



## FARMERS SUICIDES IN ANDHRA PRADESH

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### ABSTRACT

The land cultivated by the deceased farmers constituted both owned and leased, and majority of them had land not exceeding three acres, both wet and dry. Farmers having small holdings were prone to the crisis. The number of sources of debt was one source (42 per cent), or two sources (44 per cent), or three sources (14 per cent). No pesticides were supplied by the government agencies. Private companies and multinationals have supplied most of the seeds. In the state, there are 13,540 licensed pesticide shops. Many farmers had tie-up with these shops for seeds and pesticides. Money lenders and landlords constituted 27 per cent of the total source of borrowings, 32 per cent from friends and relatives, 14 per cent from fertilizer shops and middle men, and banks and cooperatives provided only 14 per cent and 12 per cent respectively. At an estimated 35 per cent of farmers had borrowed Rs. 50,000 or less, 33 per cent had loans between Rs. 50,000 to 1,00,000. When 23 per cent had between one lakh and 1.5 lakh, and four per cent had 1.5 lakh to two lakhs, about four per cent had above two lakhs. Loans spent by the deceased were for seeds, fertilizers and pesticides (89 per cent), digging borewell (6 per cent) and marriages (3 per cent). A study on farmers' suicides in Andhra Pradesh was undertaken by AWARE, an NGO, to identify various factors that led farmers to commit suicide and to suggest possible solutions to avert such suicides in future. India is an agrarian country with around 60% of its people depending directly or indirectly upon agriculture. Farmer suicides account for 11.2% of all suicides in India.<sup>[1]</sup> Activists and scholars have offered a number of conflicting reasons for farmer suicides, such as monsoon failure, high debt burdens, genetically modified crops, government policies, public mental health, personal issues and family problems. There are also accusation of states fudging the data on farmer suicides.

### INTRODUCTION:

Andhra Pradesh is a close next to Karnataka so far as the number of suicides committed by farmers is concerned. It is a complete reversal of the purpose of economic liberalization. Within the span of past three years there were 688 cases of suicides committed by farmers in just 20 districts of the state. Out of the 490 suicide cases in the country last year, Andhra Pradesh alone accounted for a major share of 385 cases.<sup>68</sup> Even during the current year, as many as 169 farmers of the state have already committed suicide till date. Cotton growers are worst victims of government's misplaced priorities and misconceived planning. For the cotton growers of the state, the failure of the crop and heavy slump in the market price of cotton was so dreadful that the only course left to them was to commit suicide rather than face the ruthless and unsympathetic state machinery for adopting stringent and coercive methods for recovery of loans. Grim situation arising out of recurring drought for the last four years, unavailability of government and institutional loans to small and marginal farmers, slashing of agricultural and power subsidy leading to escalation in production cost, downslide in market price of agricultural commodities, and dismantling of agricultural extension services as well as closure of Public Distribution System are the contributing factors forcing the farmers to commit suicide.



Royalseema areas of Andhra Pradesh face severe drought conditions. For the last five years, there has been no rain in August and September, causing the crop to fall. Bits of rain in August and September provide the moisture for the groundnuts to form. With no other crop with the potential to replace groundnut, the situation is truly desperate and rural indebtedness is rife. A good crop of groundnut should yield 1,500 kg per hectare, while an excellent one gets 2,500 kg. The Anantapur farmers are only managing 200 kg per hectare – just enough for sowing. This meant the crop is too uneconomical to harvest and is left in the field to rot. At this point, the future undoubtedly seems bleak, and more than bleak with the opening up of the economy and import of palmolin. Sadly, despite the groundnut farmers being in such dire straits, little official help seems forthcoming.

