WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS IN INDIA

A Learning Document

FOR WOMANITY FOUNDATION

September 20, 2024

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Acknowledgements

Preface

When we launched the Women's Land Rights (WLR) Programme in 2021 (now called Land for Women), we were very clear that while access to land rights (ownership and control) was critical for women's empowerment and agency, it was more difficult to chart mechanisms and pathways through which this could be easily reached. We imagined a road full of blocks and bumps mainly due to the rooted patriarchal norms associated with ownership of and control over assets and, in particular, over land.

We imagined that in such a road, we had not only the responsibility to make our programme effective but also ensure that we did no harm to the same women we wanted to make aware of their rights and, while supporting them in their journey to exercise them, we could collectively learn the best strategies to do so.

This learning became central to our approach and it has been multifaceted: how do women experience their connection to land? How does land ownership and access improve/ or not their position in the family or in the community? what do our implementing partners need to learn of themselves and about their approaches to become more effective? what would our donors like to know to invest more and with more confidence in women's land rights? how do our technical partners see their experience in the programme? and what can Womanity learn to deploy more effectively resources and plan its support activities around land to facilitate partners but also to increase investment in the sector?

As the program has unfolded over the past 18 months, Womanity and its partners have engaged in rich, ongoing dialogue—identifying insights, adapting to evolving contexts, and confronting new and unexpected challenges. It is from this environment of inquiry and openness that this study emerges.

The study, conducted in partnership with Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST), looks backwards to the past 18 months to capture the collective learning of the first half of the programme and it looks forward to help identify emerging questions, hypothesis that are not yet tested, and remaining gaps.

ISST explored the learning needs of the programme with an ethnographic approach from the grounds up, starting for the women the programme wants to serve all the way to partners, donors and us.

This document aims to do three things: first, to capture and organize key learnings from stakeholders across the WLR ecosystem; second, to inform adaptive improvements to the program in real time; and third, to co-create a learning and reflection framework that will guide the next 18 months.

Through a democratic and partner-led approach, this study is not only a record of what has happened—but a living tool for continuous learning and transformation. It is both a mirror and a map: reflecting where we have been and guiding where we might go.

Womanity's team – Land for Women

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List of Acronyms

ASVSS – Ambedkar Sheti Vikas Sanshodhan Sanstha

FES – Foundation for Ecological Security

FGD – Focus group discussion

FO – Field officer

FRA – Forest Rights Act

FRC – Forest Rights Committee

GBV – Gender-Based Violence

LASS – Lok Astha Seva Sansthan

MAKAAM – Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch

MMW – Multiple Marginalised Women

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

OBC – Other Backward Classes

SC – Scheduled Caste

SRLM – State Rural Livelihoods Mission

ST – Scheduled Tribe

ToC – Theory of Change

WEE – Women's Economic Empowerment

WGWLO – Working Group for Women and Land Ownership

WLR – Women's Land Rights

Executive Summary

The Women's Land Rights (WLR) Program (now renamed by Womanity as the Land for Women Program)[1] is designed to be a powerful mechanism to address barriers to WLRs and promote gender equity and economic empowerment through locally sustainable models that can be adapted and scaled across India. In the first phase, Womanity Foundation selected five partner organizations – Jan Sahas in Madhya Pradesh, Lok Aastha Sewa Sansthan in Chhattisgarh, Prakriti in Maharashtra, Aastha in Rajasthan, and the Foundation for Ecological Security in Odisha. This is a new program for the Womanity Foundation (hereafter referred to as Womanity) as well as for the grantees to implement a project explicitly dedicated to addressing issues related to women and their land rights.

In order to receive early-stage inputs, Womanity approached ISST to develop a 'learning document' to trace the journey of the WLR program. This document would draw from the perspectives and experiences of Womanity, partner organizations, local communities, and other program stakeholders with whom Womanity has worked over the past 18 months. The learning document would have two components: one that focuses on emergent learning needs based on the experiences of the prior 18 months; and a learning framework that is forward looking, i.e., expected to lay the ground to keep 'learning,' as a key outcome for all parties involved in the Womanity ecosystem of WLR.

This document presents a concise picture of WLR in the Womanity ecosystem. Using qualitative methodology woven with ethnographic elements, a rich data set was available which not only provides an overarching perspective of the land rights question in different parts of rural India, but also highlights the different regional contexts in which the individual organizations operate. Data is gathered though extensive fieldwork with the five major partner organizations mentioned above, and through online interviews with two other organizations which are part of the WLR program – Ambedkar Sheti Vikas Sanshodhan Sanstha (ASVSS) and Jan Chetna – and other stakeholders in the WLR program. A learning framework consisting of nine major elements was derived from the data set which is depicted in the diagram in the first section of the report. Complementing the framework, is a table that differentiates learnings from the first 18 months and future learning needs. These learning needs are also mapped to specific categories of people from among the grantees and the Womanity team. Section 2 gives a brief about the methodology and approach, backed with details of the visit schedule in Annexure 1 and methodology in Annexure 2. Section 3 lists the Contextual Challenges and Opportunities in the field of WLR in India. The final section 4 provides reflections and recommendations vis-à-vis the changing nature of the WLR discourse.

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[1] When we began this project in 2022, Womanity called it the Women's Land Rights Program, and hence we will continue to use this name in this report. Due to the insights gained through the implementation of the first phase, Womanity now calls the program "Land for Women".

The following are our major findings and axes of analysis in the learning document:

1. **Working with contextual gender relations has proved to be a beneficial strategy for most organizations. Despite land ownership being a sensitive issue, directly linked with power relations, the organizations have been able to introduce the topic of WLR with women.**

2. **The need to understand contextual caste and community dynamics has been both a learning in the last 18 months, as well as an element that most organizations wish to either deepen or include in their strategy.**

3. **Across all the organizations a common learning has been the need to study and become familiar with state and community-specific land laws. This has helped in the implementation of the WLR program, and enabled nuanced strategies to emerge.**

4. **Most organizations have initiated dialogues with local stakeholders which have helped them safely approach the topic of WLR. The circle of local stakeholders with whom to engage can be extended to increase efficiency in the initiatives.**

5. **Re-invigorating women's engagement with local gram sabhas and panchayats and educating women about available government schemes have greatly enhanced their confidence and contextual awareness. Organizations which have taken this path have seen positive effects on women's capacities to make claims.**

6. **Some organizations have strategically involved men in the WLR project strategy. Learning from these initiatives will be important in the coming years.**

7. **Womanity and organizations themselves have created avenues for the exchange of intra- and inter-organizational learnings. This has helped consolidate learning and build strategy.**

8. **Organizing women into collectives to bring about smaller changes in their contexts and eventually encourage them to make claims for land rights has been promising.**

9. **Despite working with local and contextual gender power relations (point 1), organizations have intentionally used the WLR discourse of women's empowerment, which shows promise for shifting gender norms.**

About The Learning Document

Womanity has decided to strategically accelerate *gender equality and economic empowerment* of women in India by developing and supporting sustainable models that look at women's land rights pathways that can be adapted and scaled across the country. The program focuses on increasing land literacy, women's land ownership and long-term land access to secure livelihoods for 50,000 women at the community level. Womanity's Theory of Change (ToC) Document outlines the rationale and the pathway to advance gender equality and economic empowerment of women through sustainable models and strategic interventions. Womanity has outlined three phases to reach 50,000 women – Build, Enhance and Scale. In the Build phase, it seeks to identify challenges, evolve prototype sustainable models, measure effectiveness and impact, support implements, invest in research, and develop a comprehensive evidence plan.

This learning document prepared by ISST contributes to the efforts of the Build phase of Womanity. The objective of this document is to capture the learnings of the various partner organizations, key members of the Womanity team, and the other stakeholders (referred as the Womanity ecosystem in India) in the first 18 months of the project period, as well as their future learning needs. Through a thorough analysis of the data collected over six months, a learning framework was expected to map all possible needs for building knowledge and strengthening capacities within the Womanity ecosystem to effectively address various WLR issues.

Land holds a central position in the lives of people in rural India. Women's land rights continue to be a sensitive and complex issue at the community level. ISST's research team sought to understand the complex relationship women have with land situated within diverse socio-economic contexts, varying with geographical region and other intersectional identities of women.

Using qualitative methods and a few ethnographic tools,[2] ISST developed a learning framework that is depicted in the diagram below, with WLP at the center and nine spokes. A learning framework consisting of nine major elements was derived from the data set depicted in the diagram in the first section of the report. Complementing the framework is a table that differentiates learning in the first 18 months (from January 2022 to mid-2023) from future learning needs. These learning needs are also mapped to specific categories of people among the grantees and the Womanity team. If there were no expressed or observed learning needs from the community for some points, we have not populated the table for those elements. An ethnographic approach enabled us to understand the WLR issues in a 360-degree manner while the team was in the field. Observations and informal interactions with women and other stakeholders in the field, like the panchayat and Forest Rights Act (FRA) members, helped us triangulate our observational findings, and the details helped the team analyze the data.

The rationale for focusing on three learning sites, i.e., the Womanity team, partner organizations, and respective local communities, is the continuous dialogue/interaction among the three stakeholders within the Womanity ecosystem on the subject of WLR compared to other stakeholders. These three groups are primary actors in the WLR program. Their perspectives change through their interactions with each other, which in turn impact the larger discourse of women and land. Other stakeholders such as funders, trainers, and land experts, who were interviewed during the course of this project, occupy

[2] Pl see Annexure 2,3,4

different, niche spaces in the Womanity ecosystem and are not necessarily engaging with either the communities or the organizations regularly. Their learnings and learning needs go beyond the nine elements running through this learning framework and are presented separately. They have provided valuable recommendations to inform the future strategy of the Womanity Foundation for the WLR program.

Following the learning needs table, is a brief on the methodology of the project. The final chapter provides an analysis, linking key observations from this study to the ToC of Womanity and insights from other stakeholders.

Learnings, specific to each organization, are presented in a separate section which can be shared with the respective organization individually.

