

An Overview of Farmers Suicide in India

Dr. P. Chand Basha

Reader in Sociology, K.H. Government Degree College, Dharmavaram, Anantapur (Dist) Andhra Pradesh (India)

ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History

Published Online: 07 August 2018

Keywords

Developing country, Farmers, Suicide

ABSTRACT

India is a developing country and After China it is considered as one of the fastest developing nation of the world. Further, it is an agrarian country with around 48.9% of its people depending directly or indirectly upon agriculture. Nowadays the problem of farmers' suicides is one of the vital concerns that need to be addressed by the Government. As many as 5,650 Indian farmers committed suicide in 2014, or 15 farmers a day, according to data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). Days after attributing the record number of farmer suicides in 2015 to poor disbursement of credit, which left them at the mercy of usurious money lenders, the Centre on Tuesday shared with Parliament grim statistics highlighting how the situation remains unchanged in 2016.

There is a wide array of factors that has led to the increasing spate of farmer suicides in India. The lands are not as productive as before, the markets are failing, the debts are piling up, and the pests cannot be kept at bay. More than an economic problem, this has now assumed political and humanitarian dimensions, especially since the past decade. More than 80% of the Indian farmers are marginal land owners and they are economically poor. So they are facing economical problems for successful running of agricultural activities. In addition to this, the farmers has their family responsibilities like education, marriages and health provisions of their family members and children, which requires huge money. The burden of these entire things turns them towards suicides.

The fertilizers and pesticides that they use are of a poor quality. All these factors often lead to complete loss of crops. Quite often it so happens that the better quality seeds are so expensive that the small and medium farmers cannot buy them. As far as manure is concerned, most small farmers and peasants have to use cow dung, which is an effective one. However, the problem for them is that this cow dung is used as fuel too, which means that not enough cow dung is available for all. Chemical fertilizers are mostly out of bounds for the poor farmers. Prevention of crop failure should be the primary aim of the Government. In most cases, it is not the lack of water but the lack of proper management on the government's part that causes water shortage. at organic manure is highly necessary to make sure that soil stays healthy. the farmers could be helped to shift to the cultivation of crops that would be easy and economical to cultivate in adverse conditions. Agriculture should be approached professionally and not as a traditional occupation. The solution to the farmer's plight should be directed towards enabling the farmers to help themselves and sustain on their own. Temporary measures through monetary relief would not be the solution.

1. Introduction

India is a developing country and After China it is considered as one of the fastest developing nation of the world. Further, it is an agrarian country with around 48.9% of its people depending directly or indirectly upon agriculture. Despite a steady decline in its share to the gross Domestic Product (GDP) agriculture remains the largest economic sector in the country. Low and volatile growth rates under the sector and the recent escalation of an agrarian crisis in several parts of the country pose a threat not only to national food security but also to the economic well being of the nation as a whole.

Nowadays the problem of farmers' suicides is one of the vital concerns that need to be addressed by the Government. Considering the paramount importance of this issue, the NCRB, for the first time, has collected detailed data on farmers' suicides. Farmers include those who own and work on field (viz. cultivators) as well as those who employ/hire workers for

field work/farming activities. It excludes agricultural labourers. A total of 5,650 farmers have committed suicides during 2014, accounting for 4.3% of total suicides victims in the country.

As many as 5,650 Indian farmers committed suicide in 2014, or 15 farmers a day, according to data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB).A staggering 3,228 farmers committed suicide in Maharashtra in 2015, the highest since 2001, according to data tabled in the Rajya Sabha on March 4, 2016, that is almost nine farmers every day. The number of suicides almost equal the number of people killed (3,477) by the Taliban in 2014, India Spend had reported earlier. Days after attributing the record number of farmer suicides in 2015 to poor disbursement of credit, which left them at the mercy of usurious money lenders, the Centre on Tuesday shared with Parliament grim statistics highlighting how the situation remains unchanged in 2016. This paper focused on the causes and

remedial measures to curb the problem of farmers' suicide in India.