### **Suicides in India: Who and why?**

Beyond the four states that we analyzed to study farmer suicides, we look at the data for all India to better understand the problem of overall suicides. Figures 6 and 7 highlight the share of population reporting suicides and the leading causes respectively. It is shocking to note that consistently over the last decades, housewives have reported significantly more suicides than any other population category in India. They account for nearly 20 percent of all suicides in India. While the overall numbers remain high, the trend shows some decline over the last five years. In comparison, farmers account for 12 percent of all suicides over last two decades, but it is heartening to see the sharpest decline within this category over the last five years. The latest data reports farmer suicides accounting for less than ten percent of all suicides in India. Remaining distribution of suicides in India are across professional categories such as private sector employees, self-employed, public sector employees and students. If we study the trends carefully, while most categories show decline over time, private sector employees and students in India are reporting higher suicides over time. With respect to the student community in India, we have found clusters appearing which are related to examinations and results time. These are covered extensively by local and national news.

### **Recommendations to stop Farmers Suicides:**

We need to develop a comprehensive policy taking into account all the related aspects – agrarian reforms, rural credit system, agricultural insurance, crop changes, employment opportunities and the role of Panchayat Raj Institutions. There is a need for the total revitalization and revamping of the farm sector and rural financial institutions to ensure average per cent age of sustainable growth per annum for the sector; otherwise the ambitious target of eight per cent growth rate per annum during tenth plan (2002-2007) would remain a dream, following are some suggestions and recommendations to alleviate the present situation.

- To sustain the family of the deceased, all the financial help should be provided as 'Fixed Deposit' in the bank, with quarterly payment of interest.
- A comprehensive Agricultural Insurance Scheme should be launched. Specific attention should be given to cover cash crops – like cotton, sugarcane and edible oils.



- Organic farming should be promoted to avoid or minimize the cost of pesticides and fertilizers.
- Biodiversity must be the basis of production to reduce vulnerability to climate and markets.
- Strongest action under Indian Penal Code should be taken against suppliers and manufactures of spurious pesticides.
- Likewise, the suppliers of spurious/inferior seeds must be punished.
- Seed supply must be maintained as a public god to protect farmers' rights.
- Integrated Pest Management (IPM) should be popularized among farmers.
- Institutionalized Credit System to the farmers must be simplified.
- Moneylenders charging the exorbitant rate of interest must be punished.

### Farmer suicides in India

| State                           | Total farm suicides between 1995 and 2010 | Average deaths per year |
|---------------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| Maharashtra                     | 50,481                                    | 3,155                   |
| Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh | 41,062                                    | 2,566                   |
| Karnataka                       | 35,053                                    | 2,190                   |
| Andhra Pradesh                  | 31,120                                    | 1,945                   |
| West Bengal                     | 19,328                                    | 1,208                   |
| Kerala                          | 18,904                                    | 1,181                   |
| Tamil Nadu                      | 14,864                                    | 929                     |
| Uttar Pradesh                   | 9,368                                     | 586                     |
| India                           | 2,56,913                                  | 16,057                  |

### Conclusion:

The reasons attributed for suicides were mostly crop failure due to pests and use of defective pesticides. Only six per cent of the farmers were able to get technical advice from mass media and the major sources of technical advice were from private pesticide shop owners. The amount of debts of the deceased farmers ranged from less than Rs. 50,000 to more than 1.5 lakh. The range included Rs. 50,000 or less (35 per cent), Rs. 50,000 to 100,000 (33 per cent), 1 lakh to 1.5 lakhs (23 per cent), and more than 1.5 lakhs (4 per cent). The loan spent by the deceased farmers was on seeds, fertilizers and pesticide (89 per cent), digging borewell (6 per cent) and for marriages (3.5 per cent). The most common method adopted to commit suicide was consuming pesticide (90 per cent) followed by hanging (8 per cent) and drowning (2 per cent). According to P. V. Ramanna, Director of AWARE, almost half of the farmers died under 40 years of age. Gram Panchayats should evolve a mechanism to identify the indebted and suicide prone farmers and help them to overcome the crisis. Extension agencies with a vision of eco-friendly sustainable development should guide the farmers to make the efficient use of water, electricity, pesticide and other inputs. The role of commission agents, traders and intermediaries should be minimized to facilitate the farmers to fetch maximum price of their produce. Agriculture policy needs to shift from its current bias of 'corporates first' to 'farmers first'.



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