

The right to shelter

An evaluation of
the land transfer
programme to
Mahadalits in Bihar

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May 2016

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PROJECT REPORT

Hemanshu Kumar & Rohini Somanathan

May 2016

1 Introduction

India has witnessed high rates of economic growth for the past two decades. However, it has struggled to ensure that the benefits of growth reach the most vulnerable sections of its citizens. “Strong inclusive growth” has been a primary policy imperative of the government of India in recent years (Planning Commission, Government of India, 2013, p. vii), and many social welfare programmes have sought to target historically disadvantaged groups such as the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). However, how these benefits are distributed *within* these groups is poorly understood.

This project is part of a larger research agenda which attempts to understand inequalities within groups that are recognised as disadvantaged by the Indian state. Our specific focus is the set of groups labeled as *Mahadalits* by the Government of Bihar, who are a subset of the SCs in the state. We are particularly interested in whether programs for Mahadalits suffer from the same problems as past attempts at equalising opportunity through affirmative action.

Since 2010, the government of Bihar has initiated several programmes with the aim of uplifting the socio-economic status of Mahadalits. In a previous IGC project, *Evaluating the effects of targeted transfers to ‘Mahadalits’ in Bihar*¹ we collected primary data on over 2,400 households in 48 Pan-

¹ref no. CPR-INB-IGR-2012-CPP-34024

chayats spread across four districts in Bihar: Gaya, Gopalganj, Katihar and Nalanda. We used these data to examine whether the appointment of locally recruited *Vikas Mitras* ('development buddies'), whose main responsibility was to help households receive benefits from existing government transfer programs, significantly increased access. We found that households from the *Bhuiya* and *Musahar* castes, that are at the very bottom of both the ritual and economic hierarchy, benefited substantially in panchayats where the Vikas Mitra was drawn from their caste. This suggested that, even within the Mahadalits, caste divides remain salient.

During the course of that survey, we collected information on a variety of government welfare programs. The current project was designed to analyse these data systematically to understand the extent to which they were well-targeted and also to examine whether specific caste identity mattered for access within the broad community of Mahadalits. We decided to focus on a particularly radical program, namely that of land transfers to landless Mahadalit families. To obtain the information on landlessness necessary to implement the program, the Government of Bihar conducted a census of Mahadalit households across the state in 2009-10. This represented the first such exercise in recent decades. If these data are accurate, they provide a rich picture of the distribution of land among historically disadvantaged castes in Bihar.

The current project combines data from three sources. First, we have digitised a large amount of the official data on landlessness among Mahadalit communities from the afore-mentioned census, covering 19 of the 38 districts in the state. We use these to present data on inequalities among the Mahadalits from these districts.

Second, we matched households in our survey with these land census data for the districts of Gaya and Katihar. We use this sample of matched households to examine the extent to which land transfers went to the most disadvantaged castes and to the poorest households among them.

Third, we use official data on the beneficiaries of land transfer programs in Bihar. This has recently been compiled and made publicly available as part of "Operation Bhoomi Dakhal," a government campaign that aims to ensure that existing beneficiaries obtain possession of their land. We analyse this data for the 12 blocks in which we conducted our primary survey, and examine the trends in land transfers to vulnerable groups such as Mahadalit communities.

In the land distribution efforts of Bihar, we find a remarkable pivot towards some of the most vulnerable sections of the population in the period since 2010. Large numbers of women, Mahadalits, and within them, the most disadvantaged Musahar community were provided land in this period.

The Mahadalit Awas Bhoomi Yojana also appears to be fairly well-targeted and the program seems to have adhered to the eligibility criteria announced. Among these matched households, we also find that households receiving land were on average poorer, as defined by durable good ownership, food security and specific consumption expenditures. In addition, the government did follow through on its commitment to provide landless households both land and shelter in the sense that most households receiving land were also provided funds for construction under the *Indira Awas Yojana*. These household were not generally given preferential treatment under other government schemes. For example, the fractions receiving PDS transfers, social security pensions or school uniforms was generally lower for this group than for other households.

Section 2 describes the composition of the Mahadalits. Section 3 provides some background information on land transfer programs in Bihar, especially the *Mahadalit Awas Bhoomi Yojana*, which is covered in section 3.2. Section 4 describes the data from the official Mahadalit census of 2009-10 that we digitised. We then describe our primary survey in section 5, and discuss how we matched households between the two data sets. We look at overall time trends in land transfer programs in our survey region using data from Operation Bhoomi Dakhal in section 6. In section 7, we use the households matched between our survey data and the Mahadalit land census to draw some suggestive conclusions on how well the Mahadalit Awas Bhoomi Yojana was able to target its intended beneficiaries. Section 8 looks at whether beneficiaries have been able to translate land titles into actual possession of land. Section 9 concludes.

2 Mahadalits in Bihar

In September 2007, the Government of Bihar set up the Bihar State Mahadalit Commission, and tasked it with identifying the most disadvantaged among the Scheduled Castes of the state. In addition, the Commission was asked to give suggestions for ways to improve the educational and social status of the Mahadalits. (Bihar State Mahadalit Commission, 2007, p. 1)

The Commission relied on demographic data, as well as data on educational attainment and occupational status from Census 2001, on its own visits to various parts of Bihar, as well as on letters and representations made to it by various civil society organizations to formulate its recommendations. In its first interim report submitted in November 2007, the Commission recommended that 18 of the scheduled castes of Bihar should be considered extremely oppressed and designated as ‘Mahadalit’,

