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On Saturday 24th February 2018



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L.S. Raheja
L.S. RAHEJA COLLEGE OF ARTS & COMMERCE

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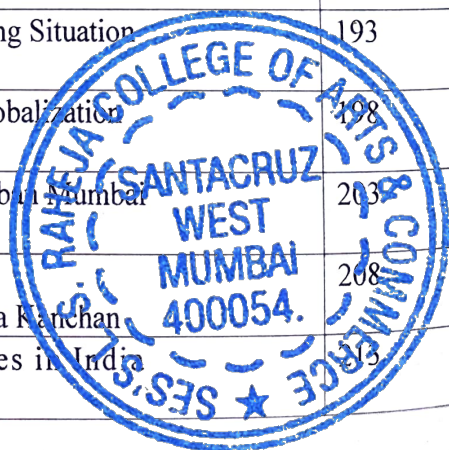
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Agriculture Sector in Maharashtra: An Alarming Situation

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Introduction:

Maharashtra is the third largest state in India both, in terms of area. The city of Mumbai is the capital of Maharashtra and is considered as the financial capital of the country. But for the last few years, the state is facing agrarian crisis. Uncertain monsoon conditions, drought, other natural calamities have affected the agriculture productivity. The farmers are indebted and have lost hope. Farmers' suicide increased at an alarming rate in the state. This paper tries to analyse the recent trends in the agriculture sector of Maharashtra with respect to those factors which have been instrumental for bad performance in terms of output as well as farmers' suicide.

Methodology: The data used for analysis is purely secondary data that is available in the 'Economic Surveys of Maharashtra' for the period of five years from 2010-11 to 2014-15. The variables considered are: expenditure on irrigation by the government, irrigation capacity utilized, monsoon behavior, percentage change in the production of food grains and oilseeds, agriculture finance provided by different financial institutions and number of farmers' suicide in the state. The paper also includes the statistics on farmers suicides and the minimum support prices. The method of simple correlation has been used to analyze the relationships between the variables.

The agriculture sector in Maharashtra depends on monsoon for good agriculture production. But in the last few years efforts have been made to increase the irrigation facility. The following table shows the expenditure made by the government for the last five years on irrigation facility and actual irrigation potential utilized.

Table 1: Expenditure on irrigation and irrigation potential utilized

Year	Expenditure on irrigation (Crs.)	Total irrigation potential utilized (%)
2010-11	407.88	30.5
2011-12	448.04	46.58
2012-13	574.85	34.64
2013-14	305.57	26.6
2014-15	688.41	34.6

Source: Economic surveys of Maharashtra from 2010-11 to 2014-15

The expenditure on irrigation facilities has been increasing over the years. Thus irrigation potential has been increasing. But, the actual utilization of this potential has been less than 50 %. Thus, more than 50% of the irrigation capacity has remained unutilized. This is a major reason for the agrarian crisis to worsen in the state. An increase in the expenditure on irrigation facility always has a positive effect on the foodgrains production.

We use simple correlation between the percentage change in the production of foodgrains for a year to the expenditure on irrigation in its preceeding year. Thus, we use the lagged methodology. There is strong positive correlation of 0.951 between these two variables.

Another variable is the monsoon behavior and its relation between the foodgrains production. The kharif crop production is more dependent on monsoon than the rabi crop which is winter crop. The following table shows the number of districts with excess, normal, deficient, and scarce rainfall for the five years.

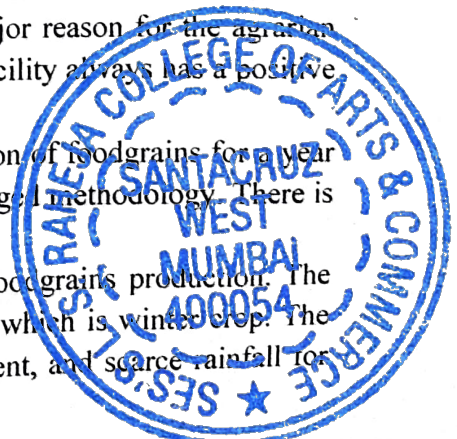


Table 2: Number of districts in Maharashtra with the rainfall categories.

Year	Excess Rainfall	Normal Rainfall	Deficient Rainfall	Scarce Rainfall
2010-11	195	145	15	-
2011-12	46	209	100	-
2012-13	30	189	133	3
2013-14	186	153	16	0
2014-15	17	112	213	13
2015-16	2	75	254	24

Source: Economic surveys of Maharashtra from 2010-11 to 2014-15

The years 2014-15 and 2015-16 have been very difficult for the agriculture sector as number of districts with deficient rainfall has been maximum for both the years. The number of districts with scarce rainfall is also maximum during these years. This is also one of the major reason for low agriculture productivity. The correlation between the number of districts with deficient rainfall for a year and production of rabi and kharif crops for that respective year shows a strong negative correlation of -0.959 for kharif production and relatively strong negative correlation of -0.72 for rabi production. This indicates huge dependence that the production levels of both the crops have reduced with the increase in the number of districts in the category of deficient rainfall. It brings out the dependency of the agriculture sector on monsoon.

