

**ROLE OF COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS IN ACCESS TO RESERVE  
COMMON LAND TO SCHEDULED CASTE COMMUNITY OF PUNJAB: A SPECIAL  
FOCUS ON ZAMEEN PRAPTI SANGARSH COMMITTEE**

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**Abstract**

*Community-based organizations (CBOs) play a vital role in the implementation of laws and policies related to common land governance and management. The Punjab Village Common Lands (Regulation) Act of 1961 is a significant legislative effort aimed at regulating and ensuring the proper utilization of village common lands in the state of Punjab, India, especially providing 1/3 part of reserved Panchayati land to Scheduled Caste people of concerned village. This research paper aims to explore and analyze the role of community-based organizations in the effective implementation of the Punjab Village Common Lands (Regulation) Act 1961. By analyzing existing literature and interview conducted from the president and members of community based organizations, the paper sheds light on how CBOs contribute to the sustainable management of village common lands, ensure social equity, and promote community development. The findings highlight the importance of strengthening the capacities of CBOs, fostering collaboration among stakeholders, and creating an enabling policy environment to enhance the successful implementation of the Act.*

**Keywords:** Community-Based Organizations, Land Governance, Punjab Village Common Land Act 1961, Sustainable Development, Shamlat land, Rural Communities, Land Management.

**Introduction**

The land is a critical resource that plays a pivotal role in sustaining livelihoods, fostering economic development, and ensuring social cohesion in rural communities. In fact, in Punjab land is not only the source of livelihood but also the status of symbol of status. Scheduled Caste people are systematically excluded from the use and access of panchayati cultivable land. According to Census of India 2011 Punjab has highest percentage of Scheduled Castes population in India (31.94%) but they own only 3.20% of agricultural land. Majority of SC population (73.33%) is living in rural Punjab but very few (6.02%) of them

are cultivators (Census of India 2011). The Punjab Village Common Lands (Regulation) Act of 1961 was enacted to address issues related to the management, utilization, and distribution of village common lands. The Act aimed to provide legal provisions for equitable distribution, prevent encroachments, and promote sustainable land use practices. Act also provided 1/3 part of panchayati cultivable land reserved for Scheduled Caste people of the village (Punjab Village Common Lands (Regulation) Act, 1961; Punjab Village Common Lands (Regulation) Rules, 1964). But on ground reality the act is not implemented, the landowning upper caste people used and cultivated the reserved Panchayati land on lease on the name of any Scheduled Caste person (Singh, 2019, P. 25; Times of India, 5/10/2015). Actually the panchayat as per the instructions of Director of Rural Development and Panchayat Officer organised a bid every year to give Panchayati cultivable land to highest bidder through auction of this land. Total 1/3 part of this land is reserved for Scheduled Caste people of concerned village but the Act is not implemented on ground level. In this context, Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) have emerged as important actors in facilitating the successful implementation of the Act. The present paper focused on contribution and working of Zameen Prapti Sangrash Committee (henceforth ZPSC to provide 1/3 reserved panchayati land to scheduled castes. Study is based on the interview conducted from the President and members of CBOs.

### **Defining Community Based Organizations:**

Community Based Organizations (CBOs) are basically non-government and non-profit organizations that function at the ground level, especially within a specific locality or community. CBOs are generally formed by the members of a particular community who work together to rectify the issues of common concerns and tried to solve the problems of their community and the overall development of its members (Sells & Geyer, 2006). The members of CBOs are known to each other and closely connected with each other and they have a deep understanding of local issues which helps them to face their challenges and to solve them. The members of CBOs are determined by the principle of community participation and engage its members in the practice of decision-making and endeavor to empower them. The major goals of CBOs vary depending upon the unambiguous needs and requirements of their community. These organizations mainly work on areas such as poverty alleviation, healthcare, education, human rights, environmental conservation, women's empowerment, rights of labourers, livelihood promotion, and social justice. In spite of this,

it also encourages inclusivity, diversity, and social cohesion. It also tried to encourage active participation from all other sectors of the community. CBOs make use of various strategies such as community mobilization through local workshops, regular meetings with its members, seminars, agitation, protest, and gherao of minister and government officers, capacity building, etc to achieve their objectives.

In Punjab Community Based Organizations are playing a vital role in the empowerment of downtrodden people and local communities. There are a number of CBOs working in Punjab concerning different issues such as women empowerment, upliftment of Scheduled Castes, upliftment of agricultural labourers, improving the livelihood of farmers, environment conservation, and protection of common property resources. In the context of the Punjab Village Common Lands (Regulation) Act, 1961, Community Based Organizations mainly are contributing to its implementation through various mechanisms such as Awareness and Advocacy, Monitoring and Enforcement Participatory Planning etc.

