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The Word on Women - PHOTO BLOG: Rural Indian women join forces to acquire land rights

By Nita Bhalla | Wednesday at 3:59 PM | Comments (0)



Geeta Senma, 45, a rural, low caste Indian woman talks about her struggle to acquire land rights and start a farm cooperative with other women from Ganeshpura, her village 80 km (50 miles) northwest of Ahmedabad city. In rural India, an estimated 15 million families are both poor and landless, says Landesa, an international charity working on land rights in the developing world. While some are headed by women, deep-rooted traditional views have meant that often wives, daughters and mothers lack legal entitlements and inheritance rights.

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A sign displays the name of one of the fruits being grown by the Ganeshpura Vanalakhsmi Cooperative, a venture started by rural Indian women in Ganeshpura village. The cooperative, which began in 1991, has increased the incomes of the women by more than thirty times, improving their food security and allowing them to send their children to school, but most importantly giving them a sense of identity and respect in their community.





Women from the cooperative work on their plantation which grows a range of crops from wheat and aubergines to apples and lemons. The 10-acre plot has boosted their incomes dramatically and improved their quality of life, although they faced many barriers in acquiring the land due to strong patriarchal views which discriminate against women.



Senma hacks weeds from her maize crop in Ganeshpura. She is one of 55 women in the village who fought to acquire land for their cooperative despite social and discrimination by villagers and officials who were reluctant to let the women empower themselves.





Rural women process and pack spices and staples grown by cooperatives set up by the Self Employed Womens' Association (SEWA), India's largest and oldest female trade union. The trade union aims to organise women to help them gain full employment and reliance. It also provides a guaranteed market for its more than 100 cooperatives -- which produce everything from tea in Assam to turmeric in Gujarat -- through its own marketing company which is procured directly from farmers and processed, packed and sold by rural women.

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