



Why Farmers leaving farming? : Problems of Today's Farming

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Introduction

Where the burden of increasing costs, poverty ridden existence, arising out of pressure to derive more yield from the same land, use of chemicals to boost land fertility, debt traps, weather disturbances, paltry prices for the crop yields, heavy reliance on monsoon, cultivation subsidies had made agriculture a unappealing, un-gainful and a dead profession. This was evident in the migration of rural youth to non-farming vocations and their relocation to cities, selling their farmland for other infrastructural purpose.

In the past two decades, condition of farmers in India has been deteriorating rapidly. According to a rough estimate, nearly 300,000 farmers have committed suicide so far. For many years the numbers have been rising. Government has not published data since 2016. Sometime back government published data on farmers' suicides for 2016, according to which the number was less than in 2015. However, some experts don't believe this number to be real.

Plight of farmers is also reflected from the fact that share of agriculture which used to be 25 percent of GDP in 1990-91 has dipped to nearly 15 percent now. The saddest thing is that per capita income in urban India is approximately 9 times that of per capita income in rural India. The present government has announced its resolve to double farmers' income by 2022.

Condition of the farmers is no secret. The crisis is becoming unbearable for them and they are going on agitation mode. We all know what is going on in our country with farmers. Various reasons have been offered to explain why farmers commit suicide in India, including: floods, drought, debt, use of genetically modified seed, public health, use of lower quantity pesticides due to less investments producing a decreased yield and also government economic policies. In old times, Krishi was the backbone of Indian economy and farmers were so rich. On the other side, the young farmers are leaving villages to search for job in cities so they can survive.

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Inappropriate Policies

Farmers tell me the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA or MGNREGA, formerly NREGA) has heightened the problem. In fact, Schedule I Clause 12 of NREGA (2005) states, “As far as practicable, a task funded under the Scheme shall be performed by using manual labour and not machines.” This highlights how MNREGA has really been about jobs, instead of output or productivity.

How MGNREGA is Feasible in Agriculture?

Cannot change agricultural operation (Pre or post pone). As timing of agricultural work is same in whole geographic area. MGNREGA can help in Mixed farming- Dairying, Poultry, piggery, fishery, etc. Increase production of milk and milk products, Boost income through Cash crop – vegetables, sugarcane, flower, fruits, etc. Promote mechanization and scientific farming, Labour i

ntensive cultivation – for more credit, more production and more employment. Promote mixed cropping- two are more crops at time in same land.

Inclusion of MGNREGA in Agriculture

The reports on MGNREGS revision, written by Dr. Mihir Shah, that was released by Mr. Ramesh, on 22nd February, 2012, mentioned that farmers can get 8 man-days per acre for transplantation and another four man-days for weeding in 2 intervals under NREGA scheme free of cost. Those farmers are eligible to get NREGA labours, who would adopt System of Rice Intensification (SRI) for maximum 3 years in SRI block. “SRI is an agronomic technique of paddy transplanting in early (8 to 14 days age), followed by alternate wetting and drying irrigation and mechanical weeding (Shah, 2012, p79)”.

How MGNREGA helps farmers?

Regulation of NREGA for Agriculture should be organized for agriculture. List of job

card holders who want to work in agriculture and List of registered landlord/farmers who need labour. Some rules for hiring labours and working durations and conditions. Farmers need labour during peak period of agriculture, but not regular, so non agricultural work should stop. Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) should be played role of mediator and managed list of farmers and card holders. Farmers should not get labour free of cost, but they get some subsidy or monetary help from MGNREGA fund.

What type of Agreement should be?

Labour and farmers should be mutually interested on each other and respect each other.

➡ In case the labour is not interested to work any of the registered farmers' field panchayat should not be forced to the labour for that, and similarly, if the farmer is not interested to hire anyone of the NREGA labours then panchayat should not force farmers to hire that labour too.

➡ The agreement should not be static in nature, hard and fast rule and regulation, but it should be need based and mutual understanding of the farmers and labours.

➡ What type of Agreement should be? Any labour is hired for one day only

and he/she is free to choose their employer next day.

➡ Labour should be paid full wage for a day, if he/she will spend more than 4 hours in the field/house of the farmer, but, if the labour left the work after 4 hours without consent of the employer (farmer), labour is not eligible to get wage of that period of work.

