

What is extreme poverty?

Extreme poor households exhibit a high degree of chronic and severe deprivation. Their low income is linked to a lack of employment and secured shelter, low literacy rates, inaccessibility to credit and social safety nets, basic services and low community involvement and participation in decision-making. Among the extreme poor, there is a disproportionately high number of elderly, disabled, female headed households and minority groups.

The official Cost of Basic Needs (CBN) poverty measure in Bangladesh has an 'upper' (moderate) and a 'lower' (extreme) poverty line. The latter defines people whose total expenditure is equal to the 'food poverty line' (the cost of a basket of goods amounting to the consumption of 2,100 Kcal per person day) as extreme poor. A calculation in HIES 2005 equated this with an income of BDT 25 per person per day in urban areas and BDT 23 in rural areas.

According to HIES 2010, 17.5% of Bangladesh population is extreme poor approximately (25.1 million people).

What is khasland?

Khas or state owned land is land which the government is entitled to both lease and give away to citizens of the country who do not own land.

“Identification and management of khasland (state owned land) and water bodies, distribution of the same to the landless and poor people, retention of such land and water-bodies by the landless, and pertinent rules and practices within the prevailing social-political context of Bangladesh constitute prime issues of agrarian reform.

— Dr Abul Barakat, Economist

Khasland for the Poorest - Simplify the Process

Key Recommendations for National Govt

- 1) Simplify the khasland attainment process – simplify the form, reduce the number of steps, streamline the process and improve access to information.
- 2) Identify other land which could be categorised as khasland (eg water bodies) and map this out carefully.
- 3) Include new categories of people who can claim khasland – one such category should be 'the Extreme Poor' – which should also include widows without sons, disabled people, adivasis, etc.
- 4) Prevent khasland grabbing by elites.
- 5) Create mechanism to provide agricultural, economic and legal aid support to khasland recipient.

Key Recommendations for Local Govt

- 1) Activate the upazila/district khasland distribution committees (and set up in areas where they don't exist).
- 2) Re-evaluate who should be on the committee and once again include NGOs with long track records in the community.
- 3) Clarify the role of Union Land Offices and give them the clear responsibility to prepare applications and maps of the specific plots of khasland to distribute.
- 4) Improve accuracy of targeting - collaborate with NGOs to identify the neediest members of the community.
- 5) Digitise land records at the local level.

The extreme poor people of Bangladesh suffer because of an inefficient system of khasland distribution which deprives them of access to resources that have been committed to them.

Shahidul Islam, Director of Uttaran* says, “Bangladesh has 3.3 million acres of khasland and 6-7 million landless households. It is possible to give each landless household 0.50 acres of khasland with which to generate an income and climb out of poverty.”

If all of Bangladesh's khasland is quickly distributed to the extreme poor and if they are supported to make productive use of this land, significant steps towards MDG 1, i.e. - the eradication of extreme poverty can be made. The current land policies are fairly adequate and may not require extensive reform, however the process of applying and attaining the land needs systematic improvement.

* A shiree partner NGO working with landless extreme poor in the South-West region of Bangladesh



Providing khasland to landless people can be an effective means to reduce poverty in Bangladesh.

Application Challenge

The application process is rife with problems. Often acquiring the (khas jami) form is itself a challenge because many deputy commissioners' offices do not have copies. The form is complicated and most applicants are illiterate. The required supporting documents such as a landless certificate from UP chairman, photos and national ID card are difficult to obtain. Access to khasland information is difficult for the extreme poor. Furthermore, only five categories of landless people can apply, and often these categories are limiting. For example, women without able sons and disabled people, are not entitled to khasland.

The form needs to be simplified and made readily available, more categories of people to attain khasland need to be added and information about the process needs to be accessible to the extreme poor.

Processing Challenge

The transfer of khasland from the government to an individual is a complex, lengthy and non-transparent process. Currently an application passes through several government offices including the Union and AC land offices along with the sub-registrar's office and usually takes up to 6 months. A lack of coordination (and motivation) between these offices and their staff create delays. Additionally, old maps are used to identify khasland and a lack of proper records makes it impossible to categorise which land is available for transfer. Inconsistencies in land related data at the union, upazila and district level also makes it difficult to track and identify distributable land. The selection of beneficiaries to receive land is heavily influenced by local elites, thus muddying the process even further.

“Quite often the biggest challenge regarding khas land is distributing it, because that is when local elites get involved. Their influence is so great and powerful they need to be part of the process rather than opposing it.

