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Q4

**State the objectives and measures of land reforms in India.
Discuss how land ceiling policy on landholding can be considered
as an effective reform under economic criteria.**

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · GS III · 10 marks · Land Reforms

Land reforms in India.

Core demand of the question

- State objectives of land reforms in India
- List the main measures taken
- Discuss how a land-ceiling policy can be an effective reform under economic criteria, not only equity slogans

Revision summary

Objectives were to end intermediaries, secure tenants, redistribute surplus, consolidate plots, and fix records.

Measures included **zamindari abolition**, tenancy laws, ceiling statutes, Bhoodan, consolidation, and digital land records.

A ceiling helps the economy if land moves to tillers and output and credit rise.

It fails if plots become uneconomic or surplus stays benami.

Legal leasing, records and a credit-water package make ceiling an economic reform, not only a slogan.

Introduction

Land reforms after Independence tried to break the old rentier order and put the tiller closer to the title. The political aim was justice. The **economic** test is whether the same measures raise output, credit and investment, or only split plots until they cannot feed a household.

Body**Objectives**

- Abolish **intermediaries** so the State and the cultivator meet without a zamindar.
- Give **security of tenure** and fair rent to tenants.
- Redistribute surplus land through **ceilings** so the landless get a plot.
- **Consolidate** fragments so a holding can take a tube well and a tractor.
- Update **records** so title supports credit.

Measures

- Abolition of zamindari and similar intermediaries in the 1950s, with compensation, under State laws and **Ninth Schedule** protection.

- **Tenancy laws:** regulation of rent, prohibition of eviction without cause, and in some States a path to ownership.
- **Land ceiling** statutes from the 1960s-70s, with declared surplus and allotment to the landless; implementation was uneven and exemptions were wide.
- **Bhoodan** and gramdan as voluntary transfers, limited in area.
- Consolidation of holdings in parts of the north; weaker in the east and south.
- **Digital India Land Records Modernization Programme** and unique land-parcel IDs try to make the record match the ground.
- Recent policy also discusses **legal leasing** (NITI Aayog model **Agricultural Land Leasing Act, 2016**) so ceilings are not evaded by oral tenancy.

Ceiling under economic criteria

- A ceiling is economically useful if it **cuts unproductive concentration** and puts land with those who will till it, raising labour absorption and local demand.
- It fails the economic test if it creates **uneconomic fragments**, if surplus is benami, or if the new owner has no credit, water or extension.
- **Effectiveness therefore needs: accurate records**, few unjustified exemptions, a **floor as well as a ceiling** through consolidation or cooperatives, and **legal lease markets** so a viable operational holding can form without reversing equity.
- **Ceiling is then a reform of structure, not a one-time seizure:** title plus water plus credit is the economic package.

Flow diagram

Land reform objectives -> End intermediaries
 Land reform objectives -> Tenancy security
 Land reform objectives -> Ceiling surplus
 Land reform objectives -> Records credit
 Ceiling surplus -> Economic test
 Economic test -> Viable holding plus tiller

Conclusion

Land reforms aimed at equity, tenure and records. Ceiling can be an effective economic reform only if surplus actually reaches tillers and holdings remain viable through consolidation, credit and lawful leasing. A paper ceiling with benami land fails both justice and output.

Facts & figures

Zamindari abolition

First-generation State laws in the 1950s removed intermediaries between the State and the cultivator.

Ceiling laws

1960s-70s statutes capped family holdings; declared surplus was smaller than the paper target because of exemptions and evasion.

DILRMP

Digital India Land Records Modernization Programme: computerise records and map parcels so title can support credit.

Model leasing Act 2016

NITI Aayog draft so landowners can lease legally without fear of losing title, and tenants can access credit.

Ninth Schedule

Many early land-reform laws were placed here to shield them from property-right challenges.

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