➡ Farmers (Landlord) should not be insulted to the labour in any forms (physical, emotional, others) and labour should not be left the work till work would not be finished (if time not over 8 hrs).

➡ From this agreement, village panchayat should assure to the farmers to avail the agricultural labour during peak period, and labour to get job with full amount of wage.

➡ Labour prefers NREGA work over agriculture work, because he can earn Rs. 200- 250 per 3 hours by digging of pits (10 x 6 x 1 feet), but they never earn that much wage from any other work in village. So wage Subsidies to the Farmers. Farmers are agreeing to pay average Rs. 100/200 per day and rest amount would be subsidy (Half of existing wage rate).

Apart from this, another important step the government has taken is that Kisan Credit Cards (KCC), which were available to only land-owning farmers, could now be offered to

landless rural people too engaged in fishing and animal husbandry. This is being considered to be an important step as cheap agricultural loans could now be extended to these occupations as well.

Wrong policy makers/beurocrates -

Service sector also has very limited employment opportunities available for unskilled and uneducated labour. One can't believe that the policymakers are unaware of these ground realities. Despite that, their insistence on flushing rural population out creates doubts about their intentions. The policymakers always try to blame low productivity in agriculture for the plight of Indian farmers. They argue that all over the world development happened only by shifting rural population to the urban areas. Therefore, their suggestion has always been to follow the same path. However, they conveniently forget that villages and farming play a major role not only for food security of the nation but also employment for more than half of the working population. Since there is dearth of employment opportunities outside rural areas, we need to provide gainful employment to the rural population (both land-owing farmers and landless labour) at their doorstep.

The societal and political pressure to develop more sustainable crop production systems (as well as other agricultural systems) has grown over the past decade and is not

likely to go away. This will require policy making system innovations in various sectors (such as crop and animal production) and sub-sectors. Ongoing approaches, however, ignore that in the ongoing dynamic in these sectors a large number of stakeholders is tinkering with a variety of innovations trying to solve a range of problems as they experience them. In historical system innovations such bottom-up processes were the dominant drivers for transitions. Current attempts that seek to evoke system innovations towards sustainability therefore cannot ignore this bottom up dynamic and should make it part of their strategies. It attempts to combine the learning that takes place in bottom up practice initiatives (often farmer-led) with the more deliberate attempts at learning in planned projects that are often research led. This combination does more justice to the innovation dynamic that is actually taking place than the more narrow focus on projects.

Combining top down and bottom up also allows combining the strong and weak sides of each of these approaches, notably:

- Top down approaches are driven by the development of a vision (or set of visions) of an integrally sustainable new system. Thus, sustainability goals are baked into the process. The weak point is that these new visions and their constituting parts (the promises) do not

fit in well with the existing system. This makes it difficult to ‘anchor’ these novelties within the current system and gain practical experience. Such an anchoring, however, is required to get a transformation process going. Starting this process ‘from the outside’ is difficult and may trigger a lot of resistance.

- In bottom up initiatives such anchoring is guaranteed since the initiatives come from the existing system. But because of this anchoring it is difficult to take along broader sustainability issues which would require more radical steps.

Unavailability of quality inputs at right time-

In every cropping season there is a dilemma in the village over whether they should buy inputs from a local shop or the nearby town or city. Most farmers, particularly small and marginal farmers, buy the inputs they need – seeds, fertilizers or pesticides – using credit. The majority of the farmers emphasized that close to fifty percent of their total crop production cost goes for inputs. So, the quality of these inputs is very important.

To ensure quality inputs, farmers can opt to buy from a retailer in the nearby town. However, they may not be able to obtain inputs on credit without a reference from the

market intermediary. Those retailers who do provide inputs on credit to farmers then charge 2-3 percent interest rate per month till the harvest. There is also a requirement to sell the produce through the same trader (though there is no formal agreement). These restrictions and higher costs on purchases in the city, coupled with a one-day wage loss and transport costs for travel to the city (and delivery in the case of fertilizers), force most of the farmers to buy inputs from local (un) authorized village shops.

