AN OVERVIEW OF FARMERS SUICIDES IN ANDHRA PRADESH

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ABSTRACT

The suicides by farmers in Andhra Pradesh are increasing owing to various reasons since 2004. The multi-dimensional nature of farmers' distress is due credit, insurance, supply of inputs such as seeds, fertilizers (including bio-fertilizers), and pesticides, and marketing—are becoming serious. The social factors such as the non-empowerment of elected local bodies, the exploitative attitude of moneylenders and merchants, and gender discrimination are also led to the deprivation of small and marginal farmers and landless agricultural labor. Compounding the crumbling of institutional and social support systems are other factors such as the disconnect between research, education and extension organizations and rural realities, irregular power supply together with violent voltage fluctuations, land degradation, unsustainable exploitation of ground water and consecutive droughts. Policies relating to imports of farm commodities and economic liberalization have added fuel to the fire. The agrarian crisis has its roots in the collapse of the rural economy. The centrality of basic livelihood security concerns is missing in government policies. A systems approach is missing in dealing with the problems of farmers' distress.

KEYWORDS: Farmer’s suicide, farmer’s distress, drought, flood, new seed act planned etc.

INTRODUCTION

The suicides by farmers in Andhra Pradesh have highlighted the adverse impact of neglecting irrigation and agriculture in a predominantly agrarian State. Stating that these and allied sectors such as cooperatives and dairying suffered conscious neglect attributed the suicides to this policy change. Farmers’ suicide in Andhra Pradesh has been hitting the national headlines for a decade. In 2000, the State was rocked by the revelation that 26 debt-ridden farmers of Guntur district had sold their kidneys. Many of the cases were reported from the Palanadu region where cotton and chilies are grown. Low prices and poor crop yields forced many to end their lives. The farm sector in Andhra Pradesh is going through a purple patch right now, thanks to a good monsoon. Irrigation reservoirs are full and hydel power generation has reached an all-time high, so much so the Government has offered Rs.200 crore
as refund Low power consumers. Though the Government, announced a massive Rs.45,000 crore outlay for pending irrigation projects. Many of them are caught up in controversies relating to cost escalation, corruption charges, opposition from the displaced, and environmental issues. Nine districts received less than normal rainfall for two years, forcing farmers to go in for more bore wells. The bore wells did not yield adequate water and the crop failed. The debt-ridden farmers ended their lives, a majority by drinking pesticide. A law requiring the permission of the revenue department to drill a borewell was never enforced. The Centre's role in farmers’ suicides plays a pivotal role. While fixing the minimum support price, the Centre did not take into consideration the increased cost of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides. Debt-ridden farmers who made heavy investments faced an economic disaster due to un-remunerative prices. Import liberalization too had an adverse impact. Suicides could not be attributed just to mental depression as various socio-economic factors contributed to them. In the United States suicide rates fell during the World Wars when unemployment was low but increased during the Great Depression of the 1930s when it was high. Which Commission has brought, into sharp focus the contrasting economic policies of two successive governments—one pro-reform to the hilt and the other convinced that free power supply to farmers is the panacea. While the earlier policy triggered an agrarian crisis.

FARMERS’ DISTRESS: CAUSES AND CURES

The suicides are due to the multi-dimensional nature of farmers' distress. The deficiencies in institutional factors—those related to credit, insurance, supply of inputs such as seeds, fertilizers (including bio-fertilizers), and pesticides, and marketing—are becoming serious. Social factors such as the non-empowerment of elected local bodies, the exploitative attitude of moneylenders and merchants, and gender discrimination are causes the condition of small and marginal farmers and landless agricultural labor to the state of depuration. Compounding the crumbling of institutional and social support systems are other factors such as the disconnect between research, education and extension organizations and rural realities, irregular power supply together with violent voltage fluctuations, land degradation, unsustainable exploitation of ground water and consecutive droughts. Policies relating to imports of farm commodities and economic liberalisation have added fuel to the fire. The agrarian crisis has its roots in the collapse of the rural economy. The centrality of basic livelihood security concerns is missing in most government policies. A systems approach is missing in dealing with the problems of farmers' distress.
The Andhra Pradesh Government set up a Cabinet Sub-Committee comprising the Ministers of Agriculture, Home, Revenue and Co-operation for studying the tragedy of farmers’ suicides in all its dimensions. The Report contains useful recommendations worthy of immediate implementation. Financial institutions led by NABARD and the State Bank of India are responding to the challenges arising from the collapse of cooperative credit institutions and are slowly bringing about credit reform. They are also increasingly supporting the growth of self-help groups capable of undertaking market-driven micro-enterprises supported by micro-credit. They are beginning to respond to the needs of women farmers and women agricultural labour. They are also taking steps to arrest the decline in the credit-deposit ratio in villages. There is, however, an urgent need for a comprehensive rural credit reform. There is an urgent need for a well-designed, transparent, and low transaction cost integrated health and crop and livestock insurance system. This is a priority need. This could be in the form of group insurance covering self-help groups operating at both the production and post-harvest phases. Panchayati raj institutions need to be involved more in proactive distress avoidance—in identifying hot-spots and initiating distress mitigation measures.

