minister so that the efforts in this direction can be expedited. He was confident that endeavours from all corners, including his own department will achieve the cherished goal of providing homestead land to every landless family.

In his chair's address Dr. Praveen Sinha outlined the role of his organisation – FES, India – in this project and how it supports the cause. He, further, stressed on the magnitude of the problem and asked for both people and institutional support to realise the goal of providing homestead land to every landless family.

Concluding the first session Mr, Sanjay Kumar thanked the minister and the chair for lending moral and technical support to the project.

The second session began after a short tea break. Main speakers for this session were Mr. Kapileshwar Ram of Prayas Gramin Vikas Samiti, Mr. Baleshwar Prasad of Prakhand Gram Swaraj Sabha, Gaya, Mr. Pradeep Priyadarshi of Pragati Gramin Vikas Samiti, and Mr. Satyanarayan Madan, an eminent scholar-activist. The session was moderated by Dr. Manoj Kumar Tiwary.



Mr. Kapileshwar Ram in his address recounted the historical perspective with respect to the homestead land problem and held institutional tardiness accountable for the slow progress and accumulated bottle necks. He underlined the need for a comprehensive survey to determine the extent and seriousness of the issue. In the end, he demanded that there should be conformity between thoughts and actions.

Session's second speaker, Mr. Baleshwar Prasad, highlighted the inherent paradox that remains unresolved for the beneficiary. According to him, a number of people, who have been provided homestead land, have later sold it to other people and regained the ignominious status of people without home. He placed emphasis on the linkage between livelihood support mechanism and provision of homestead land so that economic distress does not force beneficiaries to sell their acquired homestead land.

Mr. Pradeep Priyadarshi, our third speaker, drew attention to the relation between homestead land and dignity and identity. Without the provision of a land which can be owned and developed as home, a person's dignity is always questionable and hinders his/her further development. And this is everybody's human right to claim one's participation in resources and endowments of nature, he concluded.

Session's last speaker, Mr. Satyanarayan Madan, believed that there is a need for all-round democratic development in this regard. Conflict and discontent are generated by the denial of people's democratic rights. And, right to live in dignity by owning a patch of homestead land is one such right. Further, he pointed out that we should have different parameters for different regions with respect to homestead land. Bihar's different regions have different

ecological and demographic profiles and these must be taken into account if we want provision and retention of homestead land at a sustainable basis. Concluding his address he deplored that the issue of homestead land is still far away from mainstream developmental agenda. There is a need to bring it to the fore, he stressed.

A lively discussion among speakers and audience ensued immediately. It was obvious from the discussion that almost all participants have grassroots experiences on the issue, and difficulties they observe and encounter in this regard. Most were of the opinion that we should stick to the main agenda, i.e. provision of homestead land to landless people, which is already earmarked and decreed by the state government.

Summing up the workshop, Mr. Sanjay Kumar said that the issue of right to homestead land is still a long way to go to be settled completely, and there is a need to stay focussed and determined. For this, institutional initiative and support are paramount and critical. This can be achieved, he further said, through advocacy and liaison with government, including the Chief Minister as suggested by the Minister of SCs/STs Welfare, and all involved stakeholders. On the ground, he observed that there is a need to prioritise what is deliverable but has been withheld due to lack of resources and commitment on behalf of lower rung of the bureaucracy. Some sustained concrete action in rural Bihar will benefit thousands of homeless people if documents related to regularisation and legal entitlement of homestead land can be handed over to concerned people. On the back of this achievement, he reiterated, we need to replicate and expand it further to all regions and population segments that have every right to own a piece of homestead land. Concluding the workshop, Dr. Tiwary thanked all speakers and participants for affording their valuable time and sharing their precious thoughts with everybody.