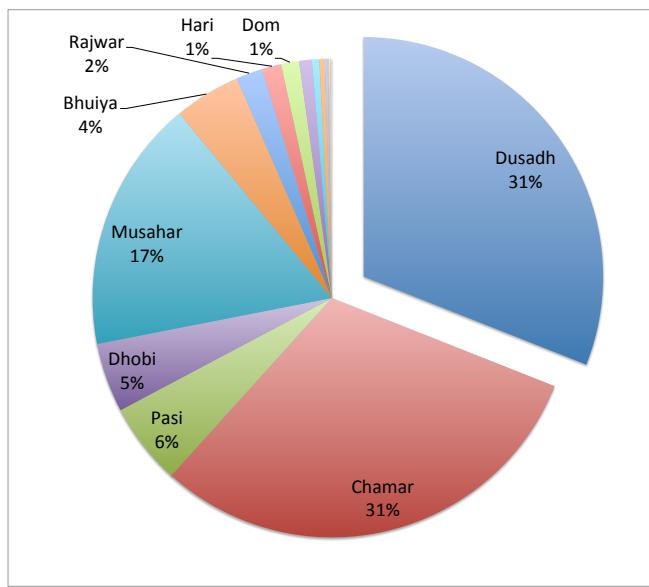


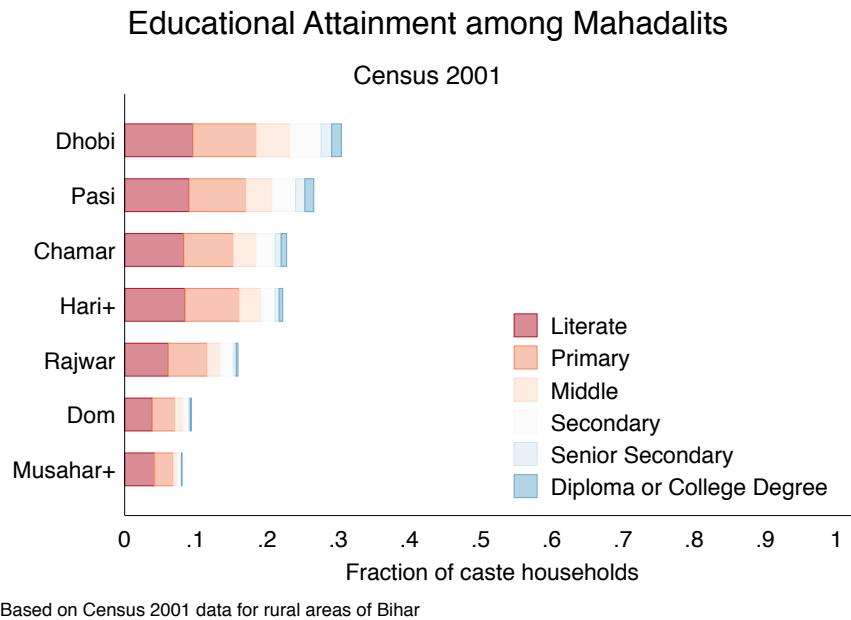
Figure 1: SC Population Composition in Bihar: Census 2011

thereby excluding four large castes, the Dusadhs, Chamars, Pasis and Dhobis. (Bihar State Mahadalit Commission, 2007, p. x) As per Census 2011, these 18 castes comprise just over 28% of the scheduled caste population of Bihar. In its next interim report submitted in April 2008, the Commission recommended including the Pasis and Dhobis in the list of Mahadalits, and in November 2009, on the basis of the third recommendation of the Commission, the government of Bihar also designated the Chamars as Mahadalits.

Thus, at this time all Scheduled Castes (SC) except the Dusadhs (in other words, about 69% of the state's SC population) are designated as Mahadalit. Figure 1 illustrates the caste composition of the SCs in Bihar, as per the latest Census of India data.

The individual scheduled castes in Bihar can be quite different in their socio-economic status. By several measures, the Musahars, Bhuiyas and Doms fall at the lowest end of the hierarchy within the scheduled castes. As per Census 2011, while the average literacy rate for all scheduled castes in Bihar is just under 49%, the corresponding numbers for each of these castes are under 30%. While just under 70% of all scheduled caste main workers in Bihar are agricultural labourers, this is true of 80.4% of Bhuiyas and 87.2% of Musahars.

The ethnographic evidence confirms a picture of enduring hierarchy. Singh, (2008b, p. 703) regards the Doms and Musahars as “the two most backward castes among the scheduled castes.” Of the major scheduled castes, Singh, (*ibid.*, p. 760) notes that the “Pasis are ranked above the Chamar, Bhuiya, Dusadh, Dhobi, etc.” It is also notable that Pasis are locally known as Chaudhary [p. 759], an



honorific. Indeed, they have access to village water resources as well as entry to temples. [p. 764] In comparison for instance, Singh, (2008a, p. 217) notes that the Chamars are not allowed to share community wells or enter village temples, and this is also the case for Dusadhs. [p. 305] On the other hand, Bihar State Mahadalit Commission, (2008) notes that most Dusadhs work as *chowkidars* or watchmen, due to which they have respect in society, and that people of smaller castes fear them. [p. 32]

If we focus on transactions in food, the Musahar stand out as especially low, considering that they “accept any kind of food and take water from all the Hindus” (Singh, 2008b, p. 703). In comparison, castes such as the Pasis, Chamars, Dusadhs do not accept water from castes of lower ritual status, such as the Doms. [pp. 217, 305 & 764]

Figure 2 below shows educational attainment levels across the major Mahadalit castes² using Census 2001 data.³ Remarkably, the rank ordering of castes in terms of educational levels has remained almost undisturbed throughout the post-Independence period in India.

²We retain all castes that form at least 1% of the total households in our Bihar Mahadalit census (2009-10) data.

³Tables on detailed educational levels for individual scheduled castes are not yet available for Census 2011.

3 Background: Land and Housing

Over the years, the Government of India has expressed serious concern over the problem of landlessness and lack of proper housing for the poor.

The Supreme Court of India has asserted that the “right to shelter is a fundamental right, which springs from the right to residence assured in Art. 19(1)(e) and right to life under Art. 21 of the Constitution.” (*UP Awas Evam Vikas Parishad vs. Friends Cooperative Housing Society Ltd.*, 1996 AIR 114).

In the Eleventh Plan (2007-12) documents, arguing that “the right to a roof over one’s head needs to be seen as a basic human right,” the Planning Commission noted that an estimated 13-18 million families in rural India were landless, of which 8 million lack homes of their own. It argued that one of the “key elements of an effective land policy” is the “security of homestead rights” (Planning Commission, Government of India, 2008, p. 28), and recommended that landless families be allotted 10-15 cents of land each, with a priority being given to female-headed households. (*ibid.*, p. 30)

The problem of landlessness is far more acute amongst the Scheduled Castes, not just compared to non-SC/ST households, but also in comparison to the Scheduled Tribes. Estimates based on the Land and Livestock Holdings Survey conducted as part of the 59th round of the National Sample Survey indicate that in India as a whole, over 56% of SCs do not own any land other than their homesteads, as compared to just under 38% for non-SC/STs and under 36% for STs. In Bihar, the severity of the problem among the SCs is much greater: over 72% of SCs are landless by this measure, as compared to 35% for non-SC/STs and only 22% for STs (Bakshi, 2008, p. 101).

