

Agrarian Distress in Maharashtra: Why Vidarbha and Marathwada Alone?

Sangeeta Shroff, Jayanti Kajale, Prashant Bansode

Maharashtra is leading in suicide among farmers. Its incidence is concentrated in the vulnerable regions of Vidarbha and Marathwada. While the number of suicides per lakh hectare of net sown area is 26.35 in Vidarbha and Marathwada, the corresponding figure for the rest of Maharashtra is 7.25. Primary data collected from these two regions indicated that soyabean and cotton were the major crops of sample households where there was an instance of suicide and together constituted 62.78 per cent of their gross cropped area. Looking across all crops, the net returns to farmers were negative to the tune of ₹ 27,301 per acre and ₹ 32,716 per household indicating that farming is an unviable economic activity. Crop failures due to droughts year after year coupled with low prices make farmers defaulters in the credit market and a vicious cycle is perpetuated. The study concludes that Marathwada is a water stressed region with many districts receiving even less than half the normal rainfall. Therefore, top priority must be given to watershed strategies, besides promoting water saving technologies

I Backdrop

Indian agriculture is passing through a severe crisis. While this sector has experienced technological interventions which contributed to self-sufficiency in foodgrains, diversification to commercial and horticultural crops and promotion of dairy, poultry and allied activities, the overall scenario is that of stagnation, underperformance and lack of dynamism. The Eleventh Plan target growth of four per cent per annum for the agricultural sector could not be achieved as the average growth rate turned out to be 3.67 per cent per annum while that of the economy as a whole was 7.9 per cent. The Twelfth Plan (2012-2017) for agriculture has shown a worse picture as the average growth rate during first four years of the plan was only 1.6 per cent per annum, which is way below the targeted growth rate. The data from the 70th Round of National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) reveal that during the period July 2012 to June 2013 at the All-India level the average monthly income per agricultural household was

Sangeeta Shroff, Professor, Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune 411004, Maharashtra, Email: sangeetashroff@hotmail.com

Jayanti Kajale, Professor, Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune 411004, Maharashtra, Email: jayantigk@hotmail.com

Prashant Bansode, Associate Professor, Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune 411004, Maharashtra, Email: prashantsoc@gmail.com