Thus, the main Learning Document is a generic document that can be used for a wider audience, while the organization-specific sections are for Womanity and its partners.

Learning Framework

The issue of land rights for women or land for women is a complex one. Based on conversations with the implementing partners and various stakeholders of the project, a Learning Framework has evolved. This framework can be used first and foremost as a means to understand various dimensions critical for the initiatives of WLR. Second, this framework would be useful to locate subsequent learning emerging from ongoing initiatives.

The learning framework depicted here is a schematic presentation of learnings from the last 18 months, as well as the expressed and observed learning needs of the five organizations working on WLR with support from Womanity. We have identified nine key areas of overall learning from past and future learning needs from all the organizations.

Diagram: Learning Framework for the WLR Programme

Learning Framework for the WLR Programme

- Caste - community dynamics and contextual social relations
- WLR discourse for empowerment
- Collectivization and leadership of women
- Involving men at all stages
- Regional and community specific Land Laws
- Inter and Intra-Organisational learning
- Dialogues with local stakeholders
- Linking women with Panchayats and welfare schemes
- Contextual gender relations

The Learning Needs Table

Under each of the nine learning areas, learning needs have been assessed for the three critical stakeholders presented in rows under each learning area:

- **Organizations**
- **Womanity Foundation**
- **Community**

The second column gives learning emerging from the 18 months; and the third column provides future learning needs, which is a combination of learning needs expressed directly by the representatives we spoke to and the needs observed and assessed by the ISST research team. The final column lists specific categories of people[3] who can adopt the learning frame.

Learnings in the last 18 months draw from the continuum of project objectives, contextual challenges, innovations, and strategies arrived at while implementing the WLR project work in the best way possible. Future learning needs are drawn from the expressed and observed requirements for strengthening the programme, as well as from the observations and analysis of the ISST team to make the interventions resilient and successful.

The Learning Needs Table

Stakeholders	Past Learnings and Observations (last 18 months)	Future Learnings Needs and Observations	Prospective Learners
1. Working with Contextual Gender Relations			
Organisations	• Most organizations have a deep understanding of gender relations in the communities they work with. • This understanding has helped them develop strategies which have a women-centric focus, making their entry-level activities gender-specific, but not yet gender transformational which challenge gender norms in their context. • Women are showing the way on how to locate the WLR question with the communities and have demonstrated an	• A deeper understanding of gender binaries and of context-specific gender, caste, tribe, age, marital status, regional and religious identities should be integrated into the ToC, which will greatly enhance the effect of the present strategies of the organizations. • Understanding of gender relations in terms of power distribution as power relations will be helpful in formulating awareness-building and long-term	Across organisational hierarchy

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[3] Assumed organizational hierarchy based on fieldwork among all organizations (in ascending order) – field animators – project coordinator – program level – head; this is an average hierarchy, there could be more or fewer levels than these, depending on the age and size of the organization.

Stakeholders	Past Learnings and Observations (last 18 months)	Future Learnings Needs and Observations	Prospective Learners
	understanding of gender relations. • Challenging the gender norms or talking about women getting individual land rights, while women are in harmonious familial, and community relations is not yet favorable. • However, talking about women's empowerment has been helpful in all circumstances.	empowerment efforts. • Becoming intentional in the use of the gender and intersectionality analysis frameworks in specific contexts would help organizations achieve the goal of gender norm shifting as per the Womanity's ToC. • A nuanced exploration of how women negotiate gender norms and power relations through traditional gender roles, overt compliance with existing power structures, and subtle ways of dissent would enhance outreach and awareness-building and help in understanding the holistic nature of the impact that organizational interventions have on women and communities.	
Womanity	• Womanity understands the value of approaching WLR with sensitivity towards local gender dynamics. • Womanity's focus on WLR as a means to an end with multiple beneficial ripple effects has been validated across the experiences of all organizations in the first 18 months. • Womanity's understanding of the WLR discourse as a facilitator for smaller and buildable changes is strongly validated	• It may be beneficial for the Womanity team to relook at their ToC to accommodate their evolving understanding of what kind of shifts are practically possible versus what is desirable in terms of the relationship between shifting gender relations in the context of land relations. • The empowerment of women can remain the long-term goal with clearer observation of mid-term outcomes around the shifts required in gender	Strategy level team at Womanity

Stakeholders	Past Learnings and Observations (last 18 months)	Future Learnings Needs and Observations	Prospective Learners
	through the experiences of all organizations. • Womanity has considered and engaged in an internal deliberation around Women's land rights vs Women's land relations as a focus area. This is reflective of their evolving stance on gender as a core element in the issue of WLR and the awareness that gender relations vary contextually.	norms and shifts in power relations. • Building on points 2 and 3 in the left column depicting the focus of past learnings on land relations has the potential to address systemic level barriers to achieving gender equality and women's economic empowerment. • The change in language which moves away from 'land rights' to 'land relations' vis-a-vis land and women (in the ToC), can lead to redefining short-term and long-term gender relations and power shifts. • Yet, land relations is an umbrella concept encompassing various aspects of women's lives. A breakdown of broad focus areas within the concept of land relations will be required to make it easier to accommodate the land relations perspective in ToC.	
Community Level	• Women have found it easier to claim land rights in their marital homes than in their natal homes. This is because women believed that not asking for land and property rights from their natal families held the promise of social protection from their fathers and especially brothers. On the other hand, the land and	• For women to claim land rights from their natal families (as per the changed laws), and their relationships with the land as a means of economic security versus the actual or perceived support of their brothers, will have to be addressed. Evidence needs to be gathered on the actual and perceived support	Women and community leaders

Stakeholders	Past Learnings and Observations (last 18 months)	Future Learnings Needs and Observations	Prospective Learners
	property rights in their marital homes were perceived as a matter of right. contextually.	received by women when they let go of their claims to land rights in their natal homes. Grounded research using participatory methods would be very effective. • The anticipated ripple effect of women achieving land rights will require that women are able to see the organic link between the ongoing processes of empowerment that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are undertaking and the activities designated as part of the Womanity grant.	

| 2. Understanding Caste – Community Dynamics and Contextual Social Relationships |||||

| Organizations | • Given that the previous work of the organization of the first cohort already had a strong presence with the communities, most organizations are aware and mindful that there is a mix of castes and communities living together in the villages they work with.
• The organizations have addressed the question of land rights through applicable national laws specific to their contexts, like the Hindu Succession Act for Hindu women and FRA for Adivasi women and families. | • Application of the intersectional analysis will require recognition and strategies to address the reality that women in the same village, block or district where the organizations are working would belong to different castes, ethnic and religious groups.
• Women's access to land is not only predicated on formal laws but also on laws as practised by the communities they belong to. For example, where there is a traditional practice of primogeniture[4] in a village, the younger | Across organizational hierarchy |

[4] A system in which only the eldest child, especially the eldest son, receives all the property when their father dies

Stakeholders	Past Learnings and Observations (last 18 months)	Future Learnings Needs and Observations	Prospective Learners
	• Several organizations have attempted to interact with Jaati Panchayat leaders to understand and influence how traditional laws regard women's access and control to land. This has enriched their understanding of contextual laws and practices.	brother may not get a share in the land, in which case, his wife cannot claim it too. Organizations will have to learn to strategize and navigate the formal laws and the practised community laws governing women's access and control to land.	
Womanity	• Womanity's ToC shows awareness of the diversity of the kinds of lands and the diverse and contextual rules of access for women depending on the applicable laws. • A strong focus of MMW[5] shows a deep understanding of caste and community dynamics as well as the intersectionality of caste/community and gender identities.	• In order to create a strong eco-system understanding of the contextual land laws and practices, Womanity's plan of creating context-based WLR courses, including one on the Forest Rights Act with Working Group for Women and Land Ownership (WGWLO) *(Womanity's Annual Report 2023)*, will be a concrete step to addressing the challenges posed by the prevailing intersectionality due to varied contexts. • A systematic documentation of the contextual laws and customs should be undertaken as a starting point for knowledge-building around WLR, which in turn can aid nuanced strategy-building.	Strategy-level team and communications team
Community Level	• Women inhabit caste identities and adopt	• Awareness and sensitization workshops to recognize how	Women, community leaders

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[5] MMW – multiple marginalised women – a term from Womanity Theory of Change

Stakeholders	Past Learnings and Observations (last 18 months)	Future Learnings Needs and Observations	Prospective Learners
	gender roles and responsibilities through a process of socialization. These internalised caste and other social relations pose multiple obstacles in the path of making claims for land rights.	patriarchy operates to maintain the unequal status of women, along with offering knowledge of constitutional laws that promote gender inequality will help women think of WLR strategies they can lead and shape.	

