

Potential for Using Khas land in Eradicating Extreme Poverty in Bangladesh

Key Policy Messages:

- Access to land is a critical success factor in helping households escape from extreme poverty.
- Households with *khas* land have multiple sources of income, and can earn and save more.
- Khas land can act as a mitigation strategy against shocks, and helps develop local leadership.

Process improvements:

- All *khas* land (agricultural, non-agricultural and water bodies) should be clearly identified, marked and classified, and an accurate list made public.
- Simplify the process of registration for the extreme poor.
- Maintain balance in the distribution committees, to ensure transparency and an intolerance of bribery, patronage, and nepotism.
- Recover all illegally occupied *khas* land.
- Speed up the transfer process.
- Provide support to the extreme poor *khas* land recipients to help them maximise the return from the land, and not feel burdened by it.
- Create a “Watch-dog” and ombudsman body to oversee the process.

This policy brief explores to what extent *khas* land contributes to making positive changes in the lives and livelihoods of extreme poor households in Bangladesh. It also expands on the problems of *khas* land distribution among the landless extreme poor households in the country based on experience from EEP/Shiree. It is designed to be read in conjunction with EEP’s 2011 policy brief which calls for the simplification of the *khas* land process.

Evidence suggests that *khas* land, if distributed properly, can benefit extreme poor households come out of extreme poverty. The experiences of EEP/Shiree confirm this. However, this is not automatic: having access to *khas* land by the extreme poor is a complex process, and retention and use is also not easy. Extreme poor households need to be supported throughout the application process and beyond to ensure they can use land resources effectively.



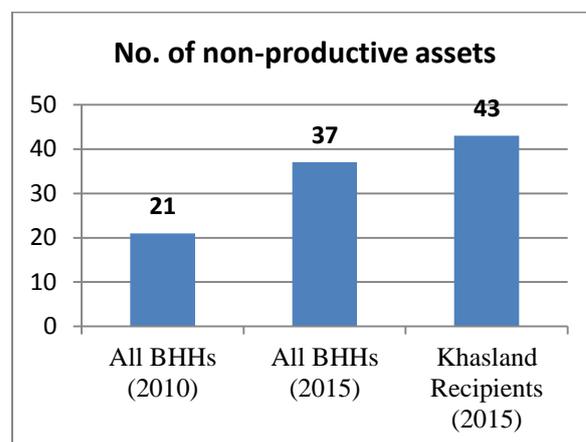
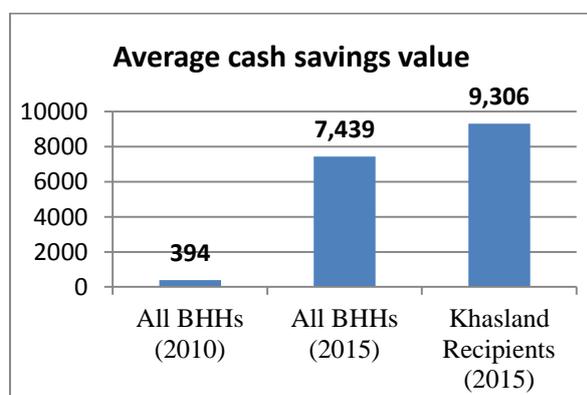
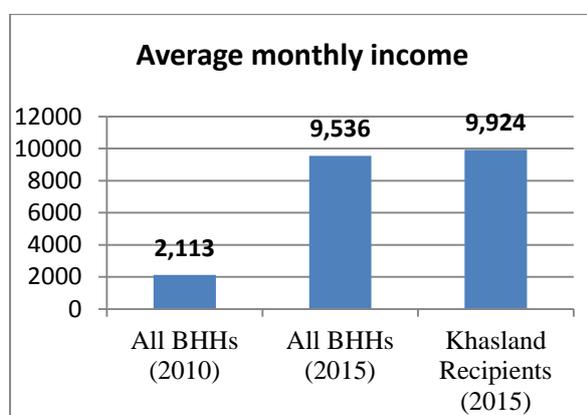
How does Khas land help overcome Extreme Poverty?

Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in reducing poverty (both moderate and extreme) and achieving social progress. However, over 20 million people still live in extreme and long-term poverty in Bangladesh.

The Seventh Five Year Plan document of the Government of Bangladesh has rightly pointed out additional measures to address extreme poverty including replication of micro successes of targeted livelihood programmes which have been very successful at helping households move out of extreme poverty.

Research from EEP shows access to land is an important factor to help extreme poor households come out of extreme poverty.

EEP/Shiree CMS-3 data confirms that beneficiary households (BHH) with access to *khas* land are better-off compared to other BHH without: extreme poor households with access to *khas* land earn more, save more, accumulate more assets, and have access to better sanitation facilities.



A 2014 study on effectiveness of access to *khas* land found the following benefits:

- Households receiving *khas* land have multiple sources of income.** At least one of these sources is based on the land, the other can be a business run from home.
- Khas land helps build resilience:** as men and women can work together, this can mitigate the negative and long term impacts of shocks, and in some instances help recovery.
- Access to *khas* land led to the development of leadership** and new forms of organisation in the villages: recipients motivated the landless, organised community movements to help access land, and campaigned against land grabbers.
- Improved identity in society.** Access to land facilitates community interaction through improved status and creates better market opportunities.

A 2007 study on effects of land ownership on psychological well-being of poor farmers reveals that the mean happiness scores of landless, share-croppers and *khas* land recipients are 0.43, 2.00 and 7.06, respectively. Mean comparisons shows that the *khas* land recipients have expressed significantly more happiness than the landless respondents.

Is access to *khas* land a “Magic Bullet”?

Although several studies show that access to *khas* land helps extreme poor households, if it is not accompanied by necessary support, it can be burdensome for the extreme poor recipients. Key challenges identified from a 2011 study are below:

1. **Generating and protecting the gains for those with low quality, under-sized, or isolated land is difficult.** It depends on the strength and functionality of the extra-household networks: the more non-functional or ‘exploitative’ the relationship, the less successful the household.
2. **Female-headed households are not as successful as their male counterparts.** This is due to smaller networks and less influence over prices of crops, which has a negative impact on their ability to make better use of their assets.
3. **Lack of knowledge, skills, negotiation / bargaining power, and access to government services limits success.** The extreme poor may lack capacity or confidence to gain support from government in order to use the full potential of their land.
4. **Investments in IGAs don’t maximise the potential income from the land.** Better support is needed to ensure these investments are made at the right time and in the most appropriate way.

Ensuring access and retention of land is not enough: a study in 2000 found that 50

percent of the recipients’ social and economic status has improved, but it created many new problems such as, mental stress, and strained relationships with the local community, influentials, and officials.

Additional challenges in the distribution and retention of *khas* land

Lack of accurate inventory of *khas* land available with the government. Generally, people are not aware of the available *khas* land in their respective areas. Households can incur costs applying for land that has not been classified correctly, and their application is rejected.

The enlistment process is opaque, and dependent on good relations. Many households are unaware of the registration process; furthermore if households do not have good relations with local government representatives, it is difficult for them to be enlisted, and they may even be evicted from the *khas* land for which they are applying for title.

Illegal occupancy following transfer. Illegal occupants use all manner of deceptions to occupy the *khas* land, such as false documents, coercive power, or refusal to surrender it.

Turnover of Government staff and limited resources. Transfers of local level government officials slow down the process. Limited manpower is an additional factor.

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