2. Causes of Farmers Suicides in India:

According to the expert in the field of agriculture, farmers' suicides in India for the same period are world's highest. There is a wide array of factors that has led to the increasing spate of farmer suicides in India. The lands are not as productive as before, the markets are failing, the debts are piling up, and the pests cannot be kept at bay. More than an economic problem, this has now assumed political and humanitarian dimensions, especially since the past decade.

1. **Financial reasons:** As an agrarian economy more the 48.9% population of India depends on agriculture and its allied activities. But for the successful running of agriculture and its allied activities requires capital. More than 80% of the Indian farmers are marginal land owners and they are economically poor. So they are facing economical problems for successful running of agricultural activities. At the same time nationalize banks are not willing to lend funds to farmers as there is no surety to return it. Even the private money lenders don't lend funds to them as they don't have any mortgage except their land. Even they lends funds to farmers they charges high rate or compound rate of interest. In addition to this, the farmers has their family responsibilities like education, marriages and health provisions of their family members and children, which requires huge money. Even the Government of India and concern state government also fails to give economic relief to farmers. The government always declares various packages in Crores of rupees to farmers for relief but due to corruption in distribution, wrong criteria's of assigning aids, unwillingness about farmers problems needy farmers don't get benefits of government help. The burden of these entire things turns them towards suicides.
2. **Issues of weather and climate:** The weather in India these days has become erratic at best and rainfall does not happen at the right time. Moderate rainfall, which is needed so much for proper agriculture, is now becoming a thing of the past and things have reached the extreme. The situation is especially bad in Central India, which can be regarded as the agricultural heartland of India. In the past three years, the weather patterns have been changing. The situation does not become any better even when there is normal rainfall. 56% of the country depends on snow-fed rivers for its water and in such a situation even marginal fluctuations can have devastating effects. The ambivalence of extremely dry and equally wet conditions often leaves unmitigated devastation in its wake. The problems are further exacerbated by the fact that 85% of precipitation in India happens because of rainfall. Dry spells can be very bad especially during the initial periods of the process of growing crops. If there are sustained repetitions of dry spells then there can be some massive crop loss. Thanks to these conditions, these days even experienced farmers are at a loss when it comes to

predicting the right time to sow their crops and the right time to harvest them. The fact that pests, weeds, and diseases are evolving has only added to the farmers' misery. Soil erosion is also a major problem faced by farmers.

3. **Quality of Seeds, Pesticides, and Fertilizers:** Farmers in India have to often make do with poor quality seeds. There are many reasons for this sorry predicament – ignorance on part of farmers, corruption of officials, ineffective and coercive laws, and improper enforcement of the same. The fertilizers and pesticides that they use are of a poor quality. All these factors often lead to complete loss of crops. Quite often it so happens that the better quality seeds are so expensive that the small and medium farmers cannot buy them. As far as manure is concerned, most small farmers and peasants have to use cow dung, which is an effective one. However, the problem for them is that this cow dung is used as fuel too, which means that not enough cow dung is available for all. Chemical fertilizers are mostly out of bounds for the poor farmers. It is also stated that organic manure is highly necessary to make sure that soil stays healthy. However, it has also been observed that excessive usage of these has led to the soil being infertile and affected the quality of crops.
4. **Inadequate Storage Facilities:** ASSOCHAM estimates that each year 30-40% of the entire agricultural produce in India is damaged because there are not enough cold storages. In monetary terms, this translates to INR 35,000 Crores. Food such as fruits and vegetables enjoy high demand round the year. However, these crops are destroyed due to abnormal rainfall. Farmers who do not have cold storages have to sell their produce as early as possible so that they do not rot. This means they are sold at a loss since supply exceeds demand by some distance. It is very costly, and thus impossible, for a small farmer to own and operate a cold storage.
5. **Unsatisfactory Realisation of Prices:** One of the most crucial problems faced by farmers in India is regarding marketing. The laws in India are outdated and most often a farmer has no option but to sell his produce in regulated markets, where the middlemen are the ones making the maximum gains. At times, they can make up to 75% profits. If the middlemen can be eliminated then the farmers could have sold their products at better rates. On the other hand, the farmers have to be satisfied with the bare minimum. The situation is especially dire in the sugar factories where the weighing scales are always said to be dodgy and it takes a significant time for the farmers to just break even. In some situations the farmers also need to give away their produce for free to the moneylenders. Distress selling in small villages is a pretty common phenomenon as well. The Rural Credit Survey has correctly stated that nothing is favourable for the farmers in terms of time, place or conditions of sale.

