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**Timeline**

2018

**Sample Size**

576 men and 665 women in 712 households in 88 village tracts (quantitative survey) and 28 interviews with 96 respondents in 17 village tracts (qualitative interviews) in Ayeyarwady Region of Myanmar

**Research Implemented by IPA**

Yes

# Examining Livelihoods, Tenure Security, and Land Rights in Rural Myanmar

## Abstract

In 2016, Myanmar started a new land reform intended to improve the land tenure rights of their lower income citizens. Acknowledging the importance of evidence to support the land reform, the research and advocacy organization Landesa partnered with IPA to conduct a mixed methods study to better understand the extent of landlessness in the Ayeyarwady Region, the connection between land tenure rights and food security, as well as the extent of women and men's knowledge of their land rights. The study found that 51 percent of the households in Ayeyarwady are landless, many of the landholders lack of basic land tenure documentation, and that women face systemic barriers in accessing land, among other findings.

## Policy Issue

Reforms that expand land tenure rights to a wider share of a country's population can have a broad range of benefits; in various contexts, they have been shown to increase citizens' trust in markets,<sup>1</sup> encourage longer-term investments (albeit on a small scale),<sup>2</sup> increase human

capital investments,<sup>3</sup> and contribute to durable macroeconomic growth.<sup>4</sup>

In 2016, Myanmar started a new land reform intended to improve the land tenure rights of their lower income citizens. The land reform included the allocation of land to landless households, the return of land or land compensation to those households who formerly experienced displacement or lost land, the formalization of land occupied by landless households, and strengthening of customary rights to land. However, the government and civil society organizations have little systematic knowledge about landlessness among Myanmar's residents— knowledge that is necessary in order to create policies and programs that strengthen land rights.

This project is a descriptive background study that will produce evidence to support the technical advice for the land reform being conducted by the government of Myanmar

## Context of the Evaluation

This research took place with residents in rural areas of Ayeyarwady Region of Myanmar. Some households in Ayeyarwady have land tenure rights and possess legal proof of such rights (such as a tax receipt, or a certificate called Form 7). Landless women and men are the majority of the rural population in the region. Livelihoods in this region mostly revolve around agriculture and are often directly tied to land access (for instance, cutting firewood or grazing animals). The current legal structure for land distribution may result in imbalances in the access to land tenure rights based on gender, ethnicity, and territory.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, stories about expropriation of land (“land grabbing” by organizations associated with the past government) are common, and this can undermine faith in the rule of law to enforce property rights.<sup>6</sup>

Landesa, a research and advocacy organization that partners with governments and civil society to develop pro-poor and gender-sensitive laws, policies, and programs that strengthen land rights, has been working with the Myanmar government to advocate for more secure and equitable land rights in the country since the new democratic turn in 2016.

## Details of the Intervention

*Note: This is not a randomized controlled trial.*

IPA and Landesa worked together to carry out a mixed-methods baseline study about livelihoods, tenure security, and women and men's access to land in Ayeyarwady Region. The study combined quantitative data collection (both village and household level surveys) with qualitative methods (focus group discussions and in-depth interviews).

The study was carried out with the following goals:

1. Identify the extent of landlessness in Ayeyarwady.
2. Identify the characteristics and circumstances associated with the likelihood of men and women being landless.

3. Assess the knowledge and perception of land tenure rights among men and women in the region and among village administrators.

Quantitative data collection took place in May and June 2018. Overall, 576 men and 665 women in 712 households and 89 village administrators, randomly selected, were surveyed.

After household and village level data was cleaned and analyzed, qualitative data collection took place in October and November 2018. Overall, the research team conducted 28 interviews—20 in-depth interviews with single participants or couples, and eight focus groups with 7-8 respondents each.

## Results and Policy Lessons

*Extent of landlessness:* Over half of the households (51 percent) surveyed were landless (including both those households with absolutely no agricultural land and those who lease or encroach on others' land). Interviews suggested that landlessness can occur as a result of particular land loss experiences such as past land grabs under the previous government—or as a result of forces such as economic disadvantage from debt, shocks, or rising prices, or intergenerational or historical landlessness. Some villages have a higher concentration of landless households than others, regardless of how remote they are. Women are significantly less likely to own land than men, and face several systemic barriers to land access if their rights to land are gained through marriage.

*Land-related decision-making:* Almost all respondents felt that they had the authority to make important decisions about their land and crops, such as what to grow and sell. Men and women each report being involved in decision-making, but men perceive themselves as being more involved than women are and having ultimate decision-making power.

*Food security:* Food insecurity was prevalent in all types of households surveyed, even those that had land—overall, around 40 percent of households surveyed had experienced food insecurity in the last three months—but was higher among absolutely landless households.

*Tenure security:* Overall, 16 percent of respondents reported feeling insecure about losing their land use rights. Men were more likely to feel long-term tenure insecurity than women, and the most common reason for feelings of tenure insecurity was having an uncultivated plot of land.

*Knowledge of, and trust in, land laws:* Respondents were generally unaware about laws related to land rights: only 30 percent were able to correctly identify Form 7 as the document needed to prove their land use rights. Respondents with land were more knowledgeable than those without, and men tended to have higher levels of knowledge than men. On the other hand, village administrators were significantly more knowledgeable about issues of legality surrounding land rights.

## Sources

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