3. Understanding Nuances of Regional and Community Specific Land Laws in the Region

Stakeholders	Past Learnings and Observations	Future Learnings Needs and Observations	Prospective Learners
Organizations	• The Womanity-supported project gave organizations the impetus to develop a deep understanding of how different laws function in implementation and in real-time, and how they shape community dynamics. • They made dedicated efforts to build awareness among their teams on regional laws and their implementation. • Organizations are supporting women's claims to land by providing legal guidance and, in some cases, access to lawyers for women and families with land disputes, thus building a supportive ecosystem.	• Womanity in its ToC document acknowledges the complexity of laws governing land ownership in India, which poses a problem to achieving equal access to land for women. • A longitudinal learning approach that can track not just successes, but also understanding the minute obstacles and challenges faced by women and their rationale in making certain decisions related to land would be useful, as Womanity moves into its third phase of Scale. The organizations should be encouraged to report very differently – not just the successes, but the details of the processes, and the negotiations among various stakeholders within their programs.	Project and field teams
Womanity	• Contextual understanding of land laws by Womanity is reflected in their approach towards	• Investing in the creation of resources in the form of small booklets in local languages, visual aids, and videos with	Strategy-level team

Stakeholders	Past Learnings and Observations (last 18 months)	Future Learnings Needs and Observations	Prospective Learners
	organizations as well as in their ToC. • Training on land rights and land laws with WGWLO has been a source of tremendous support for the organizations.	instructions for field workers would have a long-term impact. • Engagement with and support through a thorough study of various land-related laws in collaboration with reputed law universities can play a critical role in building an ecosystem, even as the grantees work on the ground to generate awareness and demand.	
Community Level	• Different communities traditionally have had different relationships with forest lands. It would be important to ensure that women from various communities in the village are engaged in the awareness programs and progressively recognizing the contextual issues of access and control.	• It would be beneficial to understanding the specifics and context of the customary and regional land laws that address disputes in the community	Community leaders
4. WLR Used Intentionally for Empowerment Discourse			
Organizations	• Organizations intentionally use the WLR discourse for the empowerment of women in their awareness meetings. • Even though the discourse is jargonistic and may not make immediate sense to the women, it can help them imagine the larger family of issues WLR is part of and, in turn, makes them realize it is important for	• The shift from land rights to land relations can broaden the scope of work and allows for the unpacking of underlying internalized gender norms. This, in turn, helps identify the systems-level work required to achieve the goal.	Strategy-level team

Stakeholders	Past Learnings and Observations (last 18 months)	Future Learnings Needs and Observations	Prospective Learners
	them to claim it for a secure future. • Recognizing the limits of the 'rights' discourse in the domain of women's relationship with land.		
Womanity	• The approach used by Womanity has kept the WLR discourse alive by focusing on quantifiable outcomes such as smaller changes or ripple effects. It has proven to be holistic and sustainable.	• As per the stakeholder meeting, funding tends to flow for quantifiable outcomes like livelihoods, education, housing, medical benefits, loan access, etc. It will be beneficial for Womanity to keep its focus on the relationship between smaller, ripple effects and buildable changes in women's lives, while also emphasizing the WLR discourse. • Frameworks such as the Small Wins Framework for evaluation, and Outcome Harvesting approaches can help capture the shifts that are critical in the WLR ecosystem and can also draw from and inform the ToC. • In the long run the use of such alternate evaluation approaches can become more established in the eco-system. This will help to secure better funding from other donors as well as support appropriate NGO partners.	Strategy-level team
Community	• As the organizations have already invested in women's empowerment programs, women have	• Women will have to be engaged in how they want to negotiate the WLR ecosystem. The	Women leaders and women claim makers

Stakeholders	Past Learnings and Observations (last 18 months)	Future Learnings Needs and Observations	Prospective Learners
	found the use of WLR gives a boost to their courage and aspirations, and broadens the sphere of empowerment. • Claims making whether it is at the family level or with the government, awareness about WLR has broadened their aspirations and increased their confidence.	choices they make about natal family claims, claims in the marital homes, claims by widows and single women will have to be articulated through reflection workshops comprising women leaders and those choosing to make the claims *(refer to the section 'What Land Means to Women,' page 24-25)*	

| **5. Dialogues with Local Stakeholders - Understanding Social Relationships Based on Land Ownership** |||||

Stakeholders	Past Learnings and Observations (last 18 months)	Future Learnings Needs and Observations	Prospective Learners
Organizations	• Most organizations made the immediate circle of stakeholders around women's land claims (such as the family and panchayat-level revenue officials [patwaris]) their focus. This was a very useful focus to have. • Some organizations have already established links with lawyers via their field staff, which has proven to be helpful over the last 18 months. • Engagements with State Rural Livelihoods Missions (SRLMs) have also proven to be beneficial, as the state-supported program will provide a platform to implement laws that promote women's economic empowerment. These would be strong allies for scaling up.	• In the next phase, the organizations would have to evaluate the critical stakeholders who need to be influenced and engaged to further women's empowerment through WLR. These could be lawyers, Forest Rights Committees (FRCs), Panchayati raj officials (beyond the village level), and other civil society organizations working in the area. • Violence against women can be anticipated in some cases when they claim land as a right from their families. Organizations would need to include in their future strategies police sensitization in advance to ensure that women do not face further challenges from the police, and can expect the legal systems to be responsive to their needs. • Engagement of grantees with networks like the Mahila Kisan Adhikaar	Strategy-level team

Stakeholders	Past Learnings and Observations (last 18 months)	Future Learnings Needs and Observations	Prospective Learners
		Manch (MAKAAM), can provide strength, perspectives and their own lessons, all of which are critical for Phases 2 and 3 of the Womanity strategy, Enhance and Scale.	
Womanity	• The Womanity team has had the foresight and courage to involve all the stakeholders in building and gauging, as well as reviewing their WLR program. • The diverse range of stakeholders engaged in the process has aided their aim to create an eco-system and build knowledge as per their ToC. Their emphasis on 'Land for Women' in their annual report of 2023 forefronts the process of learning and growing as a donor organization keenly involved in the nuances of the issues they are funding. This is a rare and a welcome posture for a donor organization, especially one engaging with issues of gender relations.	• It would be beneficial for Womanity to include in their grantee organizations those which are capable of engaging with local and national governments on the issue of WLR, and to involve them as stakeholders.	Strategy-level team
Community Level	• The training and induction of women on WLR has proven to be an effective strategy. It has helped reduce the hesitation of women to engage with local stakeholders like the patwaris, extended family members, officials, and the police in	• It would be worthwhile to consider strategies that actively promote multi-stakeholder dialogues where women, armed with new knowledge and perspectives, set the agenda and drive the discussion and thus create a conducive	Women Leaders and Community Leaders

Stakeholders	Past Learnings and Observations (last 18 months)	Future Learnings Needs and Observations	Prospective Learners
	the process of claims-making. The training has helped women become agents of change in their communities.	environment for their taking an informed and active role in decision-making on issues of land.	

6. Linking Women with Panchayats and Welfare Schemes – Organic Awareness-Building Around Rights			
Organizations	• Recognizing the importance of working with panchayats as the key administrative unit to claim land rights, most organizations have taken significant steps to motivate women to engage with their respective village panchayats. This has also rejuvenated the possibilities of women's political participation. • Linking women with welfare schemes, such as loans which they would be eligible for when land is jointly or individually owned in their names, farmers' benefits, and important documents like Aadhar cards, kisan cards, ration cards, etc, have proven helpful in eventually approaching the question of women's land rights in the last 18 months.	• While the current approach seems practical, it should not remain instrumental where women are seen as conduits to access schemes and loans, as banks and governments begin to operationalize women's claims to assets. The next stage would be to keep raising the bar through conversations, training, and workshops, such that women are able to realize the transformative potential of their access and control over land. • It would be worthwhile to include financial literacy around land as an asset to leverage its full potential.	Strategy team and field workers
Womanity	• Womanity's ToC acknowledges these links and connections as both entry points as well as ripple changes in women's lives with the introduction of the WLR discourse. • It has been a thoughtful way of approaching the	• Before the Scale phase, it would be worthwhile to assess the validity of the ToC through ground-level data. This will require not only in-depth studies which include success stories, but also documentation that will throw light on	Strategy team

Stakeholders	Past Learnings and Observations (last 18 months)	Future Learnings Needs and Observations	Prospective Learners
	WLR issue and does justice to the sensitivity of women.	contextual enabling factors as well as persistent challenges. Assumptions around pathways of empowerment should be evaluated comprehensively for the current generation of women as well as for the next generation of women's access to land rights in families.	
Community	• Women find it easier to connect with the WLR agenda when approached via government schemes, protective laws, and political safeguards. • Families of women are often agreeable to transferring land to their daughters-in-law, which enables them to receive the benefits of schemes as joint landholders.	• Women leaders can also be trained to understand the tiered eco-system of administration, which could be useful in their better understanding the claims processes. • Women should be able to reflect on whether they are being instruments or agents in improving their livelihood options.	

7. Intentionally Involving Men at All Stages, from Awareness to Making Claims

Stakeholders	Past Learnings and Observations (last 18 months)	Future Learnings Needs and Observations	Prospective Learners
Organizations	• A couple of organizations have found it useful to include men in their meetings with women. The idea is that if men are convinced, women will face fewer obstacles in making a land claim. • The above learnings have evolved through practice and have been adapted as strategy by these organizations, which have proved very helpful.	• The organizations will need to learn how to systematically include men in their project processes. Beyond specific engagements for the projects supported by Womanity, organizations could use the opportunity to engage men to support changes in norms and to challenge the deep-rooted patriarchy that operates through families, markets, state, and the community.	Strategy team

Stakeholders	Past Learnings and Observations (last 18 months)	Future Learnings Needs and Observations	Prospective Learners
Womanity	• The holistic approach taken by Womanity has addressed the community as a whole and therefore ensured the inclusion of men in the process.	• As the language of women and land shifts, the opportunities and spaces to explicitly highlight men's land relations become apparent. This enables an analysis of how men's relationship with land affects women, and indicates the spaces for negotiation.	Strategy level team
Community	• As most who hold administrative authority in land matters are men, women have had an opportunity to engage with men. Other men they engage with are of course in their family, and they have had to negotiate with them as they applied for formal titles. The organizations have facilitated and motivated men to recognize the legitimacy of women's claims. These are starting points for the eventual paradigm shifts required for women's equality in relation to land. • Men's participation and engagement is crucial for sustainable shifts.	• Existing patriarchal norms prevent many men from understanding women's relationship with land. Celebrating those men who have made it possible for women to claim land rights, whether in the family or other in formal institutions and positions, will help create a supportive context for other women to alter their existing relationship with land. • Engaging early male change-makers in building strategies going forward can make for more holistic responses with reduced conflict.	Community leaders, particularly men
8. Intra and Inter-Organization Learning Avenues for Mutual Learning			
Organizations	• The Womanity project allows for regular animator-level meetings within each organization, for them to share their experiences, challenges, and innovations on WLR. • These have proved to be important spaces for the	• Womanity could consider innovative ways to create space for inter-organizational exchange related to challenges, strategies, and major learnings, and to create a space for reflection at the	Across organizational hierarchy