6. **Lack of Farm Labour:** These days farm labour is regarded as demeaning, especially casual labour. Sectors such as construction and industries are already employing people, who would otherwise be engaged in agriculture. This is also one reason urban migration has increased so much in the last few decades. These days the children of the farmers are more interested in getting institutional education and joining other jobs. The government has also started the system of minimum support prices, which has resulted in inflation and increased the wages. This means that the smaller landholders do not get much leeway in terms of hiring sufficient agricultural labour. It has also instituted schemes such as the MGNREGA for casual labourers, which means that they are more interested in those openings than any agricultural work. The fact that these jobs do not require to be them highly productive, as opposed to agriculture, only entices them further. These factors have affected the small farmer the most.
7. **Scales of Operation:** Real estate prices have gone up to such a level that people are finding it hard to buy a home as it is. In such circumstances it is unrealistic for the average people to think of owning farms for cultivation. Majority of the people who have their own land to till have got it from their ancestors. Since more often than not, after the death of a farmer his land is divided among his sons, it leaves precious little for a farmer. This is the reason that the scale of operations here is so small. At the most, it is just a couple of acres. This in turn leads to small income that does not permit processes like mechanization and automation that are needed to stay relevant. This is why the small cultivators have no option but to rely on human labour, which in this day and age is woefully inadequate. At times, thanks to the increasing real estate prices, small farmers that are not doing so well are encouraged to sell their land to realtors and ensure a good life for themselves. This also means that the amount of land available for farming is decreasing thus affecting Indian agriculture in general. The problem of small landholdings is acutely felt in states with high population density like Kerala, Bihar, West Bengal, and eastern Uttar Pradesh. In these states, on an average, farmers have less than a hectare of cultivable land. The situation is different in states such as Rajasthan and Nagaland. In fact, in states like Punjab, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh the net sown area is more than the national average. The gap between small farmers, big farmers or landlords, and medium farmers or peasants is huge. India's inheritance laws with its emphasis on fragmentation are problematic in nature. A lot of time and resources are wasted every time a fragmentation happens and it reduces output since it is highly difficult to properly cultivate such small pieces of land. Marking boundaries also means that useful and fertile land gets eaten up in the process. In such circumstances, there is precious little that the farmer can do to improve the produce.
8. **Political reasons:** Politics in India is another reason for farmer's suicide in India. For the success of any business & profession, in addition to favourable economical and weather condition, political environment also plays important role. The Indian politicians who plays important role in policy making and decision making are totally shy and neglected agriculture sector. They are failing to take effective measures for soundness of agriculture. The politician has totally neglected agriculture sector and always gives preference to Industrial and service sector. While deciding MRPs of agricultural produces they don't consider the cost incurred for the production of same. They frequently declare various relief packages for farmers but failing to take effective implementation of the same. So the needy farmers don't get the benefits of such packages. The government also frequently bans export of agricultural products as per terms & conditions of WTO & GAATs. This is harmful for the exportable agricultural produces. at the same time most of the small and marginal farmers are belongs to backward communities like SCs, STs, OBCs and Muslims (Inferiors in Indian Politics) and even today politics is the monopoly of self declared superiors. This is resulted in biases in distribution of financial help and subsidies.