**DROUGHT, FLOOD, SEEDS AND SUICIDES**

The normality of the monsoon is usually measured by the quantity of rainfall received and not by the quality of its distribution. However, it is inter-spell duration that determines the destiny of crops and not just total rainfall. The chronically drought prone areas of our country have been mapped. In several parts of the country, there may be drought in the early part of the monsoon period and floods later. As a result, the visit of Central drought relief teams is followed by the visit of flood relief teams to the same area. Both drought and floods have been subjects of study by numerous Commissions and Committees during the last two centuries. Yet, even now farm families face the same old problems because of lack of proactive and preventive measures. The complex linkages among crop failure, indebtedness, exploitative seed and pesticide delivery systems and farmers’ distress, increasingly led to suicides. As soon as the media draw attention to such acute distress in rural areas, the response is the same—Central teams are sent out, political leaders visit and cash payment and other forms of relief are announced.
INTENSITY OF SUICIDES

Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh have together seen 89,362 farmer’s suicides between 1997 and 2005. On an average, one Indian farmer committed suicide every 32 minutes between 1997 and 2005. Since 2002, that has become one suicide every 30 minutes. However, the frequency at which farmers take their lives in any region smaller than the country say a single State or group of States has to be lower. Because the number of suicides in any such region would be less than the total for the country as a whole in any year. Yet, the frequency at which farmers are killing themselves in many regions is appalling. On average, one farmer took his or her life every 53 minutes between 1997 and 2005 in the States of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh. In Maharashtra alone, that was one suicide every three hours. It got even worse after 2001. It rose to one farm suicide every 48 minutes in these Big Four States, and one every two and a quarter hours in Maharashtra alone. The Big Four have together seen 89,362 farmers' suicides between 1997 and 2005 or 44,102 between 2002 and 2005.

Sri K. Nagaraj of the Madras Institute of Development Studies (MIDS), Chemma who has studied farmers' suicides between 1997-2005 based on the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, divides the States into four groups. The worst of these is Group II which includes, besides the Big Four, the State of Goa which shows a high farmers' suicide rate (FSR) - that is, suicides per 1,00,000 farmers. However, Goa's rate is based on tiny absolute numbers. All Group II States have high general suicide rates (GSR) - suicides per 1,00,000 population - and have seen large numbers of farm suicides. Of these, Andhra Pradesh shows some decline in 2005. And the government claims the numbers have fallen further in 2006. But there is no NCRB data to support this as yet. In all, if the NCRB data are valid, then Andhra Pradesh saw 16,770 suicides between 1997 and 2005.

Decline in Andhra Pradesh

Andhra Pradesh was the first State after the 2004 polls to appoint a Commission to go into the agrarian crisis. Based on the Commission's advice, it also took some steps towards handling that crisis. It restored compensation for the suicides that had been stopped by the previous regime in 1998. It persuaded creditors to accept a one-time settlement of debt in several cases. This possibly helped for the decline after the terrible years of 2002-04. However, Andhra Pradesh has begun to mimic Maharashtra in one unhappy aspect. The number of "non-genuine" cases - those the government does not accept as distress-linked -
keeps mounting each month while the "genuine" suicides decline. There are other problems too. Several States, notably Maharashtra, have made identification of farmers' suicides extremely difficult by using indicators that rule out vast numbers from being categorized as such. One problem with such as in a currently data is that it will eventually reflect in and distort future NCRB reports as well.