Equally pressing is the problem of houselessness among the poor. The Working Group on Rural Housing for the Eleventh Plan estimated that the housing shortage for Bihar alone was over 4.2 million units (Ministry of Rural Development, 2007, p. 53), the largest shortfall by far compared to any other Indian state. In the Eleventh Plan documents, the Planning Commission also sought to emphasise provision of shelter to landless households through the government’s existing flagship rural housing programme, the Indira Awas Yojana. In this programme, the availability of a house site had traditionally been a prerequisite for being provided funds for house construction, “and thus, the very poor who do not have a plot of land get out from the purview of the scheme. ... Some 8 million of the 14 million houseless are actually those that have no land or live in homes located on land belonging to others (e.g. landlords, public land, etc).” (Planning Commission, Government of India,

2008, p. 95). Thus the Commission recommended that “[t]he focus of the IAY programme must be on the houseless (e.g., such communities as the Saharyas, Musahars, the so called de-notified tribes, those living on canal bunds or roads, and other such who are seen to be at the bottom of the ladder” (Planning Commission, Government of India, 2008, p. 95)

3.1 Land transfers in Bihar

There are several channels through which land has historically been redistributed by the government of Bihar:

- *Ghair Mazarua Khas / Malik* land (henceforth, GMK), which was the personal land of erstwhile *Zamindars* and was transferred to the government after the abolition of *Zamindari*. (Kumar et al., 2010, p. 6)
- *Ghair Mazarua Aam* land (GMA), which are essentially village commons collectively owned by the community. They include village pathways, waste land, village water bodies and irrigation channels, cremation and burial grounds, etc. (Das, 2014, p. 3)
- Ceiling surplus land, which is land acquired by the government under the Bihar Land Reforms (Fixation of Ceiling Area and Acquisition of Surplus Land) Act, 1961 (Bihar Act 12 of 1962) for distribution amongst the landless.
- *Basgeet parcha* (grants) issued under the Bihar Privileged Persons Homestead Tenancy (BPPHT) Act, 1947 (Bihar Act 4 of 1948). This Act was designed to give security of tenure over homestead land to tenants who had been customarily living on a landlord's (*raiyati*) lands. (Kumar et al., 2010, p. 34)
- *Bhoodan* lands voluntarily given by large landowners to the state for redistribution amongst the poor, under the Bihar Bhoodan Yagna Act, 1954 (Bihar Act 22 of 1954), in response to Acharya Vinoba Bhave's Bhoodan movement.

The following table provides a sense of the total land available in the state through each channel, and the cumulative number of beneficiaries who have been provided public lands. Over 2.3 million households in the state have received transfers of such land so far. That said, the table also makes

Table 1: Transfers of Public Lands in Bihar (as of March 31, 2013)

Type of land	Total Land ('000 acres)	Beneficiaries	Land distributed (per cent)
GMK	1,796.2	10,45,030	43.6
GMA	907.8	43,710	3.4
Ceiling surplus	363.4	3,50,374	75.1
BPPHT	NA	5,80,214	NA
Bhoodan	648.6	2,92,616	39.5

Source: Revenue and Land Reform Department, Government of Bihar.

As quoted in Das, (2014, pp. 65 & 209–213).

clear that for each channel, there is still a significant fraction of land that has not yet been distributed and is thus potentially available for future land transfers.

To enable land redistribution in places where public land is unavailable, the government has in recent years also notified policies to purchase land from farmers. This includes the Bihar *Raiyati* Land Purchase Policy of 2010 (see section 3.2 below) and the Purchase Policy for *Raiyati* Land under the Bihar Homestead Scheme, 2011. Both permit officials of the Revenue and Land Reform Department to purchase three decimals of land at a maximum cost of Rs. 20,000, to distribute to eligible beneficiaries.⁴

It is widely accepted, however that transfers of land titles has often not resulted in actual possession of land by the beneficiaries. To help remedy this problem, the government of Bihar launched *Operation Bhoomi Dakhal* in September 2014, ‘a time-bound campaign [that will] thoroughly investigate cases of land dispossession and ensure possession of land by title-holders with the assistance of the police administration as necessary.’ (Government of Bihar, 2014b, translation ours)

3.2 Mahadalit Awas Bhoomi Yojana

In its first interim report submitted in 2007, the Bihar State Mahadalit Commission underlined the right to shelter as a fundamental human right. It emphasised the importance of land and shelter for

⁴The Bihar Mahadalit Land Purchase Policy of 2010 was created to enable purchase of land for beneficiaries under the Mahadalit Awas Bhoomi Yojana (see section 3.2), while the latter policy was to similarly enable purchases under the Bihar Homestead Scheme, targeted at landless non-Mahadalit SCs, STs and OBCs.

the self-confidence, security, stability and identity of an individual, and noted that the most destitute Scheduled Castes often do not have proper shelter, nor land to build their own homes. The Commission recommended the distribution of at least 12-15 decimals of land to eligible Mahadalit families, using any existing available government or *Bhoodan* land, or if necessary, through procurement of land (Bihar State Mahadalit Commission, 2007, pp. 107-108, 141-142).

Responding to these recommendations, the Government of Bihar launched the Mahadalit Awas Bhoomi Yojana in 2008, with the aim of providing 3 decimals (*circa* 1300 square feet) of homestead land to landless Mahadalit families in rural areas.⁵ The Mahadalit Awas Bhoomi Yojana⁶ quickly rose to become one of the most significant programs managed by the Revenue and Land Reform department of the state. In its annual report for 2015-16, the department reported having provided a total of 7,284.8 acres of homestead land to 238,606 Mahadalit households all over Bihar, i.e. nearly 99% of the 241,745 targeted households. For the financial year 2016-17, the budgetary provision for the programme stood at over Rs. 20 crore, making it the single largest program under the charge of the department. (Government of Bihar, 2016, pp. 12-14)

As part of this programme, homestead land is provided to Mahadalits through four channels: (i) GMK land; (ii) GMA land; (iii) settlement of land under the BPPHT Act, 1947, and (iv) private *raiayati* land purchased under the Bihar Raiyati Land Purchase Policy, 2010. (Government of Bihar, 2012b, p. 247) As discussed above, the first two categories represent land administered by the government. The beneficiaries identified for transfers under these categories were either those who were already in possession of the land but did not have a title to it, or those who were to be settled on a new piece of government land. (Haque et al., 2012, p. 14) The third category consists entirely of Mahadalit families that were already residing on land given to them by a landowner, and to which they could be provided titles under the BPPHT Act. Finally, for those families that could not be provided either government land or titles under the BPPHT Act, the government planned to purchase private (*raiayati*) land chosen with the help of the beneficiaries. (*ibid.*, p. 17 & 20) All land provided under this programme is heritable; however it is otherwise non-transferable.

Of the four channels, transfers of *raiayati* land appear to be making the slowest progress, while transfers of GMK land and settlement of land under the BPPHT Act seem to be complete. As per the tally presented in its latest annual report, about 85% of the 50,095 families targeted for *raiayati* land

⁵As per Census 2011, about 92.6% of Mahadalits in Bihar live in rural areas.