In this paper Zameen Prapti Sangrash Committee (henceforth ZPSC) which is working for Scheduled Caste people to access their legal right of 1/3 reserve Shamlati cultivable land is discussed. ZPSC is playing a fundamental role in bringing social change by providing reserved Shamlati cultivable land to Scheduled Caste people in their villages and improving the quality of life for individuals and families of SCs within a geographic region of Malwa in Punjab State (Jha, 2016). The members of this Community Based Organizations visited the villages, spread awareness among SC people about their legal rights and encourage them to fight for their share of cultivable Shamlati land. In majority of the villages members of CBOs lead the struggle of Scheduled Caste people to get their reserved Shamlati land and got succeeded in it. These CBOs shows the path to SC people to get their reserved Shamlati land, help them in their struggle and also lead them for co-operative farming in majority of the villages.

Zameen Prapti Sangrash Committee (ZPSC) is the major organization which is working for the 1/3 reserve Shamlati cultivable land. It was formed in 2014 at Badrukha conference which was organized by Naunjwan Bharat Sabha (henceforth NBS) (Mishra and Bajpai, 2016, P. 13). ZPSC fight a number of struggle to provide 1/3 reserve land to Scheduled Caste people of concerned village. There are four parts of the working strategy of ZPSC, firstly it recognized the village where there is Shamlat cultivable land is available and the SCs are interested to do struggle to get their reserve land. Secondly it aware the

Scheduled Caste people of the village about their land rights and struggle to get reserve common land. The third step is the struggle which includes dharnas, protest against landlords and government officials, if it still not working then the last step is the encroachment (Kabza) of their reserve Shamlati land (Mahil, 2019; Krishna 2019). They sit on the Dharna at reserve land and tried to stop the proxy cultivation. In this way the bid is cancelled at number of times in different villages. Majority of the villages ZPSC worked on this strategy and got succeeded. According to the president of ZPSC there are some members required who can worked for whole time for the organization. Otherwise it will be very difficult to fight with dominant landlords and government machinery.

Now in many villages of Punjab Scheduled Caste people got reserve Shamlati land through auction for lease of one year. In the process of auction the Shamlati land is given for one year only at a time. In this process landlords tried to get this reserve land through dummy Scheduled Caste candidate every year. In every year Scheduled Caste people have to fight with landlords to get their reserve Shamlati land. To sort out this problem ZPSC demanded that the land should be given to SCs for 99 years of contract by resolution of gram panchayat. For this course of action the most important task is to convince the people and then pressurise the gram Panchayats to give Shamlati reserve land to Scheduled castes for 99 years of contract. SC people were not convinced for that, actually according to them it is not possible. Nobody will give a land on this long period of 99 years. But they after the efforts of ZPSC people got convince to get land for 33 years of lease. The next action of the ZPSC is to convince the Gram Panchayats to give this land for 33 years of lease instead of 1 year of lease. ZPSC succeeded in his work when Panchayats of three villages namely, Dhandiwal, Mulloal, Tolewal passed the resolution to give reserve land to SCs for 33years of lease (Dahiya , 2022; Mahil, 2019). In Tolewal village ZPSC contested and win the election of village Sarpanch. Then Sarpanch passed the resolution to give land to SCs of the village for 33 years lease. But after some times the Sarpanch has suspended and panchayat denied giving land for 33 years of lease. ZPSC protested against this and asked the village panchayat to scrap the resolution which earlier passed by village panchayat to give land for 33 years of lease to SCs otherwise give land 33 years of lease. Then landlords tried to get the reserve land through dummy SCs candidate and as a result conflict occurred in the village. Finally panchayat has to give this reserve Shamlati land for 3 years of lease to SCs of the village for

cultivation. In Dhandiwal and MULLOWAL also panchayat give this land for 3 years of lease to SCs (Mishra, 2017; Sandhu 2016).

## **Conclusion**

The Punjab Village Common Lands (Regulation) Act of 1961 lays the foundation for equitable and sustainable management of village common lands. Community-based organizations play a pivotal role in its successful implementation by raising awareness, building capacity, monitoring, and advocating for the rights of local communities. Strengthening the role of CBOs and fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration is essential for realizing the goals of the Act and ensuring the sustainable development of rural communities. While CBOs contribute positively to the implementation of the Act, they also face challenges such as limited financial resources, lack of legal expertise, and bureaucratic hurdles. Strengthening CBO capacities through training, resource allocation, and legal support can enhance their effectiveness.

To further enhance the role of CBOs in implementing the Act, policymakers should consider various measures such as- Capacity Building: Developing programs that offer training and skill-building opportunities for CBO members to effectively carry out their roles. Collaboration: Creating platforms for collaboration between CBOs, government agencies, and other relevant stakeholders to ensure a coordinated approach. Legal Support: Providing legal aid and guidance to CBOs to navigate complex land-related issues and disputes. Incentives: Recognizing and incentivizing the contributions of CBOs through policy mechanisms can motivate their active engagement.

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