In the absence of insurance, if the crops fail, perhaps due to poor quality inputs, or for any other reason, farmers then get into a vicious circle of debt. One farmer told us: “If inputs are substandard or fake, we have to go through a minimum of two years of suffering due to debt. Therefore, in addition to the good monsoon, the quality of inputs we buy decides our farm income season after season.” Farmers trust inputs, particularly seeds and fertilizers, supplied through the notified state government agencies/ research institutes in subsidized rates. The distribution is made every year through an online seed distribution system by IIWBR Karnal is liked by farmers. However, this type of supply is very limited, with only for a few field crops and chemical fertilizers.

The government should take action on substandard inputs distributors and traders. By using such substandard inputs, farmers are

incurring losses in agriculture. They expect that the Government should supply good quality of inputs at a reasonable price within their vicinity. For remunerative agriculture, quality, availability, accessibility and affordability of inputs is crucial. Quality inputs are essential for improving productivity and, in turn, incomes. This would make a positive impact through inclusive agricultural and rural development in developing countries like India where the majority of the farmers are small and marginal.

Why not parliament seats reserved for real farmer representatives-

It is more than a little ironic that as India witnesses its biggest farmer protest in decades, nearly 40% of the current Lok Sabha MPs claim to be “agriculturalists”. One of the questions that needs to be asked is who the actual farmers are. The ones sitting inside parliament and passing laws or the ones protesting on the streets?

According to the latest data available on the Lok Sabha website, 7.15% of MPs list ‘farming’ as their occupation, while 37.24% say they are ‘agriculturalists’. From the self-identification of the members of parliament, we can see that at face value, the representation of farmers and agriculturalists in the Lok Sabha, through profession alone, accounts for 7.15% and 37.24% respectively.

It seems absurd that when over one third of the Lok Sabha knows and understands the sector because they are or have been engaged in farming or agriculture personally that India is seeing such continued opposition to the recent farm laws. One would imagine that being farmers themselves, many of the concerns raised by the agitating farmers should have been echoed by the parliamentarians. A farmer who is in parliament or protesting outside it would naturally find some commonalities in the problems that they face.

One is then left to wonder whether this unison in passing the Bills was due to the agreement of the “Parliamentarian Farmer” with the Bill or reflects a rather worrisome picture of the steady death of deliberation in parliament. The farmers at the farms doing farming and the farmers in parliament represent a growing identity crisis between the “governing” and the “governed”. The farmer at the farms doing farming is someone who is supposed to be represented by the farmer in parliament. It then becomes a question of their identity and experience.

One possible explanation is that, hypothetically-speaking, the farmer or agriculturalist in parliament generally would have land tracts large enough to ensure they are in a better negotiating position to make contract farming and other good sounding activities as a viable option. And, more

importantly, farming may not be their only source of income.

In the same vein, the farmer at the farms is someone who likely has smaller landholding and often their only livelihood is farming. For farmers outside the wheat-rice belt, this also means they are subsistence farmers. A majority of Indian farmers are a part of this demography of small landholding subsistence or cash crop growing agriculturists. The ones in parliament don't necessarily draw their means of sustenance from agriculture or farming. There is a clear distinction between the farmer in the parliament and the one at the border. While both are farmers, there is little shared experience between the two. If there is one thing to take away from the current protests, it's that the farmer who sits inside parliament is not the same as the one who is protesting today.

Aid to legitimate farmer-

We have already seen that size of holding matters – on average only the bigger farms make modest money. As per the NSSO data, farmers on average spend about half of revenues on inputs, mostly fertiliser and labour (together almost half of input costs). This is even though fertilisers are heavily subsidised, and electricity (rather, irrigation) is ostensibly nearly free. But this masks the fact that small

farmers lose money, and the median farmer is small.

Actually, the median farmer is a labourer – they don't have their own farm. Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) data indicate that when we consider irrigation, more than half of rural homes have no land, often working as labourers in farms, and thus not the beneficiary of “free electricity”. Less than 10% owned any irrigation equipment, mostly electric but including diesel. A small fraction is located where they get canal based irrigation. Almost more than one third depend on the rain. Thus, it is only very small fractions who are the beneficiaries of free electricity, and many of them actually sell water to their neighbours. This exposes the justification of electricity distortions in the name of the poor – they don't get free electricity.

Lack in agricultural education (science that justify foreign methodologies but not give scientific views to local farmer's traditions and customs) lack of local indigenous geo-political-agri-fests knowledge. Leadership is not truly represents social structure i.e based on occupation, culture, educational base etc but it came from (represents ideology, wing left right, religious group, cast group.)

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