WHEN FARMERS DIE
Almost every sector failed regards the Andhra Pradesh farmer—the Government, the political class, intellectuals, planners, human rights groups, a once-activist judiciary and the media. Andhra Pradesh is in the midst of an agrarian Emergency. The tragic of farmers' suicides are, finally, an extreme symptom of a much deeper rural distress. The result of a decade-long onslaught on the livelihoods of millions. The crisis now goes way beyond the families ravaged by the suicides. And beyond the farming community itself. There is an urgent need to end the suicides. But doing so without addressing the larger distress is to try and mop the floor dry with the taps open. Over 300 farmers have taken their lives these past six weeks. And thousands since the structured assault on agriculture in Andhra Pradesh began years ago. For every farmer who has committed suicide, countless others face morale-sapping despair. Large numbers of people are also in a zone marked by growing hunger and a fragile equilibrium. There have been hunger deaths too. The requirement of bad season could push many over the edge. Add to this, big drops in purchasing power. And the worst performance in rural employment seen in years. Both landed farmers and agricultural workers have taken a terrible beating. The people of Andhra Pradesh are paying the price for a 'Vision' that sought to displace 40 per cent of those in agriculture from that sector. Without a clue as to where to take them next. All the households surveyed had incredible levels of debt. Many had failed to gain the credit needed at the start of this season. (One reason driving the latest suicides.) All have seen crop failure for two or more years. Almost ever)' one of them had made distress sales of land or cattle or both in the past few years. Just 20 of them combined had health expenditure running into a few lakhs of rupees. Most had changed crops in recent years. All of them had spent unbelievable sums in their search for water. Mainly sinking borrowed money in borewells. All were selling their produce to creditors of some sort at well below market price. For another, the decline of democracy in the State. The 'Jannabhoomi' model of development sidelined the panchayats, robbed them of resources and demoralised local democracy. This
meant a collapse of collective action at the village level. The panchayats have played little or no role in dealing with the crisis. The dying of local democracy had a clear corollary. The new Government has at least acknowledged that the deaths continue. You can dispute its numbers but it has not tried to deny the suicides. Its short-term measures include several that are a must. Like help for the affected families. And the proposed six-month moratorium on debt. But the problem won't end there. Even in the short term, there's an urgent need for food-for-work programmes. And the Government must use the six-month period to work out more lasting moves on debt relief. It has to plan on raising incomes and purchasing power amongst the poor. On restoring support systems. On building rural employment as never before. The new Government at the Centre must surely also have a sense of how deep voter anger ran in this election. But does it know just how intense the crisis is? Seems doubtful.

THE SEEDS OF SUICIDE

"The farmers ask us what seeds to use and we advise them." says Nageswara Rao in the district headquarters of Nalgonda. He works in one of the biggest seed and fertilizer stores in town, owned by a relative of his. "We have no scientific qualification." admits the polite Rao. "We only guide them by experience. We ourselves consult the manufacturers." Seeds, fertilizer and pesticide dealers are at the centre of a growing controversy in Andhra Pradesh. They are the new moneylenders to a peasantry strapped for credit. "The banks have given no loans in the past seven years," says Malla Reddy, General Secretary of the Andhra Pradesh Ryuthu Sangham (APRS). "So many farmers are forced to depend on sources like these for credit. The same man advises them on what to buy and then sets the rates for the purchase." With the seed dealers tacking on hefty interest rates to their credit sales, the problem gets sharper. Nageswara Rao admits, to a charge of two per cent a month on bills, but says there is no choice. Times are bad. "Besides, we are quite lenient as we wish in help the farmer. Sometimes, they agree to pay in 60 days but may not do so for 90 to 120 days."

New Seed Act planned

Farmers in Nalgonda's villages are sceptical of this altruism. "Each month's delay adds to the interest," points out P. Bhiksham in G. Edavalli village. Yet, the farmer often goes by the dealer's advice on what products to buy. "The dealer has emerged an 'expert', because the others have gone," says Malla Reddy. The APRS leader points to "over 2,800 vacancies in
the Department of Agriculture. The last Government only appointed 7,000 unqualified people on contract. They had no background in agriculture." Many of the farmers' suicides in the State have been largely debt driven. Which makes the seed dealer's role more of a problem. Some of those who took their lives did so because of both, huge debts and crop failures due to spurious seeds and pesticides. But there is little punishment for those selling fake seeds."Just Rs. 500," says the new Agriculture Minister, Raghuveera Reddy. He hopes to bring some order to a system now out of control. "We have recovered spurious seeds worth Rs. 7 crore in raids in only the past month," he told us. But the offenders are people for whom the Rs. 500 fine is a joke. So the Government intends to bring in a new Seed Act at the State level.

