

Hurdles in department of land records



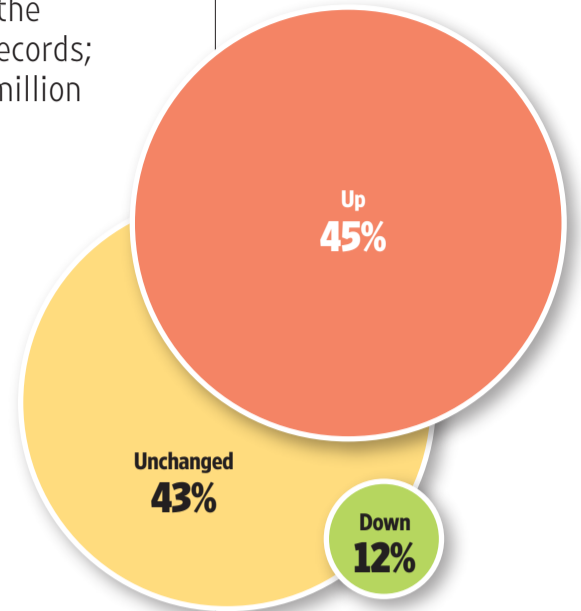
For the poor, obtaining crucial land records could depend on their ability to pay a bribe. Land records form the basis for the assignment and settlement of land titles and are needed to sell, purchase and mortgage land without dispute. Accessing them is one of the most arduous tasks in India, primarily because of the absence of updated records, a multiplicity of laws and the administrative involvement of several Union ministries and state procurement agencies. A 2004 World Bank study, 'Doing Business', found that the cost of registering land transactions as a percentage of property value in India was among the highest in the world. A Transparency International India-Centre for Media Studies survey on the impact of corruption on the so-called below the poverty line (BPL) households found that 18% of those surveyed had interacted with the office of land records; states such as Kerala and Karnataka reported interaction rates of 61% and 51%, respectively. About 3.5 million BPL households surveyed ended up paying a bribe to avail the services; the bribes added up to Rs123.38 crore.

Comment at feedback@livemint.com

Perception of corruption

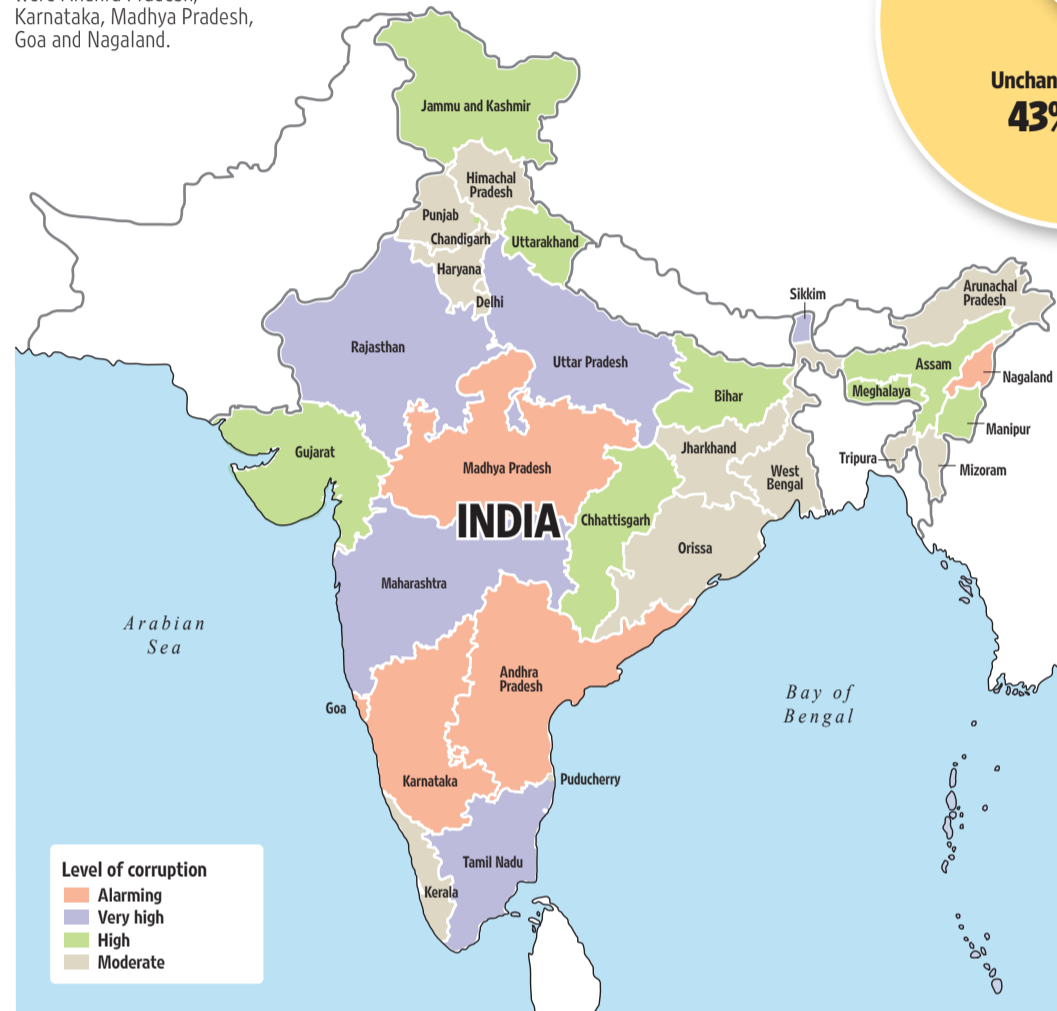
About 69% of BPL households who visited the revenue and registration departments alleged these were corrupt. In some states, this figure was substantially higher.