Stakeholders	Past Learnings and Observations (last 18 months)	Future Learnings Needs and Observations	Prospective Learners
	evolution of strategies and to restrengthen team spirit and commitment to the program.	animator level which can inform future actions.	
Womanity	• Annual reports and WGWLO training have created a space for intra and inter-organizational learning. • Womanity organised an all-partner meet in May 2023, where heads of all organizations met for a residential workshop. This was an important space for mutual learning.	• Regular training for evidence-building and funder outreach could be imparted to NGO partners through fostering more partnerships like the one with WGWLO (for courses). • Womanity could consider onboarding a learning or a knowledge partner who can facilitate these conversations and make them an interesting and energizing space.	Strategy level team

9. Encouraging Collectivization and Leadership of Women

Stakeholders	Past Learnings and Observations (last 18 months)	Future Learnings Needs and Observations	Prospective Learners
Organizations	• Some organizations have applied the strategy of collectivization of women as a sustainable way to make women's participation and leadership more acceptable on issues that may be perceived to cause social conflict. • Nominating a woman leader who constantly stays in touch with the field animators increases responsiveness to women's queries as well improves communication on relevant issues of logistics, entitlements, and other benefits.	• Conducting regular training of women leaders across villages would help them connect and flourish. • Strengthening women's collectives, whether around WLR or women's empowerment, as a broader objective and offering opportunities to learn, reflect, and act together can lead to sustainable outcomes.	Strategy level team

Stakeholders	Past Learnings and Observations (last 18 months)	Future Learnings Needs and Observations	Prospective Learners
Womanity	• Identification of MMW and the use of the empowerment discourse has organically led to the creation of women leaders as the most viable model.	• Womanity's ToC specifies the identification of MMWs. Going forward, specifying that women leaders be chosen and trained from among the most marginalized at the village level, like single women or (after assessing caste and community dynamics) those from the more marginalised groups, could help maximize the empowerment outcomes of the program. • Also, strategy could be developed to map and track the long-run intergenerational effect of women's leadership at the village level.	
Community	• Women have found the leadership and collective models very useful in helping them reach out to field animators for resolving their problems and garnering support for their issues related to land rights and gender-based violence (GBV). • Women have found being part of such collectives to be empowering. For many it has been a life-changing experience, which has opened up various possibilities in terms of community support, livelihoods, and personal growth.	• Investing in collectives as spaces to build solidarity will be critical to supporting the long-term, sustained work required to shift the narrative around WLR. • Keeping collectives as vibrant spaces for women's empowerment requires innovative thinking. Otherwise, they run the risk of being instrumentalized to achieve project objectives.	

A Kaleidoscope of Perspectives and Learnings from the Stakeholders

Interviewing and discussing key concerns regarding WLR in India with the stakeholders unearthed important dimensions of the macro eco-system within which the idea of rights, gender, land ownership and region (Global South) are situated. This chapter consists of learnings and reflections of the Womanity Foundation team and its collaborators. They have been presented separately as these stakeholders occupy unique vantage points that allow insights that vary from the operational and strategic needs presented in the previous section.

The intention behind the stakeholder interviews was to understand WLR from the standpoint of **funders, land experts, activists, and the development eco-system**. Conversations with Womanity staff can be grouped around seven major points. Thematically these are:

1. **Ability of the WLR discourse to create multiple ripple effects for positive changes for women**

2. **Women's Land Rights or women and land relations**

3. **Land as a purely financial asset**

4. **Sustainable funding for WLR**

5. **Role of capacity-building in making WLR sustainable**

6. **Challenges from the tenacity of patriarchy and kinship systems**

7. **Including more stakeholders for strengthening the WLR discourse**

Theme 1: Ability of the WLR discourse to create multiple ripple effects for positive changes for women

All the stakeholders agreed that working on WLR is a means to the larger empowerment of women and not an end in itself. Unfolding the WLR discourse and initiative in the field creates an enabling environment for achieving smaller, positive changes for women which can be eventually pooled together and built upon for a consolidated and sustainable change. These buildable changes like literacy, linkages with gram sabhas, collective membership, attending meetings and presenting their viewpoints, claiming smaller changes like an Aadhaar card, voter card, Kisan card, etc., prepare and empower them to make claims for their land rights, especially individual land rights. Therefore, it is worthwhile to work on WLR even if no immediate or direct results can be expected in terms of the transfer and ownership of land in the short run.

Theme 2: Women's land rights or women and land relations?

- The centrality of land relationships, which transcend land ownership, in the lives of women was a major learning across the team and other stakeholders. The significance of women's multifold relationships with land and the need to incorporate these into the strategy has emerged from the experiences of several field partners as well as organizations.

- While calling this issue 'Women's Land Rights' roots it in the political discourse and history of emancipation of the oppressed, the political connotations that accompany the word 'rights' can limit

the subject and create obstacles to fostering collaborations across the board.

- This understanding emerges from the critique that centring all development efforts around the discourse of rights, particularly individual rights, was a Western concept. Such a concept is likely to face resistance, but the idea of working on women's land relations will open diverse possibilities for women's empowerment.

- The engagement over the first 18 months of the project and the long-standing experience of some of the stakeholders have emphasized the need to decolonize the debate on rights which is often motivated by global trends that narrowly define women's empowerment. Instead, the grounded reality of the Indian context in which the Womanity project operates must guide the strategic thinking. As expressed in the previous section, the WLR project has opened up multiple and diverse pathways to women's empowerment. Thus, the emergent lessons and future work must closely study the inter-relationship of rights and relations, which need not be understood as two distinct fields. Sound evidence-building projects that draw from the grounded work of the partners of Womanity throughout the project cycle and, by posing appropriate research questions, can yield deeper understanding from an ecosystem perspective and not just the individual woman's land rights perspective.

- Another significant argument to consider land relations and not just land rights comes from the reality that individual land rights are also mediated through the caste and religion to which the woman belongs. In India, Dalits historically do not have access to private lands. However, there have been efforts to legitimize access to common lands to enhance livelihood opportunities. Widespread caste-based discrimination including the use of violence limits the actual use of such lands. Similarly, the lands that tribal communities occupy have different sets of complex questions that need to be addressed, such as the conflict between the interests of companies that want access to resources that lie beneath the lands and poor land ownership records. Thus, the land rights of women from Dalit and tribal communities would have to be understood in the context of the claims on land by different caste and ethnic communities.

Theme 3: Land as a purely financial asset

- An unconventional view that is worth considering is that land can be understood as a financial asset devoid of the emotional connection that women have with it. The view that land is merely a financial asset will enable women to make decisions that may be more remunerative than seeing it merely as agricultural land.

- For example, in some economically weaker areas, women could gain greater returns from selling the land instead of farming on it: it could be more profitable to sell or rent a small piece of land near a big city like Nagpur, than to do organic farming on it and earn lower returns.

- While this view privileges financial returns, it presupposes that the women and families from these areas have the means to manage the financial returns from such land in a long-term sustainable way. If this view is to be adopted, it needs to be located in systematic, long-term investments in financial literacy and financial management, as well as actual handholding to navigate financial markets.

- Moreover, this view stems from the previous understanding of urban centers as growth engines. It is known that urbanization places immense stress on natural resources and alternatives to this model are being actively explored. In this scenario, Womanity may want to locate its strategies around WLR so that it is accompanied with its vision of long-term sustainable and regenerative development.

Theme 4 - Sustainable funding for WLR

The international donor's voice brought in another perspective:

- Focusing exclusively on WLR is a new endeavor in the international donor ecosystem and every stakeholder, including Womanity, is on a learning curve.

- The current global funding trend is towards combating the climate crisis and ensuring peace. The rights discourse does not hold a central position, hence, connecting women's land relations with climate change and sustainability would be a good strategy.

- Mainstream funding interests lay in gender justice via quantifiable indicators like education, housing, jobs, etc. In this scenario, land is not immediately seen as beneficial and quantifiable.

- For Womanity the potential to leverage its forays into WLR would lie in being able to shift the narrative from these critical but basic metrics to measure development to focusing on land relations as critical to achieving sustainable and intergenerational gains. Such a view requires that over the years Womanity would have to engage with WLR across various economic strata so that the narrative gets shifted in the overall development discourse.

- From a funding perspective, work involving sustainable and intergenerational change vis-a-vis WLR is crucial.

Theme 5: Role of capacity-building in making WLR sustainable

- WLR is a niche area that would require capacity-building at various levels. Investment in capacity-building around land relations is crucial and should be strategized within the WLR programs.

- Strategic capacity-building would include not just awareness about land laws, but also the skills and abilities to navigate the shifts required in the narrative about the transformative potential of WLR at the grassroots level, as well as in influencing the narrative in the increasingly globalized and neo-liberal economic paradigm.

- This was important to make sure that land is used well and rights are retained after women gained them.

- Capacity-building is key both for sustainable changes in the landscape of WLR as well as for passing on the rights and knowledge of land use to the next generation of women.

- Capacity-building must be acknowledged as an important way of passing on the resilience women employed in the claims-making process to the next generation.

Theme 6: Challenges due to the tenacity of patriarchy and kinship systems

Another conversation opened up the socio-political and legal dimensions in which land is seen and related.

- It was argued that land is not, and was never, considered a homogeneous category in history. It is important to understand that different kinds of land will have to be engaged with in different ways. The nature and context of land and its relationship with people should inform the basis of the discourse on land rights.

- The kinship system in India is critical to understanding land ownership and inheritance laws and practices. In the north Indian context, for example, patrilocal marriages take place, where girls leave the houses of their parents to live with their husbands' families. Daughters are not allowed to attend the death rituals of their parents and therefore sons are eagerly desired as a means of old-age security. 'Son preference' and the entailing patriarchal value systems are, , at the core of everything that compromises women's chances at land ownership.

Theme 7: Deepening and strengthening the WLR discourse

- Womanity's strategy to focus on ground-level partners is a great starting point and should remain critical in shaping the future course of action. However, there is a case for supporting grantees that can engage more with the government as the state's role in recognizing and facilitating women's equal access to land rights is also critical.

- And yet the individual rights-based approach would not be the only way to achieve women's empowerment through WLR. A nuanced approach, that can document and acknowledge the traditional forms of ownership that included community ownership and women's role in these collective community-based land rights, will have to evolve.