**Input costs higher**

Other expenses, too, have risen. Tractors cost a lot more than manual work did. "In 1996," say farmers in G. Edavalli, "we could raise an acre of paddy within Rs. 3,500. Today that is Rs. 7,500 or more." Add higher power tariffs and water costs and people are now paying well over double what they did in 1996. Those who left food crops to experiment with cash crops in this period pay still more. The 24 per cent interest that seed dealers tag on makes the burden that much worse. And with seed companies hawking a "germination rate" of only 65 per cent, farmers get even less value for money. This is Telangana, input costs are higher in coastal region where, too, suicides have been on. The use of high cost items such as fertilizers and pesticides is greatest in Andhra Pradesh. The All-India average for fertilizer consumption per hectare was 88 kg in 2001. In Andhra Pradesh it was almost 180 kg. It is even greater in the coastal region. "Over use of fertilizer is a huge problem," says Malla Reddy of the APRS.

**Dwindling returns**

"At the same time," he says "tenant farmers faced massive increases in the cost of leasing land." Such tenants make up nearly 60 per cent of all farmers in many parts of the State. More so in the coastal region. From the late 1990s, they were asked by the landlords to pay (as lease cost) between 21 and 25 bags of paddy an acre each year. This, when their output was barely 30 bags an acre. So the tenant farmer is left with five bags of paddy and another three of black gram that he sows after paddy. And that is in a good year!"By the late 1990s, the farmer was wilting. In 1996, "he was making Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 6,000 an acre on an input cost of Rs. 3,500. Now he is making Rs. 1,500 to Rs. 2,000 an acre on cost of close to Rs. 8,000. Between then and now, productivity has only risen from 25 to under 30 bags an acre.
This huge use of fertilizer has not helped much. "But at the moment when input costs were so high and rewards so poor," "the banks stopped giving the farmer any credit. And output prices were crashing due to rigged and volatile markets. There was also zero investment in agriculture. This crisis was man-made." That was how the suicides began. "Add drought and crop failure to that" "and the suicides only got worse."

**SEEDS OF TROUBLE**

The news Seeds Bill now before Parliament has several farmer-unfriendly provisions and could also lead to theft of the country’s biodiversity. The new seeds Bill, which is set to repeal the Old Seeds Act of 1996, makes an attested trade in tune with current realities. It is already mired in controversy. This Bill is notable for the following major differences with the old Seeds Act. The Bill stipulates compulsory registration of all seeds traded in India; this is not required under the old Act, which allows sale of Government notified and "truthfully labelled" varieties with voluntary seed certification. Truthfully labelled means the seed is guaranteed by the seller for the prescribed minimum standards. The Bill - requires compulsory State level registration of seed producer, processing unit and trader: the old Act insists only on a license for trading. The Bill will introduce compulsory registration of nurseries selling horticultural plants. The duration of registration is 15 or 18 years, with provision to double this term. Under the old Act it is 15 years for notified varieties and open-ended for 'truthfully labelled' varieties.

Only the Central and State seed testing laboratories could offer seed certification under the old Act; accredited individuals or institutions will be allowed to under the new Bill. Seed certification is mandatory in the new Bill and it allows self-certification. It also introduces a National Register of Seeds and seeks to centralise registration by abrogating the authority of States to approve regional varieties. Enforcement is largely left to the old administrative set-up, which earned notoriety for inefficiency and corruption. Indian agriculture is notable for low productivity and low replacement rate with quality seeds. About 75 per cent of seeds are replaced by farmers saving, re-sowing, sharing, exchanging, and selling. Seed quality alone may increase yield by 20 per cent. The new Bill aims at setting seed standards and regulation of seed quality during production, supply, sale, import and export. The need for such a seed law to enhance competitiveness of Indian agriculture is indisputable. Its effectiveness will depend on its compatibility with other existing national laws on the subject—namely, the Protection of Plant Variety and Farmers Rights Act (PPVFR), the Biological Diversity Act.
The Plants, Fruits and Seeds (Regulation of Import into India) Order, and the Environment Protection Act.