⁶The program is often also referred to as the Mahadalit Vikas Yojana in government documents.

transfers were reported to have been provided the land. (Government of Bihar, 2016, p. 16)

4 Mahadalit Census Data

To identify landless households that should be targeted for land transfers, the Revenue and Land Reform department of the Government of Bihar conducted a census of Mahadalit households in the state in 2009-10. The survey included 10,380 villages spread across all districts of the state, and consisted of two parts: first, the collection of information on Mahadalit households; and the second, identification of nearby land, either government-owned or private, which could be transferred to landless Mahadalit families. (Haque et al., 2012, p. 5)

The household data collected in the census include information on

- the caste of the household
- whether the household possessed private land and a house
- the type of land on which the household was residing: GMK, GMA, someone else's private land, land settled under the BPPHT Act, or own *raiayati* land
- the source of funding for the house: private funds, Indira Awas Yojana or obtained as a donation
- the quality of the house structure: *kaccha* house made of mud, dilapidated, or *pukka*
- the name, age, gender and educational attainment of each household member

We were able to procure Mahadalit household data collected during this exercise, for 35 of the 38 districts in Bihar.⁷

Table 3 describes the coverage of the census data that we have digitised and systematised.⁸ Within

⁷The household level data collected by the Revenue and Land Reform department was obtained by the Bihar Mahadalit Vikas Mission (BMVM), to help identify beneficiaries for another government transfer program, the Mahadalit Radio Yojana. The BMVM was kind enough to let us access the data in their possession. This data was absent for three districts: Nawada, Supaul and West Champaran.

⁸We succeeded in doing this for 19 districts of Bihar. The data for the remaining 19 districts was beset with several problems; these include the presence of multiple data files covering overlapping households, internal inconsistencies in codes used for administrative units such as villages and panchayats, absence of geo-codes, absence of household identifiers to enable matching of household-level and member-level data, etc.

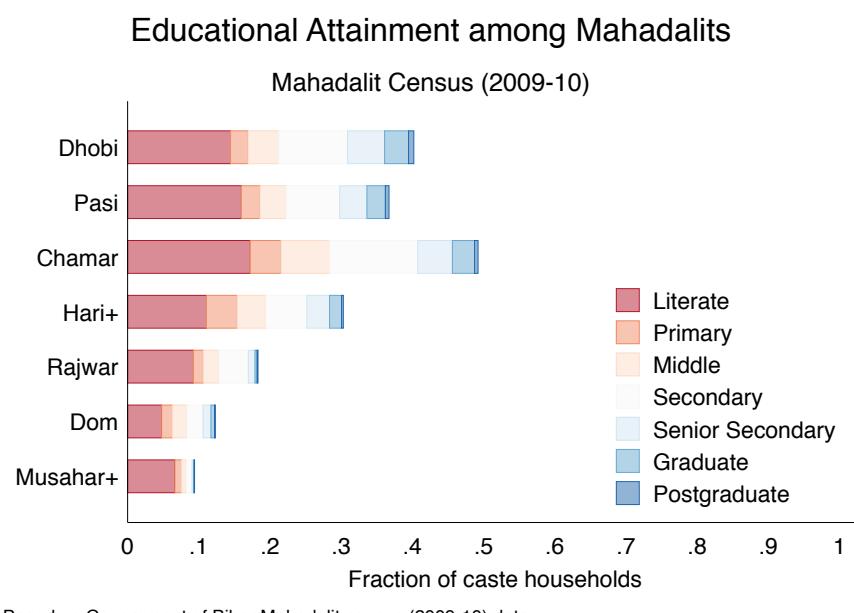
the 19 districts represented, there are at least three significant ways in which data appear to be incomplete.

First, as the table makes clear, many villages, panchayats, and even entire blocks are absent from the data. While some villages may be have been excluded due to the absence of any resident Mahadalits, this is unlikely to explain the majority of the missing data. Indeed, as we describe below, several of the villages where we surveyed Mahadalits in 2013 are absent from these data.

Second, information on individual family members is completely unavailable for 25% of the households in the data.

Third, in November 2009, the Government of Bihar expanded the list of castes designated as *Mahadalit* to include the Chamar community. The official orders to survey the Chamar community appear to have come when the Mahadalit census had already been completed in a number of districts. Consequently, while as per the Census of India 2001, Chamars are present in every district of Bihar, in the Mahadalit census, Chamars are listed in only 7 of the 19 districts for which we have thus far digitised data.

The figure below plots the maximum adult education levels for the numerically largest castes in the Mahadalit census data. The rank ordering of castes in terms of educational attainment is broadly in agreement with that in Figure 2. Once again, the the education levels of the Musahars and Doms are eclipsed by those of the Chamars, Dhobis and Pasis.



Where possible, we complement the Mahadalit census data with data collected during a field survey in 2013. The section below briefly describes that survey and our progress matching households between the two datasets.

5 Primary Survey Data

Starting in 2010, another major initiative of the Government of Bihar for the uplift of Mahadalit communities has been to appoint a *Vikas Mitra* in each panchayat of the state. Drawn from the numerically largest Mahadalit caste of the panchayat, the Vikas Mitra was envisaged as a “change agent,” a “link in the chain that reached the benefits of government programmes to Mahadalit families.” (Government of Bihar, 2012a, p. 22) Vikas Mitras have a range of responsibilities: spreading awareness about government programmes; helping potential beneficiaries to obtain and submit application forms, photos and certificates; assisting beneficiaries with opening bank accounts for government cash transfers, etc.

To understand whether these Vikas Mitras were able to improve access to government programmes, we conducted a field survey in four districts of Bihar in the spring of 2013. Our survey covered 2,423 households located across four districts: Gaya, Gopalganj, Katihar and Nalanda. In each district, we sampled 12 panchayats from three blocks, for a total of 48 panchayats. Panchayats were sampled so as to be heterogeneous in the numerically dominant caste, and households were drawn from the two villages with the largest SC populations in each panchayat. Households were stratified by caste, with three-fourths of the sample drawn from the three numerically largest Scheduled Castes of the sample village. The remaining sample included upper castes, and where numerically dominant, Muslims and Scheduled Tribe communities.⁹

Our final sample included a total of 1,364 households from the Mahadalit community. 40% of these households belong to the Chamar caste, 27% to the Musahars and Bhuiyas,¹⁰ 14% are Pasi, 8% are Dhobis, and the rest include the Turi, Hari, Rajwar, Nat and Dom.

We were able to match households in our primary dataset with the official Mahadalit census data for

⁹A detailed description of our sampling methodology can be found in the project report submitted to IGC in June 2013.