Process of Making The Learning Document

The learning document is geared towards understanding the unique standpoints of all the collaborators and stakeholders working to ensure women's rights to and relations with the land. The methodology for this document was designed to unpack the nuances of past struggles, successes, lessons learnt, and persisting challenges of partner organizations in achieving a fairly distant goal and the strategies used to achieve this goal.

A qualitative methodology with elements of ethnography was employed to highlight the complexities of WLRs in rural India. To ensure a contextual understanding of women's issues and the approach of organizations towards this, extensive fieldwork was conducted with five partner organizations, after online interactions with all of them. Each field visit lasted 4-7 days. The following qualitative and ethnographic methods were employed to gather data:

1. **In-depth Interviews**
2. **Group conversations**
3. **Participant observations**
4. **Participatory workshops – interactive games, role play**

Alongside, the research team maintained systematic field notes throughout their extensive fieldwork. Field notes, being the primary tool of ethnographic research, enabled the researchers to keep track of all observations and interview responses (refer to Annexure 4 for the field notes format). It was only through these qualitative and ethnographic methods that the detailed nuances and perspectives around land could be understood. A detailed note on the methodology followed can be found in Annexure 2.

Insights from the Process of Making the Learning Document

This learning document is designed to bring together the perspectives, learnings, and strategic interventions of the partner organizations, donors, and other stakeholders in the eco-system who are dedicated to strengthening the WLR discourse and practices in rural India. It brings to the fore major learnings from the initial 18 months of the program cycle for the categories of stakeholders mentioned, as well as for the women of the community.

The process of designing and creating this learning document was itself a valuable learning not only for the ISST team as researchers but also for other stakeholders involved. Evaluating the challenges and strategies from the initial 18 months led to the start of important conversations, which were essential for the visualization of WLR in practice at a larger scale – across organizations and contexts. It also strengthened the basis for future directions in which the WLR program could grow and areas where new

initiatives are needed, or older ones need to be deepened.

It was a new journey for the ISST team as the assignment was neither a study in the classic sense nor an evaluation. ISST used a mix of research methods to produce a learning document. Conversations with the Womanity team helped to retain the focus on the essence of 'learning' throughout.

The following are our major insights from working on this learning document.

1. We were dealing with an **expansive and complex subject**. Further, in rural India women's land rights is a sensitive topic that is difficult to broach and have open conversations about.

2. **Time** is a limiting factor. The more time that is spent with all levels of stakeholders the better is the picture that emerges and more holistic the understanding of the women's relationship with land and the multiple factors informing this. Qualitative and ethnographic approaches helped to arrive, within six months, at an overall learning framework as well as individual organizational learning.

3. Partner organizations mentioned in this document employed nuanced strategies, which built on their existing programs and connections. To unpack these strategies fully a detailed account of the regional context as well as a **historical analysis** of the organization is needed.

4. A deep study of the **regional and local contexts** is another pre-requisite for examining the many dimensions of how WLR is understood, implemented, and engaged with, as these vary with the local understandings of gender, power, inter-community dynamics, and other intersectional identities and histories.

5. A complex issue like WLR needs to be addressed simultaneously at various levels, and strategies that cater to such needs are best explored with an **immersive methodology** like ethnography. The application of an entirely ethnographic methodology would look quite different and could engage with the subject more deeply.

6. The learning document has pointed to a range of issues that need systematic study that builds evidence from the ground, an approach that Womanity endorses.

ISST's Commentary and Analysis

This document captures the complexity of women's relationship with land, the contextually rooted dynamic factors that influence it, and the opportunities that can be built on to strengthen the WLR discourse and empower women.

Private land is mostly a hereditary asset and is significantly different from any other kind of asset that can be passed on or bought and sold; it yields food and supports life, and is culturally and socially imbued in meaning and connotation that families and communities ascribe to. Land possession and its ownership and distribution form the very core of the Indian kinship systems. Sociologically, marriage in a patrilineal society is an exchange of women between men (Strauss 1971); following from this social equation, men keep control of the land and women tend to it, nurture it and celebrate it for the family, headed by the men. Land is at the core of families' and communities' prosperity and cohesion in rural societies and can also become a central cause of conflict and dispute among communities and families. In largely subsistence-oriented agrarian societies as in India, land is revered as a life-nurturing asset.

In this context, Womanity's efforts to fund civil society organizations to promote women's access to land rights can seem quite daunting. Yet, experiences of the first cohort of organizations supported by Womanity reinforce the understanding that having rights and access to land brings women to the forefront as decision-makers at the household and community levels and creates scope for them to exert their power through micro-level action in their everyday interactions. This cascading impact of the WLR initiative was seen unfolding in a nuanced manner yielding many positive outcomes even within the first 18 months.

Stakeholders in the WLR ecosystem and land experts agreed that giving women land rights is a powerful means to achieve gender equality. The investments lead to several smaller yet constructive and buildable changes for women that can be called 'empowering'. These changes, such as literacy on land records, connections with gram sabhas, collective membership, and participation in meetings, help prepare and empower women for more challenging claims for individual land rights. Updating identity documents like Aadhar cards, voter cards, and Kisaan cards also plays a crucial role. There is evidence from other projects that women's access and control over land rights have a positive relationship to improved food security for the family and a decrease in domestic violence.

The social aspects of land ownership vary widely, according to the nature of land as well as a woman's contextual circumstances. Common pastures are used for grazing one's animals, forest land is used for foraging and collecting forest produce, and some farmlands are rented out to marginalized farmers. In such different ways of relating with land, gender roles and the socio-cultural position of women in the community greatly affect their relationship with land. For example, we have stated earlier that women from the Scheduled Tribes (ST) community have different kinds of access to and interaction with forest land than women from the Other Backward Classes (OBC) community.

Interactions with the first cohort of the grantees of the WLR have highlighted multiple factors that are highly contextual and significant while building a larger strategic response.

Women's Bargaining Power to Claim Land Rights

The following diagram indicates some common factors across the field sites which influenced women's ability to claim land and make decisions, and also were positively affected in turn by women's claims to land rights. Their differential combinations would determine the level of women's bargaining power to claim land rights.

The seven factors that have emerged as critical to leading to enhanced bargaining power of women to claim land rights are: access and control of other assets; establishing farmer identity; membership in a local collective; intergenerational change in gender relations and norms; knowledge of farming and or forests; decision-making in the household and community; and higher education and exposure.

Land in exchange for socially accepted social protection for women

Today, land governance falls under personal laws, which gives states the discretion to formulate and implement diverse rules and regulations. The diversity of kinship systems in India adds to the complexity of land ownership and to the gaps between inheritance laws and practices.

As land ownership is deeply embedded in kinship systems, asking for women's individual rights to land will be seen as a challenge to the stability of relationships and communal systems. The social agreement

that land will be passed on from fathers to sons is informed by the idea of communal and familial harmony, in which women play a predesigned social role. A woman who never claims land rights in the family is an 'agreeable' or 'good woman". Other markers of this are: making the right marriage (in terms of age and caste combinations), bearing sons, shouldering unpaid care burdens without a ruse, and other such patriarchal prescriptions.

Despite the recent amendment to the Hindu Succession Act in 2005, which guarantees daughters belonging to the Hindu religion an equal share in their father's properties, women understand giving up their rights in paternal property and land or not asking for their share as *a tradeoff*. In most cultures that we encountered during our fieldwork, brothers' roles and responsibilities consisted of recurrent contributions of material and moral support to their married sisters' lives, as well to the welfare of their children. These kinds of contributions were not only materially significant but were also considered socially honorable, which in turn secured a respectable place for the woman in her marital home and village.

Asking for her share in land or property in her natal home, meant not only losing the support and favor of her brothers and father, but even her husband could shun her for blotting his good name in the community. It is then a rather difficult ask and one that understandably women do not make till absolutely necessary, as it could put them in a precarious position socially.

The idea that women make this tradeoff by giving up on a stable financial and livelihood asset, redefines how **social protection** is understood by women in rural agrarian economies. The social capital and support constitutive of their community, family, and their brothers' protection – financially and morally – makes up for the material loss of giving up on the land. Thus, one can see that while there is a law founded on the notion of gender equality in inheritance, the widely accepted practice of not including women's claim to land rights in the natal home is based on kinship systems which in turn are based on a different logic. Women and girls are socialized into prioritizing 'harmonious relationships' with their brothers over their independent land rights. This precarity of women's independent rights in land is to be reckoned with when thinking of strategizing advocacy or programs around women's land rights.

There is a strong possibility that once the 2005 amendment in the Hindu law (which includes daughters as co-parceners) is popularized, women may stop seeing natal families as the only 'social protection'. A WLR strategy like Womanity's, which underlines the importance of the multiple ripple effects of the WLR discourse, promises to enlighten, and makes women aware of the many other state schemes and entitlements they have, could help in building a strong base for women to ask for their independent rights to land. In other words, the law on land needs to be supported through the realization of other laws and entitlements, for women to benefit from it practically.

For Womanity, the question to consider is how long would it take to create a culture that establishes the precedence of women's independent rights, both in the natal family and the marital family. The question needs to be located beyond the recognition of individual rights of women as stated in laws, and in altering kinship norms and traditions.

Land as a means of control over a woman's life

Patriarchy operates through several ways of maintaining male-dominated power structures that operate at the individual as well as at the societal levels. The ownership of assets strongly favors men. During the field visits, through numerous conversations the common refrain was that if you give land to a woman, she will leave her husband and run away. After encountering this statement from both men and women,

we asked if anyone could cite an example of any woman, to their knowledge, ever having actually run away after being given her share of land rights? The answer was a resounding no, nothing like that had ever happened. The interesting response was in the rejoinder, "… because all women here are good women." The idea that owning assets is equivalent to having control over someone's life is well understood; so, men can own assets on behalf of women, as that arrangement keeps the latter dependent on men. Therefore, to give land rights is to give up control over their women.