A major omission in the Seeds Bill is its lack of harmony with farmers' rights and plant breeders' rights on varieties provided under the PPVFK. Plant breeder rights are established by registration under the PPVFR by those who develop the variety. Such rights allow exclusive commercialisation of the registered variety for 15 or 18 years depending on the crop. Farmers' rights include those over the traditional varieties that they conserve. The Seeds Bill will also grant registration to these varieties for commercialisation. The word 'registration' being used by youth these laws for granting commercialisation rights creates confusion. Whereas registration is voluntary under the PPVFR, it is compulsory under the Seeds Bill. The Bill maintains studied ambiguity on the linkage with the plants breeder rights and farmers' rights offered by the PPVFR. This raises a major issue of public interest. Another major concern arising from the Seeds Bill is the gateway it will legitimise for piracy of Indian agro-biodiversity. The Biological Diversity Act excludes use of plant varieties for conventional breeding from the purview of commercialisation. All normally traded agricultural commodities are also excluded from its purview. The PPVFR allows free access to all plant varieties for breeding new varieties. With the Seeds Bill promoting seeds export without enforcing plant breeder rights and stringent identity, the piracy of agro-biodiversity gets legitimised. At exit ports, there is no effective mechanism to regulate the seeds that actually move out. This outflow of Indian biodiversity is gaining momentum with the increasing plant breeding in the country by multinational seed companies. For them the Seeds Bill is the right legislation at the right time. The Seeds Bill is bending over backward to accommodate the interests of transgenic plant varieties by allowing their provisional registration for two years, obviously ahead of official approval under the Environment Protection Act. The questions are: how does provisional registration not violate environmental and human safety, and how can transgenic material released in the environment be called back.

AGRICRARIAN CRISIS: NATURE, CAUSES AND REMEDIES

Almost every sector failed the Andhra Pradesh farmer-the Government, the political class, intellectuals, planners, human rights groups, a once-activist judiciary and the media. Here is a widespread perception that unbearable burden of debt and increased competition from imports are symptomatic of a crisis in Indian agriculture. Both these phenomena are real inability to bear debt has led to farmers' suicides on an unprecedented scale. However
suicides are concentrated mostly in low rainfall, poorly irrigated regions and among a rather small fraction of the population. Import liberalisation has had a strong dampening effect on the prices of several crops, especially plantation crops. This has caused considerable distress in regions where they are prominent in the farm economy. Without minimising the importance of these aspects, they cannot be interpreted as indicative of, or causing, a widespread systemic crisis.

Nor should the suicides be interpreted to mean that the Indian peasantry, in general and everywhere, is suffering from an unbearable burden of debt. In 2002, less than 30 per cent of rural households in the country had outstanding debt and this constituted barely 2-3 per cent of the total value of assets held by them. The incidence of indebtedness in the States when suicides are high (Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh) or have been affected by import liberalisation (Kerala) though higher than average is still no more than a fifth. Dependence on high-cost, non-institutional sources is everywhere declining progressively. Much, of course, remains to be done to extend the reach and improve functioning of the institutional credit system, especially cooperatives. The state has also the duty to give relief to surviving members of suicide-affected families. But there is no warrant for the clamour for generalised debt relief by way of postponement of recoveries or waivers of interest, and even principal. The burden of debt is neither crushing nor of crisis-making proportions. Nevertheless, there are two reasons to be concerned that Indian agriculture may indeed be facing a wider, deeper crisis: (1) The long term growth trend in production and productivity of agriculture, considerably less than required to sustain the projected high may actually be slowing down; and (2) the growing economic and social disparities between agriculture and the rest of the economy and between rural and urban sectors.

Another concern is widening economic disparities between agricultural and non-agricultural sectors and between rural and urban areas. In the early 1950s, GDP per worker in non-agricultural sectors was twice that in agriculture; currently the ratio is over 4:1. Rural-urban disparities in terms of per capita consumption expenditure, though much narrower, have also increased. Based on National Sample Survey estimates, the ratio of urban to rural per capita consumption expenditure has risen progressively from about 1.28:1 in the mid-1970s to 1.47:1 by 1999-00. There is reason to believe the NSS underestimates the extent of rural-urban inequality in consumption as also the extent of its deterioration.

Rural-urban disparities in basic social amenities have also increased in quality though not in quantity. All these have led to resentment among the rural population that urban areas. That
the response is to offer assorted, but ill-thought-out, sops without addressing the deeper more basic issues of agricultural growth, rural employment, and governance is the basis for a sense of crisis. An influential segment of opinion in and outside the government believes the solution is to accelerate the pace of GDP growth. The Planning Commission's approach to the 11th Plan is firmly rooted in this belief. It postulates a target growth rate of 8-9 per cent per annum for overall GDP. This is considered feasible, indeed could even be surpassed, provided the process of privatisation, globalisation, and better fiscal management is accelerated. The sustainability of the projected overall growth rate depends on accelerating the growth of agriculture to 4 per cent per annum. Neither privatisation nor globalisation can work this miracle.