¹⁰We group the Musahars with the Bhuiyas because even though they are listed separately in Census of India documents, our fieldwork suggested that the two terms are often used interchangeably. Singh, (2008b, p. 702) cites Risley, (1891)'s opinion that the Musahars had branched out from the Bhuiya tribe of Chhotanagpur. Our survey work in Nalanda and Gaya districts found both groups often being termed as Manjhi.

two districts: Katihar and Gaya.¹¹

Our mileage between the two districts varied considerably. In Katihar, we were able to match 308 of the 380 Mahadalit households we surveyed with the official census data. In Gaya on the other hand, we were able to match only 71 of the 329 Mahadalit households we had surveyed.

Our matching relied extensively on the name, gender and age of household members available both in the Mahadalit census data and in the household roster of our survey. We did not expect to match all households, given that three years had elapsed between the Mahadalit census and our own survey, and not only lifecycle events such as marriages but also temporary migration can cause difficulties in tracking households.

Nonetheless, the very different success rates in matching households suggests that there may be systematic differences in the quality of Mahadalit census data between Gaya and Katihar. We discuss this in somewhat greater detail in section 7 below.

6 Land transfers over time

To give context to our primary data on land transfers to Mahadalits, we turn first to official data on land beneficiaries. As discussed in section 3.1 above, in September 2014 the government of Bihar launched Operation Bhoomi Dakhla to hasten the process of giving possession of land to extant beneficiaries of government land transfer programs. The lists of beneficiaries from the 1950s to 2014 were collected by the Revenue and Land Reform Department (in Report No. 1) and recently made publicly available. These data record the location (district, block, village), the name of the beneficiary, the amount of land provided, and the year in which land was distributed to each beneficiary.

In Table 2 below, we list the numbers of beneficiaries in the four districts in which we conducted our primary survey. Over the sixty years since Independence, more than 320,000 households in these four districts were provided land by the government. The channels through which land was provided varied considerably in importance across these four districts: while most transfers in Gaya and Nalanda were of Ghair Mazarua Khas (GMK) land, Bhoojan land was the most important channel by far in Gopalganj. In Katihar, the most common source was surplus land acquired by the government upon

¹¹For Gopalganj, the official data did not cover our sampled panchayats. The Nalanda data did not have information on family members, thus making it impossible to reliably identify the households that figured in our sample.

fixation of land ceilings in 1961.

Table 2: Total Beneficiaries of Land Transfers

District	Ceiling			Purchase			Total
	GMK	GMA	Surplus	BPPHT	Policy	Bhoodan	
Gaya	97,034	3,721	15,614	4,255	2,924	12,378	135,926
Gopalganj	6,381	228	1,578	6,835	0	62,927	77,949
Katihar	17,842	1,684	20,379	19,188	5,949	10,987	76,029
Nalanda	22,395	10,091	818	1,009	1,307	774	36,394
<i>Total</i>	1,43,652	15,724	38,389	31,287	10,180	87,066	326,298

Source: Revenue and Land Reform Department, Government of Bihar.

District-wise ‘Consolidated Report No. 1’ for Operation Bhoomi Dakhla.

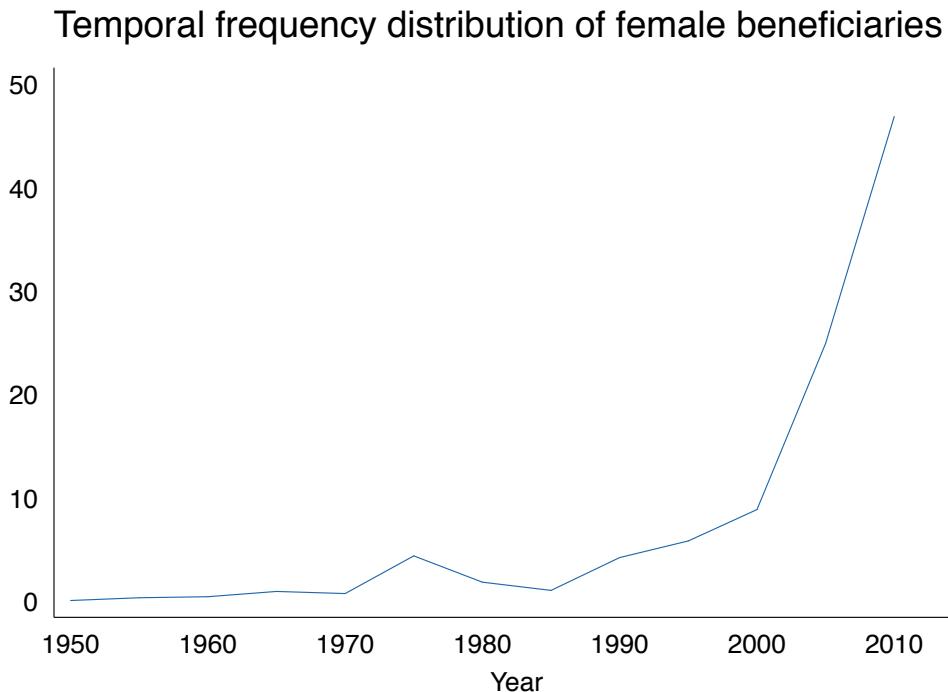
Gaya: 28/03/2016; Gopalganj: March 2016; Katihar: 28/03/2016; Nalanda: downloaded on 06/05/2016

We digitised data on individual beneficiaries for the 12 blocks spread over these four districts, in which we had conducted our primary survey. These data record land transfers to 41,366 households between 1957 and 2014. Of these, information on the year of the transfer is available only for 32,366 households. We use this information to understand the evolution of land transfers to specific groups over the years: in particular, to women and to specific *jati* groups. The published data do not separately record the gender or the caste identity of land beneficiaries. We infer this information from the name of the title-holder available in the data. Of necessity, we restrict ourselves to names that are uniquely associated with the community (caste or gender) of interest.¹² As a consequence, we are unable to accurately capture the entire set of beneficiaries of a given community, and this complicates comparisons of the numbers of beneficiaries across communities.

However for any community identified in this manner, comparisons of beneficiary numbers over time ought to be valid. Thus in the graphs below, for any given community, we normalize the total beneficiaries over the 1950-2014 period to 100, and present the temporal frequency distribution over the period.¹³

¹²For women, we search for words such as Devi, Bano, Bibi, Khatun, or for the word *pati*, i.e. husband. For *jati* communities, we utilise caste-specific family names. For instance, for Chamars this includes Ravidas, Mochi, Chamar; for Dusadhs, it includes Paswan and Dusadh; for Musahars, it includes Manjhi, Musahar, Mushahar, and Sada.

¹³To smooth the graph, we divide the data into five-year intervals. The horizontal axis on the graph records the lower end of the corresponding interval.