The question for Womanity to consider would be that while, in developing a Theory of Change, patriarchy can be seen as a barrier to gender equality, merely working on awareness of women's rights would yield limited results. Addressing this deep-rooted patriarchal system will require working on various fronts to make the gains from its investments in WLR sustainable.

Women's Land Rights and Land Use

Another important component to consider in this debate is **what do women do with the land**? Once the land is transferred in their names, do they have enough social capital to manage the farming and allied activities, and most importantly do they have the resilience to maintain control over the land? Without these elements, women's control over land is likely to slip away, so the change cannot be sustainable, leading to the need for intervention again in the next generation of women. Land rights as well as representative relationships with land require a more rounded approach which includes creating a conducive environment for women to find the power to make decisions and to assert those decisions, and to manifest this power in holding on to the land as a useful asset, as well as passing the knowledge of land laws and the resilience to go through difficult social processes on to their daughters.

In conclusion, the Womanity's program, especially with its strategy to fund and support the issue of women's land rights in diverse contexts, displays three critical aspects that should be amplified:

- A focus on the broader aspects of women's land relations instead of only on women's land rights;
- Women's ability to shape relationships both financially and socially to have greater voice and agency; and
- Strengthening civil society action aimed at empowering women through more gender-equal land relations.

This learning framework would help to ask relevant questions and reflect on elements that need to be modified, added, or dropped through the program cycle. A review of the framework periodically will help to refine it based on emergent experiences and insights.

Forming a base through this document we hope further research and strategic interventions will shed more light on the subject of women and land.

Annexures

Annexure 1
Fieldwork Schedule and Methods of Data Collection

Organization	State	Date	Location	Respondents	Type of Interaction
Jan Sahas	Dewas, Madhya Pradesh	20-26 August 2023	Jaleria Village	Women from Dalit communities	Group Conversations
			Amaladas and Gopipur Village	Women from Bhil and Bhilala Tribes, Scheduled Caste (SC) community	Group Conversations, Participant Observations
			Baleri Village	Women from Bhil Tribe	Group Conversations
			Community Online Center, Bahali	Lawyers	Participant Observations, Interview
			Community Online Center, Bagali	Coordinator	Interview
			Surajpura Village, Tarana Tehsil	Women	Participant Observations, Group Conversations
			Gamlikheda	Sarpanch and Panchayat Members	Group Conversations
			Chikli	Jan Sathis and Field Officers	Participant Observations, Interactive Games, Role Play

Organization	State	Date	Location	Respondents	Type of Interaction
Lok Astha Seva Sansthan	Gariyaband, Chhattisgarh	4-9 September 2023	Hatmahua Village	Women from Bhunjia Tribe	Group Conversations
			Pandripani Village	Women leaders and FRC	Group Conversations
			Raiama Village	Women from Bhunjia Tribe and OBC groups	Group Conversations
			Litipara Village	Sachiv	In-depth Interviews
			Litipara and Hatmahua Villages	Jaat Panchayat Leaders	Participant Observations, Group Conversations
			Office, Gariyaband	Staff of LASS	Group Conversations
Prakriti	Nagpur, Maharashtra	10-13 October 2023	Prakriti Office	Suvarna Damle	In-depth Interviews
			Prakriti Office	Prakriti Staff (working on WLR)	Group Interviews
			Sawarmendha Village	Women Leaders	Group Conversations
			Prakriti	Women Leaders	Group Conversations
			Champana Village	Women Leaders, Women	Group Conversations
			Neemtalai and Kothulana Villages	Women Leaders, Women	Group Conversations

Organization	State	Date	Location	Respondents	Type of Interaction
Aastha Sansthan	Udaipur, Rajasthan	29 September to 3 October 2023	Kholri and Oda villages	Women from Meena, Adivasi Group and Meghwal, OBC community	Group Conversations
			Piplikheda	Women from Bhil and Ghasiyar Communities	Group Conversations
			Kota	Akila	In-depth Interviews
			Kota	Animators	Group Conversations
Foundation for Ecological Security	Dhenkanal, Odisha	15-20 October 2023	Dhenkanal	Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) Staff	Group Interviews
			Ballikuan	Women	Group Conversations, Participant Observations
			Bangura	Members of Lakhimpur Panchayat	Group Conversations
			Ektali Village	Sarpanch	Interviews
			FES	Pratibha and Niranjan	Interviews
			Ballikuan	Cadre	Group Conversations
				Swapna	In-depth Interviews
ASVSS	Solapur, Maharashtra	30 October 2023	Online Meeting	Organization Staff	Group Interview
Jan Chetna Sansthan	Rajasthan	30 October 2023	Online Meeting	Organization Staff	Group Interview

*Refer to Annexure 5 for interactions with other stakeholders.

Annexure 2
Methodology: An Ethnographic Approach for Evolving Inquiries

The Womanity Foundation's ask from this exercise was a unique one. Not only did it emphasize that this was not an evaluation, but it was also made it abundantly clear that learnings – past, present and future – would form the core of this document. They wanted to understand the learnings of the various organizations over the 18-month project period, as well as their current learning needs. The idea was to study past struggles, wins, lessons, and persisting challenges to arrive at what may look like a fairly distant goal and what would lead to the goal. To cater to this, we needed to develop a learning framework, which would map all the possible needs for building knowledge and strengthening skills on WLR issues, while simultaneously making it possible for all organizations to learn from each other's experiences. This was no easy feat to achieve in the short period of six months. The framework emerged organically during our analysis and writing process, keeping in sight Womanity Foundation's theory of change.

The learning document was a first for all of us. Many meetings, debates, and discussions went into understanding and coming to a consensus about what we all needed to gauge, see, and learn from this exercise. At ISST, we have always believed that the research questions must lead us to select the methodology, so that justice can be done while building evidence, and the findings can throw enough light on the inquiry. As the process of understanding the expectations from the learning document evolved over time, we came to the realization that a conventional qualitative methodology would not serve our research design. Therefore we chose elements of the ethnographic methodology carefully and added to the research design at all stages, from selection of the team members, listing the research questions, doing the fieldwork and then the analysis and writing. While a conventional qualitative method allows the research to gather the non-quantitative elements in the field, an ethnographic approach goes a step further to allow researchers to deep dive into the contexts of the respondents, arrive at their own understandings of their lifeworld, and minimise the power hierarchy between the researcher and the respondent to generate as granular a picture of the field as possible. Since a proper ethnographic research study requires deeply engaging fieldwork of at least six months, this was beyond the scope of our timeline. Nonetheless, we successfully integrated some important elements from the anthropological methodology to suit our questions, contexts, and outcomes.

Why was an ethnographic approach chosen for this study?
The five organizations we had to study and understand exhibited the five following diversities:

1. Across the regions and states in which the partner organizations were located;
2. In the range of strategies and intervention techniques they deployed to implement their respective WLR projects;
3. In gender and intersectional identity and relations, despite the common strand of patriarchal oppression;
4. In the kind of land in question; and
5. Related to the various applicable land laws, whether national, regional, or customary.

These diversities meant that we could do justice to our learnings from them, as well as assessing the organizational learning needs, through an ethnographic approach.

Conventional ethnographic research has the following characteristics:

1. Immersive study of a culture or community to understand behaviors, norms, and values;

2. Participant observations;

3. Thick description;

4. 6-30 months of fieldwork; and

5. Thematic analysis, cultural analysis, and grounded theory.

We found the following merits in the ethnographic methodology, which dovetailed with our requirements in building a learning document on WLR:

1. Recognizing our personal and professional positionality in the field (as researchers) and trying to neutralize the resulting biases were important steps to gauge the learning needs. As middle class, educated women, born and brought up in Tier 1 cities, we had privileges we took for granted, which impacted our expectations from the world around us. To bring ourselves closer to our respondents, it was important to mentally step into their shoes and think about how the actions they are undertaking are shaped by their experiences in their life-worlds. This is always challenging, as one has to leave oneself open and vulnerable in candid conversations and in a new environment. This shift in perspective materialized as we adapted to the rhythms of the field. Letting go of our concepts of time – in terms of its linearity and our preoccupations with the value placed on punctuality – was the first step to entering a world where time had a different flow; it moved slowly, exuding patience and tolerance, things we often lose sight of in our 'back-to-back meeting' schedules in cities. The awareness that time was experienced differently in these spaces also transported us from our atomised urban existence to the expanse of community lives in the villages we visited. The idea that the larger community always had a part in your 'individual' lives, whether for good or bad, was realized through this transformed understanding of time and space.

2. With this awareness of the differences – and the biases that emanate from these – and working on personal strategies to reach a stage of being truly non-judgmental and non-presumptuous about the people and processes we were researching.

3. Understanding conventional researcher-researched hierarchies and flattening them through the use of participatory research methods, in one case through play and theatre, which leveraged elements from the 'theatre of the oppressed' to fit into the field environment in order to deal with hierarchy-driven silences and trying to better understand the context, processes, and power dynamics in the field.

4. Meaning making through thick description (behaviors/attitudes + context; perspectives in relation to people's own world) – why people (not researchers) think they do what they do; understanding structures in people's life worlds; how people understand their own actions; looking for their web of meaning.

5. Study culture and behavior as a unit and not separately. For example, during our field work in Chhattisgarh we were initially sceptical about the LASS staff not maintaining social distance from the respondents. In our social work and sociology-trained world, development work is done best by maintaining objectivity through distance; the respondents should not see you as a benefactor. This was very much the case in the field we encountered. However, eventually we realized that, given the remoteness and estrangement of the population of Bhunjiyas from the mainstream and the unique sensitivity and sensibilities in the region, there was no other way for the NGO to enter the field and maintain a relationship of trust with the communities. Plus, the NGO team was aware of this closeness and was working constantly to empower the women to be more independent and reduce

their very palpable dependence on the NGO workers. In fact, LASS's strategy was so well-planned that it successfully connected women's empowerment, political identities, and land rights organically, which could only have been achieved through the closeness they initially had with the women. LASS eventually plans to withdraw from the village after organizing the women into a large independent collective, capable of raising and resolving their own issues – Sangwari (friend) Mahila Manch. The social behaviors were embedded in the needs and peculiarities of contextual cultures and could not be understood top-down.