— Abdul Khaleque, Project Coordinator, Uttaran, shiree project

There is a real need to streamline the process so that applications need not go back-and-forth between offices. There should also be fewer steps in the process. The next action involves digitisation of records so that offices can easily look up where land is available. Finally there needs to be greater transparency so that each applicant is treated equally and fairly.

Distribution Challenge

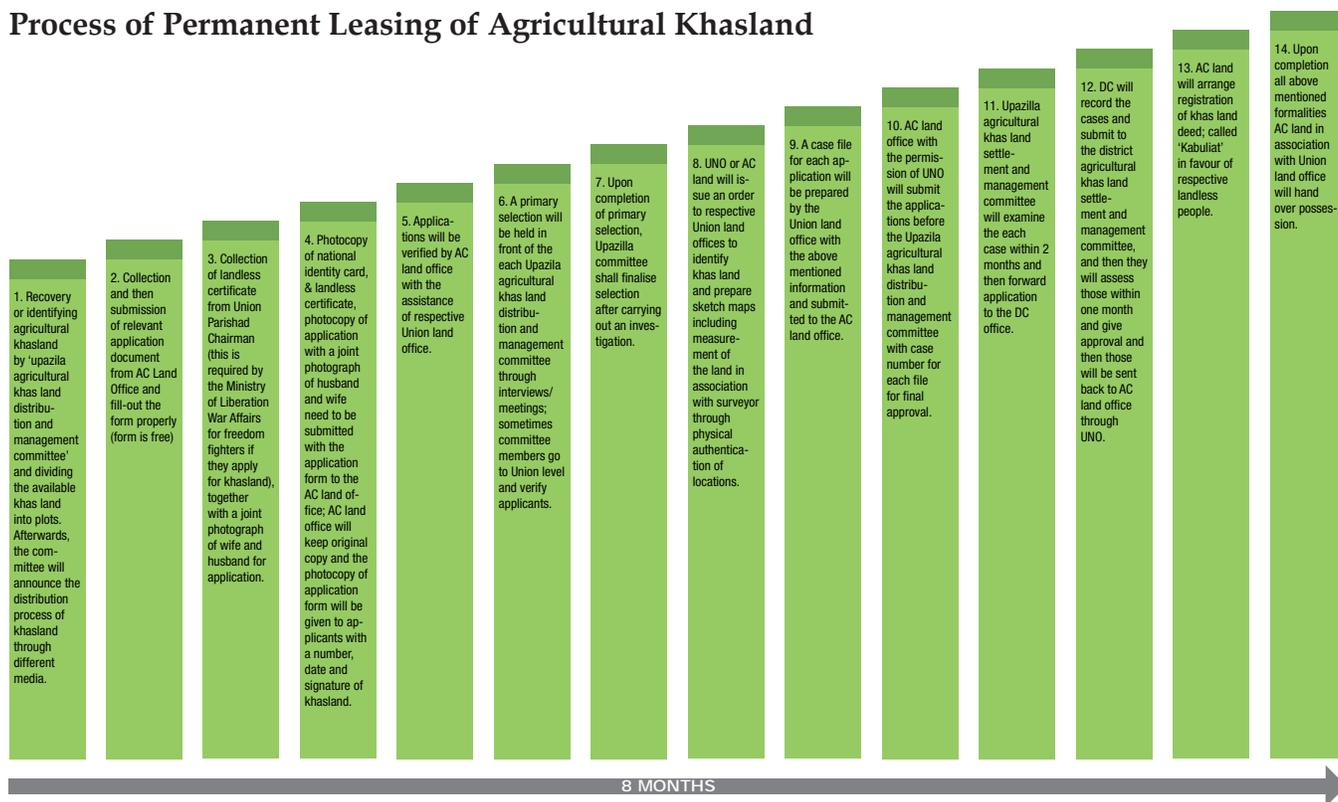
When it comes down to finally distributing khasland, there needs to be strong political will for the process to be free and fair. Current policies related to distribution are not clear and it is the extreme poor who suffer as a consequence. The problems start with the fact that many upazila and district khasland management and distribution committees have not even been informed of their role, so there is no way they can discuss which land to give to whom. Where committees include broad representation, including that of NGOs, they work better. This kind of arrangement is essential and should be introduced throughout the country, inviting NGOs who work with the extreme poor to participate.