We start by focusing on gender. In Bihar, as in India as a whole, very little land is owned by women. One estimate suggests that only 12.8% of land parcels in Bihar are in the hands of women (Das, 2014, p. 3). In recent years, the state government has made efforts to redress this situation. In 2009 for instance, the Land Ceiling Act was amended to stipulate that 50% of the beneficiaries of ceiling surplus land must be women. In addition, titles to land are now issued in the joint name of the husband and wife, with the wife's name recorded first. (*ibid.*, p. 3). The official data suggests that these efforts are bearing fruit. The most recent period, i.e. 2010-14 accounts for nearly 47% of all female beneficiaries of land transfers since Independence.

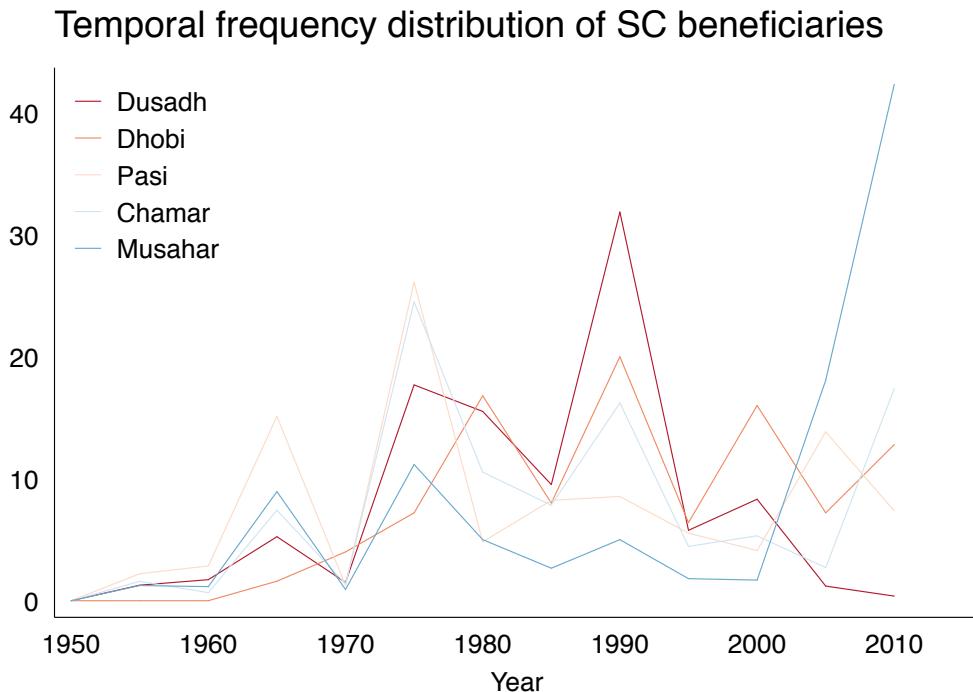
Turning to large caste categories, the next figure plots the temporal frequency distribution of households that we were able to identify as SC, ST or OBC.¹⁴ The official data show a remarkable pivot towards SC households in the recent period. Just over 24% of OBC beneficiaries received their land in 1975-1979, and less than 2% received it after 2010. More than 52% of ST beneficiaries received their land between 1995 and 2004, and under 3% received it after 2010. On the other hand, just under 24% of SC beneficiaries received their land in 2010-14, and this was by a wide margin the five-year period in which the largest number of them received land.

¹⁴SC households included those that we were able to identify as Dusadh, Dhobi, Pasi, Turi, Rishi, Dom or Musahar. ST households included those identified as Santhal or Oraon. OBC households included those identified as Mahto (Kurmi), Sah (Teli) or Yadav.

Temporal frequency distribution of beneficiary groups



Next, we report the temporal frequency distribution for land transfers to the largest SC communities. Of these, all except the Dusadh are included amongst the Mahadalits. Remarkably, we find that land distribution in the last ten years has pivoted strongly towards the Musahars, the community with the lowest socio-economic status within the major SC groups. The most recent 2010-14 period accounts for over 42% of Musahar beneficiaries since independence.



The official data thus suggests that land transfer programs in the most recent period have pivoted strongly towards the most vulnerable and dispossessed groups in Bihar: women, the Scheduled Castes, and within them, the Musahars. However, these data do not allow us to identify beneficiaries of our specific program of interest, the Mahadalit Awas Bhoomi Yojana. For this, we turn to our primary data in section 7 below.

7 Who Received Mahadalit Homestead Land?

Of the 1,364 Mahadalit households in our primary survey, only 67 households had received titles to homestead land under the Mahadalit Awas Bhoomi Yojana at the time we conducted the survey in the spring of 2013.

To explore errors of exclusion and inclusion in the implementation of this programme, we consider as eligible beneficiaries those Mahadalit households who are either currently landless, or received land titles and report total landholding no greater than the amount they received through this programme.

21 of the 67 beneficiary households (i.e. 31.3%) in our sample reported landholding in excess of what they received through the Mahadalit Awas Bhoomi Yojana. However, their average private landholding net of the transfer is merely 0.052 acres.

Of the 378 households that we were able to match between the official Mahadalit census data and our primary survey, 44 received land transfers under this programme. These households had no land of their own, both according to our primary survey as well as the official government data.

On the other hand, our survey found a total of 189 Mahadalit households in Gaya and Katihar that had no private land; 109 of these households have also been matched with the official data. Thus, only 23.8% of eligible beneficiaries in our primary survey in these two districts had received land titles, while 40.4% of the matched households benefited. To put this in perspective, it is worth noting that an internal document of the Revenue and Land Reform department, produced in September 2012, i.e. at least six months before our survey, reported that 100% of the targeted beneficiaries in Katihar and 91% of targeted beneficiaries in Gaya district had already been provided land. ([Government of Bihar, 2012c](#))

Compared to errors of inclusion, our survey thus suggests that errors of exclusion have been a far more serious issue in the implementation of the Mahadalit Awas Bhoomi Yojana.

To explore problems of exclusion further, we divide the process of targeting potential beneficiaries into two stages: first, which we will call the ‘extensive margin’, is the inclusion of Mahadalit households in the official census conducted by the Revenue and Land Reform department in 2009-10. The second, which we will call the ‘intensive margin’, is the selection of beneficiaries within households included in that census.

7.1 The ‘extensive margin’

Our primary survey found that beneficiaries of the Mahadalit Awas Bhoomi Yojana tended to be highly geographically concentrated. 50 of the 67 beneficiaries we found were in Katihar district, with none in Gaya and merely 2 in Gopalganj. Of the 48 panchayats we surveyed, our sample included no beneficiaries in 31. Indeed, during the course of individual interviews, we were told by 19 of the 48 *Vikas Mitras* that they were not aware of any beneficiaries whatsoever in their panchayats.