6. The value of empathy: placing empathy at the core of the research design and choosing tools and formulating questions accordingly.

7. Novelty-relevancy mapping: What was novel and how was it relevant to what we found? Is it relevant to all fields? If not, does it have a counterpart? We found these questions extremely valuable to ask when it came to understanding the connotations of land for a respondent group. Even though all the respondents were women, there were much diversity in their intersectional identities, so that land meant many different things to them.

8. Facilitating more agency for the researched, which was essential. For example, encouraging the women to ask us more questions, related or unrelated to the project, and answering them as openly and promptly as possible. Several women were curious and asked us questions about city life and travel. These dialogues gave us insights into how we were being perceived and how this perception was shaping their responses to our questions. We also encouraged the project teams to ask us as many questions as they liked, offered to contribute to their work while we were in their offices and went to the field with them. Many women leaders and project team members were curious about our field visits to other organizations. Their curiosity spoke volumes about organization communication needs.

9. Self-reflexivity and positionality: being aware of the self as an insider-outsider (especially during participant observation)

10. Designing contingent-emergent tools and methods based on context, using innovative ways to bring out narratives and experiences, and through these tools fostering meaningful dialogues and team-building.

We integrated the above aspects of the ethnographic methodology in the qualitative research methods we followed to create an appropriate set of methods.

The Fieldwork Process

While the fieldwork was being undertaken, we focused on the following elements:

1. Following the process of participant observation, wherever possible;

2. Writing descriptive and reflexive fieldnotes every day;

3. Reading for thick description: behaviors/attitudes, setting + context; perspectives in relation to people's own worlds;

4. Understanding structures in people's life worlds and how WLR is situated in it;

5. Looking for their web of meaning: How land right is understood, women's relationships with land, land rights as a source of empowerment for women with different intersectional identities;

6. Unpacking awareness-building. Almost all the organizations we visited started talking about WLR in the communities through an awareness meeting. We tried to unpack their idea of the awareness

meetings, what level of awareness existed according to the project staff, what was important for them to communicate, how much of what the women said, expressed, and communicated could they consider; and

7. Understanding the myriad processes of claim-making and conflict-resolution.

Participant observation as an immersive experience is an integral part of the ethnographic approach. Over the period of the field visits, ISST team members attended awareness-building workshops and women leader or cadre meetings, and observed interactions among the organization staff. In all, our team attended around 30 such meetings/discussions with community women and organization staff members, in which the members observed and participated to varying degrees. These observations allowed us to form an understanding of how the vision and approach of each organization translated into practice. It also helped us to locate the diverse and minute nuances each field context presented. For instance, we visited Hathmahua village in Chhattisgarh twice; a second time because our scheduled meeting with the community leaders was delayed and we ended up at Hathmahua village. That the LASS staff was able to visit this remote, isolated Bhunjia village unannounced and sit in the veranda of Ganeshidevi's house, which we had visited earlier, spoke volumes about the close relationship they had. The entire village was empty, as everyone had gone for their daily wage work. Some children spotted us and apparently conveyed the news of our arrival to Ganeshidevi, as her husband came to greet us shortly thereafter. Though she was not there, he made us tea and made us feel very welcome. Slowly others gathered and eventually we called the community leaders to Ganeshidevi's house and conducted the interview there. This informal interaction before the interview gave us a look into gender roles in the village where, while women were out at work, their husbands could be looking after care work at home. Through the interactions that followed, we could observe the organic and close bond between the LASS staff and the community, quite apart from the information being exchanged.

In all our field visits, we had valuable conversations with project team members and women leaders on our way to the villages. These conversations in the vehicle ranged from their work experiences to their family members to friendships, and we also managed to observe conversations among the organization staff members. These gave us an insider perspective on the everyday experiences and challenges faced by organizations and their women leaders. Once we reached the village, each field team had a unique way of welcoming us. For all the meetings and group discussions we conducted, the women in the community sang welcoming songs at the beginning. The lyrics of these songs were woven around the concepts of gender equality, women's rights, solidarity, struggle against oppression, etc. The women had memorized the songs, and this created a feeling of solidarity. In some places, the older women sang their traditional community songs. In some instances, we were welcomed with flowers and haldi-kumkum and the meeting began with paying respects to deities or historical leaders like Gandhi, Ambedkar, Azad, etc. In one of the Madhya Pradesh villages, where we went for a meeting with the panchayat leaders, a picture of Bharat Mata (India symbolized as the figure of a mother) also featured among the array on the homage altars. These diverse ways of welcoming gave us an insight into the criss-crossing ideologies, political outlooks, and social behavior in the various communities.

Participatory Research Method

Here is an example of an innovative element we included in our fieldwork, when we felt that the conventional ways of asking questions was not yielding comprehensive responses. During a team debrief towards the end of our fieldwork in one of the states, we considered including play in our method. We wondered if a little bit of ice-breaking, and role-play would generate more interest and participation from the animators, and lead to a deeper discussion on the issue and what they may still need to learn. On the last day of our fieldwork, we were set to attend and observe the monthly meeting of the

animators. We asked the project coordinator, field officers, and animators if we could engage the latter in some interactive exercises and discussions, and they were game. During the 90- minute session, we planned a role-play activity and an ice-breaker, which was a Hindi variation of ketla re ketla, a popular socio-gramming exercise, we called hawa chali, hawa chali. We had four rounds, one each for preferred color, food, hairstyle and Bollywood actor.

An immediate outcome of the socio-gramming exercise was the emergence of unknown talents. One animator, who was fond of writing poetry and singing, gave us some examples of her talents. The team members were surprised to discover this aspect of her personality, and most marvelled at her talent. The team-building process , unfolded beautifully in the conversations and mutual exchanges that followed.

We then invited volunteers for two forms of role-play, which were directed by two team members and performed jointly by the animators and us. The idea was to engage the animators in nuanced situations and in an ensuing discussion around the issues they faced in the field, which would then become a source of knowledge for us, enhance their mutual learning, as well as reiterate and refresh some of their understandings around WLR. We deliberately kept the role-play open-ended and invited audience members to participate and give their opinions/solutions to the problem being discussed in the role-play. This helped us start discussions and identify prompts for an enriched exchange. The broad plots were as follows:

1. **The patwari and his strong man** are sitting in the office. An animator brings an ST couple for land seemankaran (measurement) to start a claim-making process. The patwari does not make himself available at first, which leads to a negotiation between his strong man and the animator. Finally, during the meeting with the couple, the patwari asks for a hefty bribe to proceed. The animator tries to reason with the patwari, keeping the interests of the couple in mind.

Prompts for the ensuing discussion: difficulty in accessing the patwari, authority issues, the strong man of the patwari, strategies for negotiations with officials.

The discussion that followed revealed that animators faced many problems while trying to talk to state officials about land issues. They faced intimidation from officials and their assistants, and it was sometimes very difficult to make them pay heed to their concerns. This was an important breakthrough, as in the last six days, we had received a standard reply from all animators about the challenges faced: "In the beginning there were problems, but now there are not many problems/challenges in my work." On performing the fictional play, many of the animators agreed that what was shown actually happens with them too.

Members of the audience shared valuable suggestions with the performers as well as the larger team. One was that animators should give a proper introduction to the organization's work beyond WLR, including a presentation of its other verticals as well. Given the credibility organizations enjoys, this would build their 'identity and work' (sic) in the area, and get the patwari to take them more seriously. Another common suggestion was that animators be extremely well prepared before meeting the patwari and should have all their strategies and documents in order.

2. **Family scene:** The father has recently died and the eldest son has transferred all the land to his name. The scene is a conversation among the family members, two brothers and their wives, who are sitting with the mother. The sister, who is now married, comes home to join in the conversation. The sister asks for her share in the land.

Prompts for the ensuing discussion: the gender angle – does the daughter deserve a share in the land, given that the daughters-in-law are now taking care of the household. The discussion that followed was a rich mix – gender understanding, local community dynamics, power relations, role of the animators, and the limitations that animators face. Some innovative new strategies were even exchanged among them in the discussion that followed over lunch.

In a way it was also our way of giving back to the team because we stayed with them for six days seeking answers to our own questions. After the session, we were also asked by the field officers (FOs) about our learnings through the six days we spent with them. How did we look at and understand their work? Answering these questions led to another round of mutually enriching discussions with the animators and FOs, where we shared our observations and asked further questions to which we sought detailed answers.

Meaning-Making Workshop

After completion of the fieldwork, the team met for a day-long workshop on meaning-making at the team level. We engaged with Womanity's theory of change and the objectives of the learning document, and had detailed discussion about all the organizations individually and overall. We arrived at the following eight axis points, around which we analyzed the findings from the field:

1. Commonality and diversity among claims-making by women across organizations;

2. Triggers/motivations of organizations in taking up WLR work;

3. Strategies for WLR work;

4. Whether WLR has been understood as an accelerator for women's economic empowerment (WEE);

5. How WLR work is operationally and conceptually connected with/influences the other work of the organization;

6. Synergies with other programs;

7. The vision for WLR over the next five years or so; and

8. Organizational learning needs.

This framework helped create the first draft of the learning document. After feedback on the document from the Womanity team, the current format was adopted for the second draft of the learning document. The learning needs specified here were accessed across the organizational hierarchy, but they may not have been shared as specific needs by the organization members themselves. The last sections in all the chapters, therefore, are a compilation of what organization members told us, as well as our own assessments of what more was needed in the present mix of talents and strengths, to strengthen the program over the coming months.

Our team also engaged with various stakeholders working in WLRs, ranging from representatives from research and action groups, international land rights experts, consultants who work closely with WLR, international donors in the eco system, and members of the Womanity team.

Regular interactions with the Womanity team helped us sharpen our expectations from the exercise. An important pointer that helped us to stay the path was that the document should not read like an evaluation, but allow for learning and ensure everyone in the Womanity ecosystem is aware of the elements that need to be kept in mind, as we move deeper with the program.