Corruption is:



How they stacked up

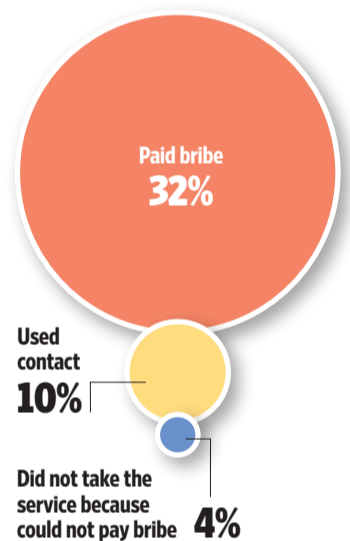
The states that reported alarming levels of corruption were Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Goa and Nagaland.



Bribe payment

(figures in %)

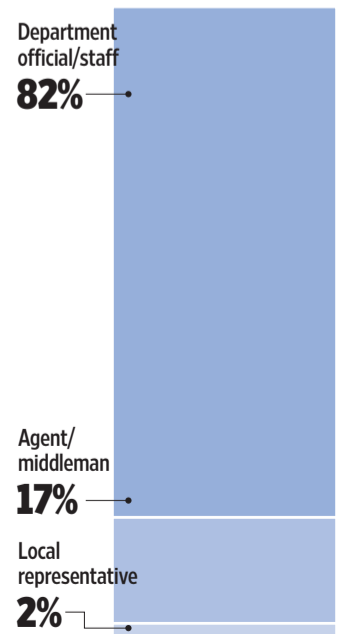
While almost one-third of BPL households surveyed paid a bribe, about one-tenth used the services of a contact to move the authorities.



Route of bribe payment

(Households in %)

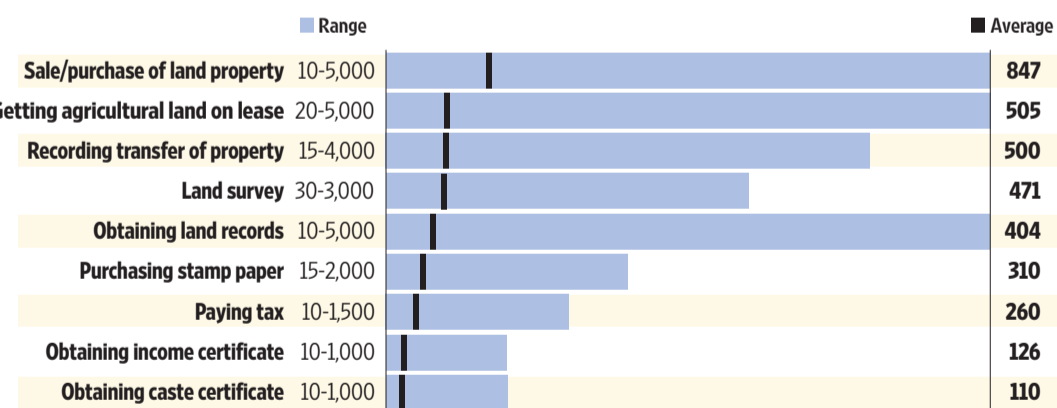
At least eight out of 10 BPL households paid the bribe directly to the department official. The survey has established a clear nexus between the higher-level officials and the lower-level staff; as a result, bribes for the former were routed through the lower-level staff. And, about one in five BPL households ended up paying a bribe to a middleman to avail the services of the land records office.