Just one village, Bathaili of panchayat Garbheli in Katihar, accounts for 20 of the 67 beneficiaries we found, while 72 of the 94 villages we surveyed have no beneficiaries in our sample.

Moreover, despite there being a large number of beneficiaries in our Katihar sample, none of them belong to the Chamar caste. Most beneficiaries in Katihar (about 61%) report receiving land titles by 2010. This suggests that the fact that the Chamars were designated as Mahadalits only in November

2009, and were consequently left out of the initial Mahadalit survey, may have contributed critically to the exclusion of this set of households.

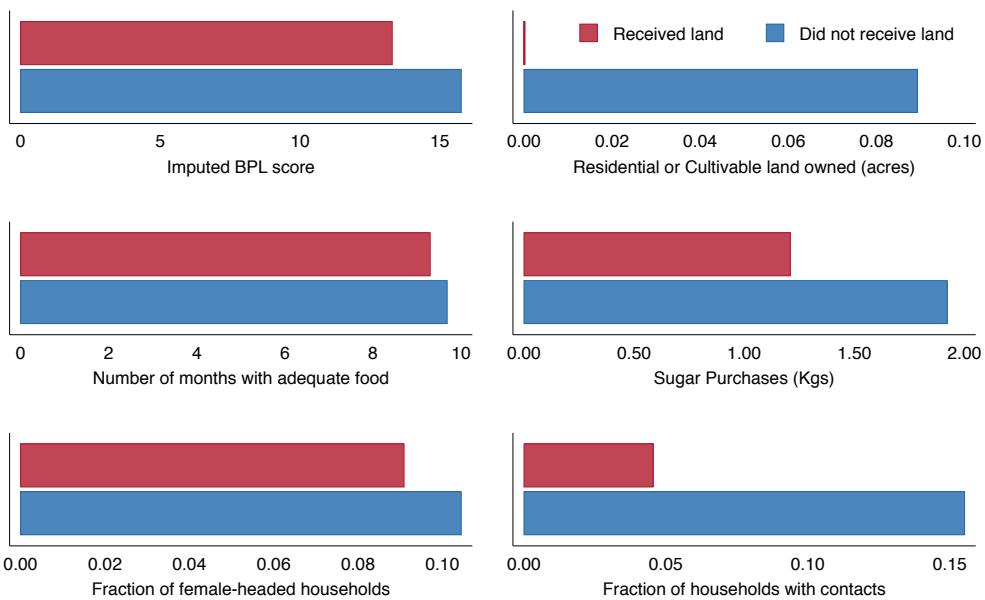
As reflected in Table 3, many villages and panchayats are absent in the land census data. In our survey, one block (Mohra) of Gaya in which we had surveyed two panchayats is missing from the official data, as are three villages in two other panchayats of the district. In Katihar, in the three panchayats for which we have matched census data, three villages are again missing from the data files. This exclusion matters: in the panchayats we are studying in Gaya and Katihar, only 1 of 23 eligible households received title to land even though their village is missing in the official data, while 36 of the 66 eligible households whose village is included in the official census data benefited.

7.2 The ‘intensive margin’

We now ask how well the Mahadalit Awas Bhoomi Yojana was targeted within the 379 households we have been able to match between our primary survey and the official Mahadalit census data. Given our sample size, the effects we find are generally not statistically significant; we treat their direction as suggestive.

First, as we noted above, none of those that received land titles among these matched households had any private landholdings. In that sense, the program seems to have adhered to its most crucial eligibility criterion.