Overall, we followed an approach which allowed space for improvization and improvement at all levels. Since there was no set template on which we were developing this learning document, we let it evolve and construct itself, as inputs from various stakeholders kept coming our way. The meetings with the Womanity team were key to informing the evolution of the report, and to lightening our paths. The team added questions, deleted some, and even changed the way they were asked in the field or to a particular stakeholder, to get the most enlightening response.

This project enabled the ISST team to explore a space between qualitative and ethnographic methodology. Despite a restriction on time, the length of the learning document and intensive fieldwork, the team was able to extract implicit socio-cultural elements that influence women's relationship with land. Participatory methods and observations were key to unpacking the complex nature of women's relationship with land that cannot be uncovered through quantitative and basic qualitative research tools. Making time for an extensive meaning-making exercise and stakeholder interviews allowed us to integrate our observations and data with the larger discourse on land and Womanity's theory of change. The methodology of this project places it in a unique position to offer insights into the worldview of women who are seeking land rights and a higher degree of empowerment through their relationship with land. These insights can pave the way for innovations in the work of land for women.

Annexure 3
Guiding Questions for the Field Partners

- Understanding the work routines and the structure of organizational work; probing the nature of work across different hierarchies within the organization

- Identifying the time for interviews with the team working on WLR, which includes women leaders, representatives from the field, and women involved with the program apart from the team or staff

- Understanding the reasons for working on the issue of WLR and the process for integration of the WLR program in the organization

- Identifying different stakeholders involved with the WLR program such as village-level officials or the village registrar (patwari) and understanding their role and capacity to influence WLR in the region

- Understanding the target groups (such as the women, men, government officials, law officials, and community heads) for working on WLR and the process of engagement and nature of the conversations to be held with them

- Identifying any local partner organizations or groups involved with them

Annexure 4
Field Notes Format

Name of the organization:

Date:

- **Name of village/place visited**

- **Type of conversation/observation** (interview, casual conversation, focus group discussion [FGD], observation, participant observation)

- **Respondents' profile/names** (whichever is available/ethical to quote)

- **Questions asked** (here you can enumerate the major questions/related points that came up and which you led with. If this is being filled from memory, you might not remember all the questions, but the more questions and sub-questions you can enumerate, the better)

- **Discussion** (this section will have the entire discussion from memory. Please try to list verbatim as much as you can. We need thick description in order to do good ethnographic research/analysis, as well as quotations/ words which were used recurrently or for certain key things/people in the field; this will go a long way during the analysis when we sit down and join the dots)

- **Highlights of the discussion** (what stood out, what was a changing point or something you noticed – a change in tone, getting distracted because of something in the environment, etc.)

- **Takeaways from the discussion** (what you learnt from the discussion – how it resonated with what you already knew – this could be new information, a correction of something you thought you knew or something which just stayed with you – from conversations, personalities, dynamics, etc.)

- **Further questions/issues/themes (I want to ask/probe) inspired from this discussion** (so that you can continue to reflect and make connections routinely, as a part of the process)

- **Reflections and meaning making** - how this relates to the larger question of WLR (this could be an extension of the point above but also to add anything you felt personally, reflecting on the process of how you draw meaning out of the data)

- **Observations and remarks around settings, dynamics and other seemingly unremarkable things that may have come to notice and may be of significance** (even though not directly and not right now)
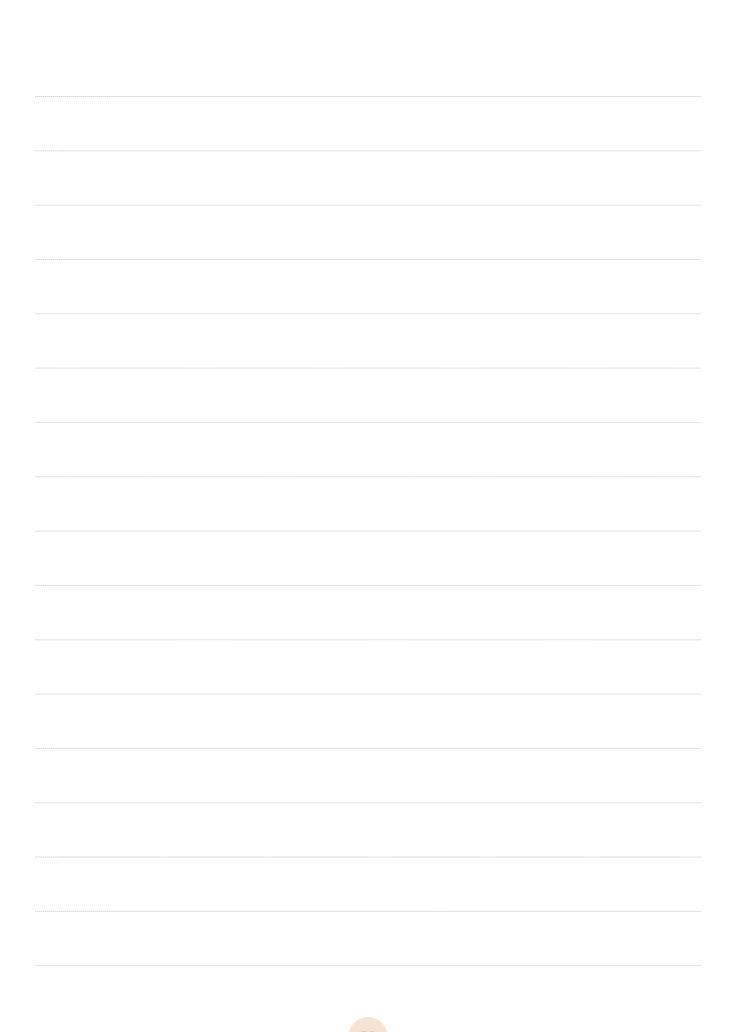
Annexure 5
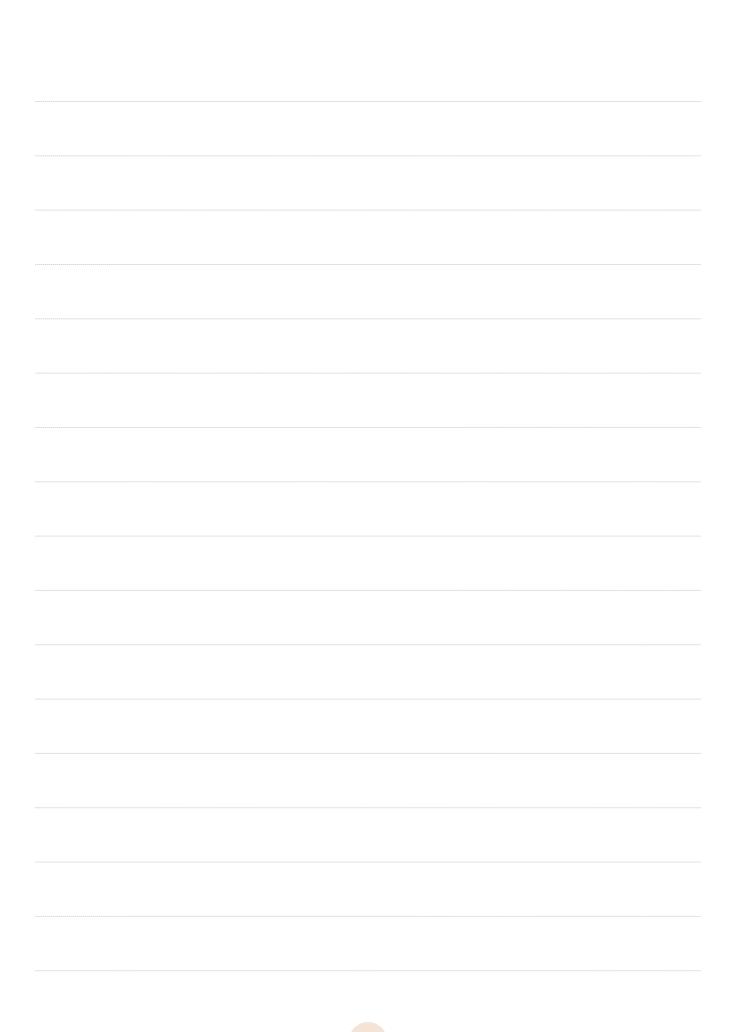## Stakeholders List and Guiding Questions

S. No	Name	Designation	Affiliation
1.	Linzi Sarkar	Senior Program Officer	The Womanity Foundation
2.	Shivani Gupta	Co-CEO and Program Director India	The Womanity Foundation
3.	Valentina Di Felice	Head of Impact and Learning	The Womanity Foundation
4.	Abhishek Kadam	Director	Social Synergy Foundation
5.	Shipra Deo	Director, Women and Land	Landesa
6.	Jeanette Lai	Associate Program Director	COMO Foundation
7.	Alice Morris	Member	Working Group of Women and Land Ownership
8.	Pranab Ranjan Choudhury	Founder	Center for Land Governance

Guiding Questions for Stakeholders

- Tell us about your personal journey with understanding WLR, both as a woman and as part of a sector which is working towards its realization.

- According to you, what is the most concerning challenge around land ownership in India? What was the need to work on WLR, and MMW specifically?

- What are some of the perspectives from other contexts and countries that you think are useful for the Indian context?

- What is unique about the approach of the five organizations Womanity is supporting? What is your opinion about the work they have done in the last 18 months around WLR?

- If, and how do, they face a backlash for working on WLR?

- If you could make a change in the strategies applied by Womanity to tackle the question of WLR, what would it be?

- What have been your most enduring challenges in this journey?

- What has been the most important lesson you have learnt so far?

- What is still a blind spot, something that you can't fully comprehend and would like to explore deeper?

- What is that one intervention that can change things for good – on the level of law, policy and the grassroots; what change in a related element in the universe of gender do you think will have a positive effect on WLR and why? For example, will legalization of marriage for non-binary couples, or their right to property, make things better for women?

- Think of a problematic case/scenario from the field which had an impact with you. Visualize and narrate the ideal scenario for that situation and what it would have changed for people involved in it.

- What are the areas you would like to learn more about through this learning document?