3. Remedies to Farmers Suicides

What then needs to be done to prevent this sad state of affairs? There cannot be one single solution to end the woes of farmers. Giving monetary relief is not an effective solution. The solutions should aim at the entire structure of agriculture. Here are some solutions that could help in improving the state of the farmers:

1. **The dependency of agriculture on nature should be reduced.** This calls for effective management of water during seasons of good monsoons. Prevention of crop failure should be the primary aim of the Government. In most cases, it is not the lack of water but the lack of proper management on the government's part that causes water shortage. A simple example for this is the recent case of the farmers in the Penna delta of Nellore District of Andhra Pradesh. In spite of the availability of ample water for a second crop, the Government decided against permitting the second crop, in view of proposed repairs and up gradation to the reservoirs. The proposal would result in draining of precious water into the sea which could be used to the benefit of the farmers. It was only after several agitations by the farmers' organizations that the Government relented and allowed the second crop. Water management should be made more effective through inter- state co-operation on water resources, where surplus water from perennial rivers can be diverted to those regions facing drought, as it is always seen in India, where in state there is severe drought, another state has to face worst floods, such regional imbalances can be managed by effective utilization of water resources throughout the country.

2. **Making institutional finance available to every farmer** is another important solution to save the farmers from debt traps of money lenders. Where institutional finance is available, it should be made easily accessible to the poorest farmers. This calls for removing of elaborate formalities and procedures for obtaining the loans. A poor farmer would be unable to understand the complexities of procedures; he needs a simple solution for his financial needs. Effective monitoring of the disbursed funds is also required because in many cases, the poor farmer is used as a front-end while in fact the benefit of the loan is availed by a bigger land owner. In addition, monitoring is also needed to ensure that the farmers are using the funds for the right purposes.
3. **Farmers need to be advised and guided on economical methods of cultivation** which would save finances for them. The technological advancement in agriculture should be passed down to the small farmers. Where the existing crops would not do well under current drought and weather conditions, the farmers could be helped to shift to the cultivation of crops that would be easy and economical to cultivate in adverse conditions. Agriculture should be approached professionally and not as a traditional occupation.
4. The government could also explore the possibility of pooling of the lands of small farmers and making a bigger chunk of economically cultivable land. Through pooling of lands, the small farmers can avail the economies of cultivating on a larger scale.
5. **Small farmers should be encouraged to develop alternative sources of income** and the government should take up the responsibility of providing training to the farmers to acquire new skills. In drought affected areas, the Government could start alternative employment generation programmes to reduce the dependency on agriculture as the sole source of income.
6. **Provision of relief facilities alone is not sufficient as it has** been observed in the case of Andhra Pradesh where farmers committed suicides just to avail the benefits of relief packages. Relief packages should be given as a benefit to farmers to enable them to sustain their livelihood rather than as a relief to families of farmers who commit suicide.

As has been mentioned earlier, there cannot be one single and most effective solution to prevent the suicides of farmers. The trend can be reversed through active participation of the Government in addressing the real issues of the farmers that are driving them to suicides. Social responsibility also goes a long way to help the farmers. The big land owners in most places do not lend a helping hand to struggling farmers, in most cases; they grab the benefits which are otherwise meant for the poor farmers. General public, NGOs, Corporate and other organizations too can play a part in helping farmers by

adopting drought affected villages and families and helping them to rehabilitate.

The solution to the farmer's plight should be directed towards enabling the farmers to help themselves and sustain on their own. Temporary measures through monetary relief would not be the solution. The efforts should be targeted at improving the entire structure of the small farmers wherein the relief is not given on a drought to drought basis, rather they are taught to overcome their difficulties through their own skills and capabilities. The Government needs to come up with pro-active solutions and the nation has to realize that farmers' suicides are not minor issues happening in remote parts of a few states, it is a reflection of the true state of the basis of our economy.

4. Professor M.S. Swaminathan National Commission on Farmers

The National Commission on Farmers (NCF) was constituted on November 18, 2004 under the chairmanship of Professor M.S. Swaminathan. The Terms of Reference reflected the priorities listed in the Common Minimum Programme. The NCF submitted four reports in December 2004, August 2005, December 2005 and April 2006 respectively. The fifth and final report was submitted on October 4, 2006. The reports contain suggestions to achieve the goal of "faster and more inclusive growth" as envisaged in the Approach to 11th Five Year Plan.