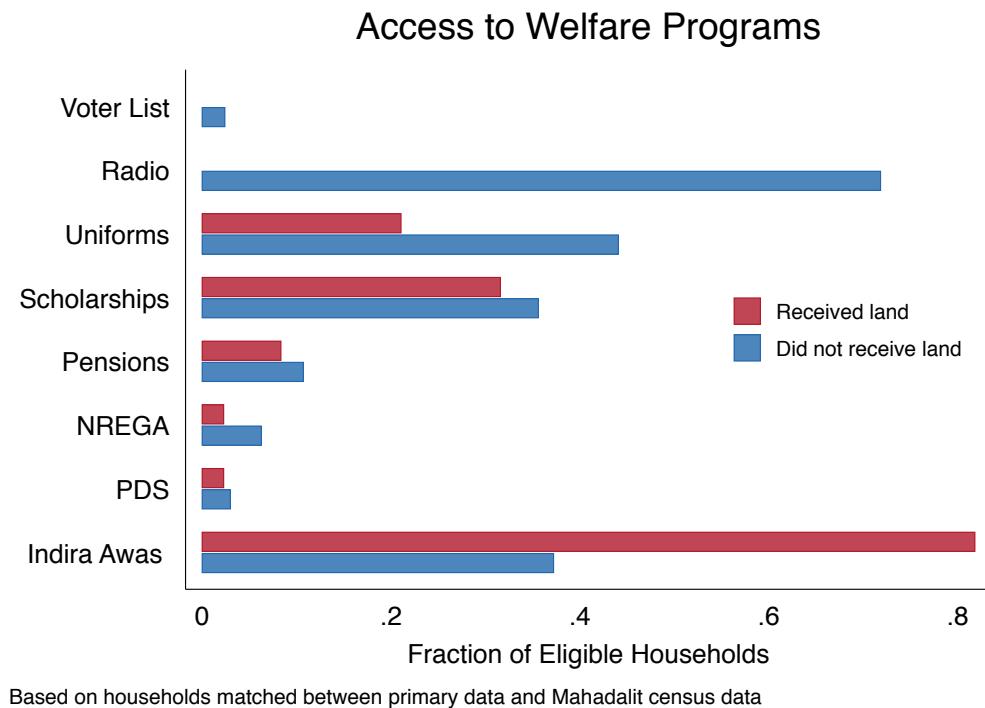
Socio-Economic Indicators



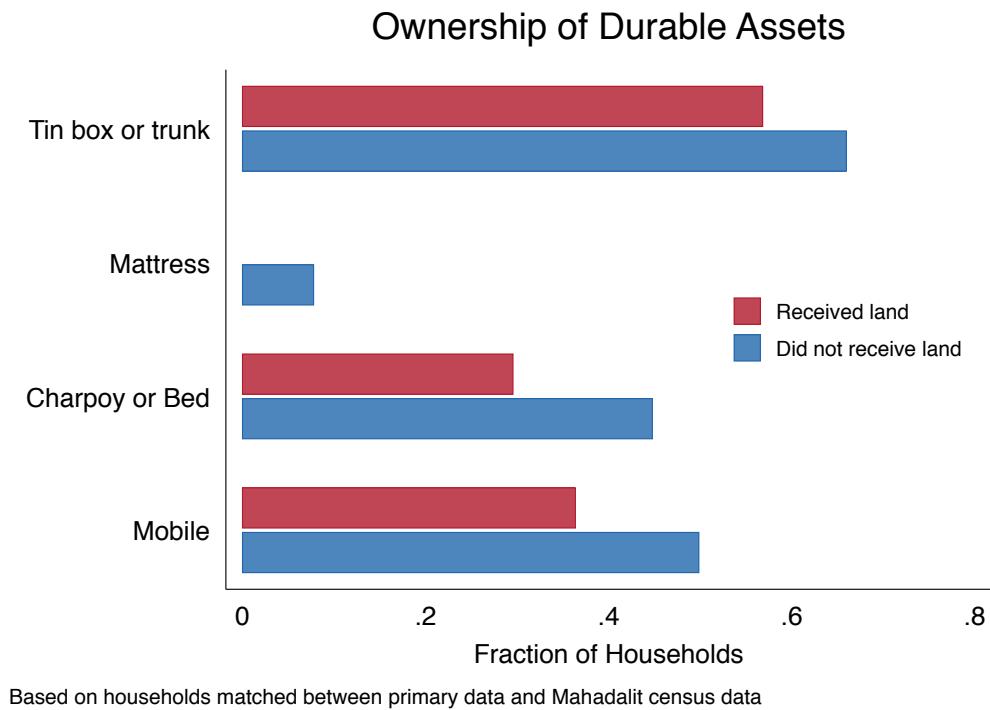
Based on households matched between primary data and Mahadalit census data

Among eligible households that received land transfers, 82% received funds under the Indira Awas Yojana within the year preceding our survey, compared to only 37% of other eligible households; this difference is highly statistically significant ($p - \text{value} = 0.000$). These cash transfers were large: on average, these households received Rs. 28,532 within the one year preceding the survey.

Thus the program was able to adhere to the recommendations of the Planning Commission in the Eleventh Plan, as discussed in section 3.2 above.



Moreover, as these figures illustrate, beneficiary households were in general likely to have lower economic status (as proxied by the imputed BPL score, sugar purchases, and possession of a variety of durable goods) and poorer social networks (as proxied by the fraction of households that counted any government officials or political representatives among their relatives and friends). In addition, while they were much more likely to be granted funds for house construction under the Indira Awas Yojana, they do not appear to have had better access to government welfare programs in general (such as PDF transfers, social security pensions, school transfers, radio distribution to Mahadalits, or voter registration in the last one year).



Finally, among landless households that we matched, over 54% of Musahars were given land titles, as compared to only 39% of Chamars, who tend to have superior social status. The difference is statistically significant, with a one-sided $p - \text{value} = 0.06$.¹⁵

8 Going Beyond Titles to Land

When we conducted our primary survey in the spring of 2013, most of those who had received titles to land had not yet been able to translate this into actual residence on the land.

While 19 of 67 households were given land they had already been resident on, of the rest, only two households reported having moved to the land they were allotted. This despite the majority of these households having received the title by 2010, at least two years prior to our survey.

Of the 48 households that were given land they were not already resident on, eight households reported being unaware of the location of the land. While low education levels among this population

¹⁵The Chamars are the only other caste group that have at least 30 landless households matched. The Musahars also fare far better than Dhobis and Pasis (both of which are Mahadalit communities with superior socio-economic status), for whom the corresponding fractions are 37.5% and 39%, respectively. However, our sample sizes are too small for the difference to be statistically significant.

would clearly have played a role here, it may have also been due to inadequate information on the title deeds themselves. The land deeds are supposed to list the *chauhaddi*, the boundaries of the land to help demarcate and identify it. Yet of the 60 title deeds we examined, 12 did not list this key bit of information.

Finally, of the 38 households that were aware of the location of the land they had been allotted, the majority (27) complained that they had not moved there because the land was unsuitable for house construction. For most of the rest, lack of funds for house construction was the key constraint.

9 Conclusion

Our investigations of the implementation of land transfer programs in Bihar, especially the *Mahadalit Awas Bhoomi Yojana*, present a mixed picture. Since 2010, land transfers have pivoted strongly towards women, the Scheduled Castes, and within them the most historically disadvantaged Mahadalit community, the Musahars. Among rural households that were enumerated in the Mahadalit census carried out by the Revenue and Land Reform department of the Government of Bihar in 2009-10, land appears to have been transferred to some of most destitute.

On the other hand, the data also appear to suggest that significant numbers of households were excluded from the Mahadalit census due to their location and in the case of Chamars, because their community was only later designated as *Mahadalit*. Transfers of land titles also appear to have occurred far more slowly than government progress reports may suggest, and where such titles were provided, there appears to be significant delay before they translate into actual possession of land.

The Government of Bihar appears to be alive to the problems of exclusion in the census carried out in 2009-10. A second stage of the census was implemented in 2013-14, to cover “those households that had been left out for some reason, or who had during this time come of age and become established as separate households”. (Government of Bihar, 2014a, p. 16)

Our survey indicates that translating titles into actual possession of land is still a major challenge in Bihar. It is heartening to see a strong endeavour to redress this situation on the part of the state government, in the form of Operation Bhoomi Dakhal launched in late 2014. We hope to analyse data from this program in the future to understand how successful it has been.

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Table 3: Bihar Mahadalit Census Data Coverage

District	Blocks		Panchayats		Villages		Mahadalit HHs
	Total	Census	Total	Census	Total	Census	Census
Araria	9	8	218	74	741	347	39,235
Arwal	5	5	69	28	315	183	9,288
Aurangabad	11	8	205	142	1,844	531	17,477
Begusarai	18	17	222	196	1,039	297	26,742
Bhagalpur	16	9	246	84	1,582	140	8,338
Gaya	24	22	337	169	2,887	1,975	136,026
Gopalganj	14	6	233	94	1,532	159	4,195
Jamui	10	8	153	95	1,504	398	25,140
Khagaria	7	7	129	119	301	183	28,509
Kishanganj	7	6	126	117	771	332	15,550
Lakhisarai	7	5	83	264	472	264	20,784
Madhubani	21	20	394	151	1,103	153	44,311
Munger	9	9	99	92	851	240	13,697
Muzaffarpur	16	14	385	129	1,783	695	29,023
Patna	23	18	323	251	1,392	860	71,216
Saran	20	18	324	262	1,642	262	11,877
Sheohar	5	5	50	51	187	95	5,027
Sitamarhi	17	17	276	112	837	417	22,653
Siwan	19	19	294	284	1,525	1,060	51,646
<i>Total</i>	258	221	4,166	2,714	22,308	8,591	580,734

Note: ‘Total’ column figures are derived from the Local Government Directory at <http://lgdirectory.gov.in>

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