NGOs can be helpful in identifying rightful candidates for khasland as they often spend great time and effort in targeting the extreme poor for their own projects.



Practical Action has shown how khasland can change the lives of landless people by producing pumpkins through the innovative sandbar cropping system on the barren bank of rivers.

Process of Permanent Leasing of Agricultural Khasland



Empowering the Landless

It took CNRS, a shiree partner NGO, 8 months of hard work and lobbying to attain 254 acres of khasland for 669 extreme poor households. The skills, knowledge and dedication of CNRS' staff was important to the whole process. First, in February 2010 staff secured sample application forms from the UNO and duplicated them 700 times. They then got 700 LLs and citizen certificates from UP members for their applicants and then helped them submit the formal application. Their work then included helping the AC land office and even liaising with local MPs. They then resolutely followed up the applications at upazila and district khasland management and distribution committees. Finally in September 2010, 101 deeds for the applicants were registered.

Mohammed Asadullah Rahman, a 29-year-old beneficiary of CNRS who attained khasland says, "Without their (CNRS) tireless work I would never have been able to get my share of land. Even with their help, the complicated process took a long time. I have started cultivating my 0.5 acres land and hopefully, if God wills, I will be successful."

Asadullah lives in Fenarbag and has 4 children. Before this project, he was jobless, assetless and landless, existing on occasional bits of charity from others.



"I never thought getting khas land would be easy, but I also never thought the very first step of filling out the form would eliminate me from the process. I can read and write a little but that form was just too much for me.

— Kushum Begum, a beneficiary of shiree-CNRS project

Other Challenges

Retention challenge: Retaining land is often just as hard as attaining it as local elites often muscle the extreme poor and take possession of their lands. There are other institutional retention problems as most of the khasland leases are only for one year thus making it difficult to retain. Leases need to be for longer durations, and more plots need to be distributed on a permanent basis.

Making productive use of the land: The extreme poor often lack the skills to make best use of their land and as such need support. Currently the National Agriculture Policy put forward by the Ministry of Agriculture states that it aims to “protect interests of the small, marginal and tenant farmers,” and as such could develop specific programs customised to help khasland tenants.

Gender sensitive distribution: Women are noticeably isolated in this process if they do not have able bodied men to support them. shiree-Uttaran research shows that female headed households face additional barriers when accessing markets and getting fair prices for their products.

Those who receive khasland need agricultural, economic and legal aid support because often attaining the land is just the tip of the iceberg. Securing land is important but making produc-

tive use of the land is the route which may enable extreme poor households build a stronger and more sustainable livelihood.

Role of Non-Government Stakeholders

NGOs: NGOs around the country have an important role to play in raising awareness. They need to sensitise the extreme poor on the khasland transfer process and their rights. They could also sensitise local land offices dealing with the extreme poor. They can help khasland recipients make productive use of their land by fostering market linkage, capacity building and crop insurance and bank loan facilitation. Accurate targeting and registering of more vulnerable people into khasland distribution programmes along with mainstream agricultural programmes would also be helpful.

Media: Media may highlight the issue of khasland and its distribution while focussing on the human side of the story.

Local elites: Local elites should understand that it is in their best interest that the extreme poor get access to khasland. They can be instrumental in preventing land grabbing and helping the extreme poor make productive use of their land. Key people need to be identified and put on village advisory committees.

Banks: Banks may be encouraged to provide small loans and crop insurance.

“I have been able to provide many families with land, but the process is still long and complex. So, effort needs to be made to make the process of attaining land easier for the extreme poor.

-- Md. Asaduzzaman, Assistant Commissioner, Land, Paikgacha, Khulna

We are the poor people, nobody looks after us. After receiving khasland, now I can look after myself and the future looks good. Every day is a battle, but at least now I can feed my family three meals a day.

-- Md. Ashraf Huda, a shiree-Uttaran beneficiary



Income is blooming like the flower among landless people after attaining khasland permanently.

Resources:

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About shiree

The Economic Empowerment of the Poorest programme is a partnership between the UKaid and the Government of Bangladesh to achieve the United Nations Millennium Development Goal 1 - to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger - by stimulating household improvements resulting in economic empowerment (shiree). shiree is also the Bangla word for 'steps', reflecting the approach of the programme to create economic opportunities that allow households to climb out of extreme poverty. shiree works with NGOs around the country and creates learning and advocacy platforms to build and share knowledge about extreme poverty. www.shiree.org



from the Department for International Development