Amount of bribe paid

(figures in Rs)

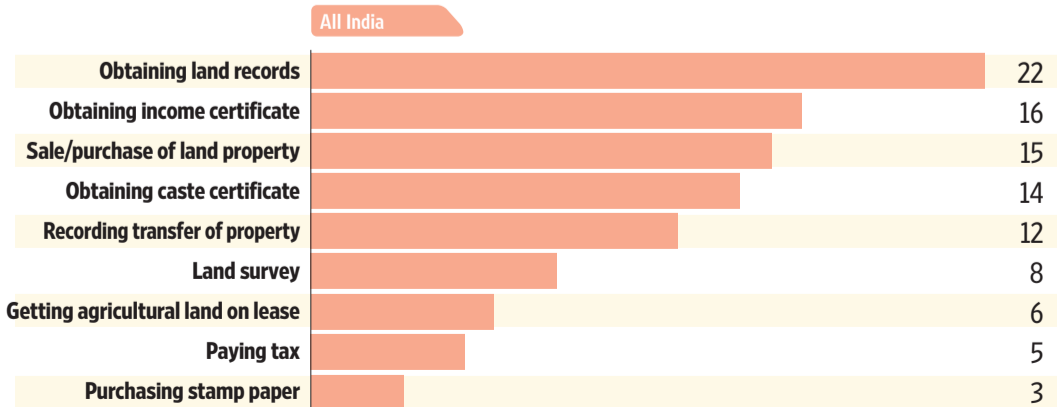
The range of bribes paid varied from as low as Rs10 to as high as Rs5,000. The survey estimates that about 3.5 million BPL households paid a bribe to avail land-related services in 2007, adding up to Rs123.38 crore; in other words, on average, a poor household had to pay a bribe of Rs405.



Reasons for paying bribe

(figures in %)

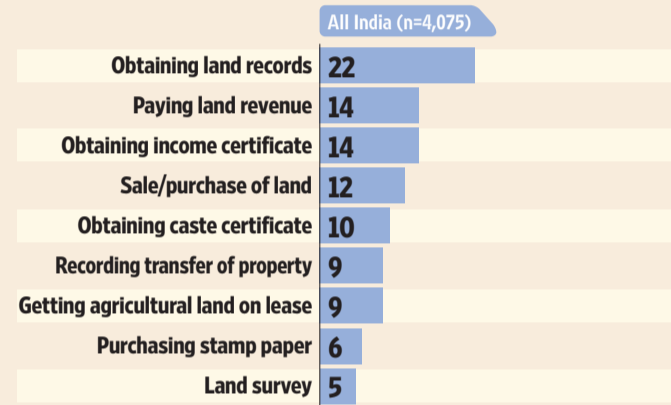
Nearly one in four BPL households who reported paying a bribe, said they did so for obtaining land records and about one in 10 did so to record the transfer of their land.



Graphics by SANDEEP BHATNAGAR/MINT

Creating the circumstances

(figures in %)
The BPL households interacted with the land records office for several reasons. The most popular reason was to obtain land records to avail bank loans.



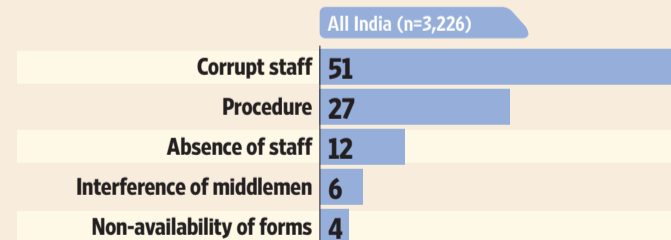
Repeat visits

(figures in %)
At least half the BPL households had to visit the land records office at least thrice. Almost one in four did so to get a certified copy of the land record.



Difficulties faced

(figures in %)
At least three out of four BPL households who visited the revenue and registration department faced problems. And 51% of them blamed it on the corrupt staff.



Efforts to improve services

(figures in %)
Only one in 10 BPL households surveyed was willing to accept that measures were undertaken to rein in corruption in the land records office. Interestingly, only four BPL households took recourse to Right to Information to obtain information on land records and registration services.



Response to some questions resulted in more than one answer

Source: Transparency International India-Centre for Media Studies survey