In the last few years, a large number of farmers have committed suicide. Cases of suicides have been reported from states such as Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Kerala, Punjab, Rajasthan, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. The NCF has underlined the need to address the farmer suicide problem on a priority basis. Some of measures suggested include:

- Provide affordable health insurance and revitalize primary healthcare centres. The National Rural Health Mission should be extended to suicide hotspot locations on priority basis.
- Set up State level Farmers' Commission with representation of farmers for ensuring dynamic government response to farmers' problems.
- Restructure microfinance policies to serve as Livelihood Finance, i.e. credit coupled with support services in the areas of technology, management and markets.
- Cover all crops by crop insurance with the village and not block as the unit for assessment.
- Provide for a Social Security net with provision for old age support and health insurance.
- Promote aquifer recharge and rain water conservation. Decentralise water use planning and every village should aim at JalSwaraj with Gram Sabhas serving as PaniPanchayats.
- Ensure availability of quality seed and other inputs at affordable costs and at the right time and place.
- Recommend low risk and low cost technologies which can help to provide maximum income to farmers because they cannot cope with the shock of crop

failure, particularly those associated with high cost technologies like Bt cotton.

- Need for focused Market Intervention Schemes (MIS) in the case of life-saving crops such as cummin in arid areas. Have a Price Stabilisation Fund in place to protect the farmers from price fluctuations.
- Need swift action on import duties to protect farmers from international price.
- Set up Village Knowledge Centres (VKCs) or GyanChaupals in the farmers' distress hotspots. These can provide dynamic and demand driven information on all aspects of agricultural and nonfarm livelihoods and also serve as guidance centres.
- Public awareness campaigns to make people identify early signs of suicidal behaviour.

5. Conclusion

An analysis and interpretation of the above data shows that, the GOI and concern state governments have totally neglected agricultural sector and its allied activities. It also fails to take effective measures and its effective implementation,

which is resulted in farmers suicides, which are continuously increased in last 15 years and rate of farmers suicides is considerably increased Hence, it can be concluded that, unless all these causes are simultaneously dealt with the situation cannot improve. It requires large public investment in irrigation and rural infrastructure, rejuvenation of the cooperative credit, marketing and processing system, strengthening of the agricultural extension services and sympathetic administration working closely with the farming community.

“Give a man a fish, he will eat for a day but teach him how to fish, he will eat for the rest of his life”, so goes the popular saying, the case of our Indian farmers is similar to this, what they need is a means to sustain throughout their lives without having the face the desperation that adversity drives them to. If India has to shine, it is these farmers that need to be empowered.

References

1. National Crime Record Bureau Report, 1995 to 2010.
2. DNA, “BT cotton crop washed away in Vidarbha”, DNA Reports.
3. Vidyasagar, R.M. and Chandra, S.K. (2004). Debt trap or suicide trap? Retrieved from: www.countercurrents.org/glo-shiva050404.htm on Oct. 14, 2007.
4. MuzaffarAssadi (2005), 'Farmers' Suicide in India: Agrarian Crisis, Path of Development and
5. Politics in Karnataka'.
6. Wakude, S. M. (2005), *Farmers suicide in Maharashtra - causes and Remedies*.
7. YASHADA (2006), 'Farmers suicide: facts and possible Policy interventions'.
8. Nagaraj K., (2008), 'Farmers suicides in India: Magnitudes, Trends and Spatial Patterns, Madras
9. Institute of Development Studies.
7. Behere P. B. &Behere, A. P. (2008), Farmers' suicide in Vidarbha region of Maharashtra state: A myth or reality?, *Indian J Psychiatry*. Apr-Jun; 50(2): 124–127.
8. Ramakrishna V., (2008), Distress in the farms, *Frontline*, Volume 25 - Issue 24, Nov. 22-Dec.,
9. *JaideepHardikar*, (2011), DNA, Farmer suicides: Maharashtra continues to be worst- affected 10th year in a row Sunday, Jan 9.,
10. P. Sainath, (2011), “In 16 years, farm suicides cross a quarter million”, *Hindustan Times Nagpur*.