The slowing down of agricultural growth is widely attributed to the slowing down of investment, especially public investment. The Planning Commission seems to share this perception and sees increased investments in irrigation and watershed development as the means to achieve the projected growth. But what is relevant is not the magnitude of investment but its contribution to increasing production capacity. For a variety of reasons peculiar to agriculture, production capacity has not increased in proportion to the quantum of investment. Thus outlay on surface irrigation, which accounts for the bulk of public investment in agriculture, is concentrated on projects that have taken an unconscionably long time to complete. Costs have risen and outlays have not resulted in any significant additions to irrigated area. The efficacy of public investments in soil and water conservation is in waste and corruption; and there are hardly any mechanisms at the local level to manage the works and ensure the potential for expansion is properly exploited. They have had hardly any impact on raising product potential or productivity of rain fed lands.

Private investment has been concentrated on groundwater exploitation deepening wells and installing more powerful pumps and mechanisation. In the context of falling water tables a sure sign of overexploitation of groundwater these investments do not increase the volume of groundwater available for irrigation and therefore production capacity. The impact of mechanisation is primarily to replace human and animal labour with tractors, harvesters, and threshers. Their contribution to increasing productive capacity is, if at all, of a very secondary importance. It is, therefore, important to focus on deeper, more basic, reasons for the slowdown of agricultural growth. For this it is useful to distinguish between three broad phases of agricultural growth in the post-Independence period. During the first phase, lasting from the early 1950s through the mid-1960s, the major part of growth came from expansion of area.
Expansion of surface irrigation and fertilizer use brought about modest yield improvement. During the second phase, from the mid-1960s through the 1980s, the scope for extending area was more or less exhausted. But this was more than compensated by an unprecedented increase in the rate of yield improvement due to massive investment in irrigation and the advent of new seed-fertilizer technology. The pace of expansion in surface irrigation slowed down during the latter part of the period despite continuing large-scale investments. The flow of technology improvements was fitful. Progress was particularly disappointing in rain-fed agriculture. This was also a period marked by imprudence in the use of land, water, fertilizers, and other key inputs due to failures of governance, poor management of public systems catering to agriculture and pricing, and subsidy policies inimical to the prudent use of resources and effective exploitation of the potential of available technology.

SIX STEPS

Overcoming this barrier calls for a major reorientation on the following lines
1. Shifting public investment towards modernization of surface irrigation works (to facilitate higher yield per unit of water used) and for watershed development.
2. Prioritizing incomplete irrigation projects after strict cost-benefit analysis and monitor implementation.
3. Limiting government's role to laying down the broad principles and institutional framework. Entrust direct management of land, water, and common service facilities to autonomous organizations functioning within well-specified rules.
4. Enforcing better preventive and punitive measures to contain gross violations of rules governing access to and use of resources.
5. Conducting a critical review of the research system in public institutions to make it more effective.
6. Changing policies relating to pricing of yield and input to avoid waste.

These may be obvious and some elements even figure in official rhetoric. That they pose tough challenges is also obvious. But the challenges have to be confronted to overcome the institutional constraints and disincentives that are now the critical bottlenecks in realising the potential for increasing production. Without it, the target of 4 per cent sustained growth in agriculture will remain a dream.
SUGGESTIONS

1. Education, social mobilisation and regulation are necessary to arrest the expansion of the agrarian crisis.

2. The science and technology dimensions of the problems leading to suicides among farmers need concurrent attention along with the socio-economic and political aspects.

3. Farmers' associations can improve the quality of their produce. Indian farmers will be able to replicate the system only with government's help. The A.P. government is off the block to make this a reality.

CONCLUSION

The suicides by farmers in Andhra Pradesh has highlighted the adverse impact of neglecting irrigation and agriculture in a predominantly agrarian State. Strengthening the delivery system of agricultural credit, quality inputs, and extension of credit to small and marginal farmers would have also helped reduce the number of deaths, the report said. According to an expert, the water-intensive paddy crop had to be replaced with dry crops during rabi in at least one million hectares to conserve water. “Had the Government followed the crop adjustment programme by giving incentives to farmers who raised dry crops in rabi ... the suicides ... would have decreased”.

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