Table 3: Percentage change in the production of foodgrains of Kharif and Rabi seasons.

Year	Percentage change in production of Kharif crops	Percentage change in the production of Rabi crops
2010-11	32.7	10.7
2011-12	-9	-45
2012-13	-16	-23
2013-14	18	86
2014-15	-30	-34

Source: Economic surveys of Maharashtra from 2010-11 to 2014-15

The above table shows the percentage change in the production of food grains of kharif and rabi seasons. It is observed that the production levels for three years have reduced. Also the reduction for the year 2014-15 in case of Kharif crop is 30% and for Rabi crop it is 45% in the year 2011-12 and 34% in the year 2014-15.

If the production levels have reduced, then we need to consider the efforts of the government and financial institutions for helping the sector through finance. The following table shows the data on the agriculture finance provided by all types of financial institutions and also under RashtriyaKrishiVikasYojna.

Table 4: Agriculture finance

Year	TOTAL (Crs.)
2010-11	19158
2011-12	24954.67
2012-13	31725.58
2013-14	51088.65
2014-15	58226.45

Source : Economic surveys of Maharashtra 2010-11 to 2014-15

The figures above are the credit provided to the farmers. As an addition to the above mentioned figures we can also include the loan waivers provided by the government as a part of expenditure on agriculture sector though it never benefited the farmers directly. According to Dr. MS Swaminathan, "farmers of this country, who constitute nearly half of the working population, also needs to eat. The

government is willing to pay Seventh Pay Commission salaries to insulate government servants from inflation, but they cannot provide a higher income for farmers to improve their lot. Farm loan waivers are posing a bigger burden on the government exchequer compared to what higher pay for farm produce will incur. But the government is not prepared to give the ₹20,000cr.or so for farmers by way of higher MSP. In 2009, the central government gave ₹72,000 crore as farm loan waiver, but no government is prepared to take long-term steps to ensure the economic viability of farming.”⁴¹ He further said: “The National Commission on Farmers, which he chaired, recommended pricing and procurement based on total cost of production plus 50 per cent principle. This will provide farmers enough opportunities for saving money for meeting the challenge of unfavourable season. Also steps will have to be taken to stabilise yield under difficult growing conditions.”⁴²If we take a glance on the loan waiver amounts then we find that it has surely increased the burden of the government.

Table 5: Loan Waivers Amount

Year	Amount
2008	60,000 cr.
2009	72,000 cr.
2017	34022 cr. (Maharashtra only)
2018	14,240 cr. (Maharashtra only)

Source: Various News reports

It is rational to expect that with so much expenditure by the government to reduce the debt burden of the farmers, the farmers must have benefitted and the suicide cases have reduced. But we see no reduction in the number of farmers suicides. The following data compares the number of farmers suicide in India and Maharashtra due to farm reasons. This is a clear indication that the loan waiver is not the solution to this problem. According to Dr. M.S.Swaminathan, implementation of minimum support price for crops, rather than loan waivers, is the long-term solution for the crises faced by farmers.

Table 6: Farmers’ Suicides Data

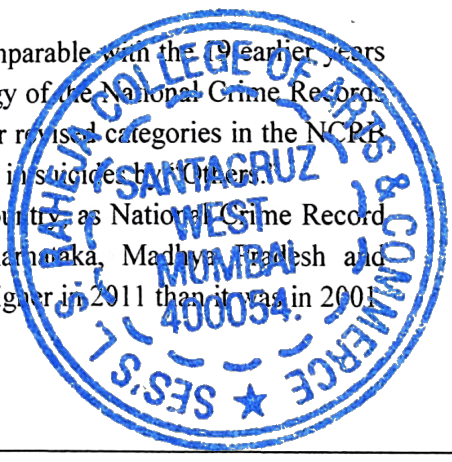
Year	No.of Suicides in India	No of Suicides in Maharashtra
2010	15964	3141
2011	14027	3337
2012	13754	3786
2013	11772	3146
2014	12360	5650

Source : NCRB data

A total of 2,96,438 farmers have committed suicide in India since 1995 out of which 60,750 were from Maharashtra. It is a high time and the government should take some steps to sustain the incomes of the farmers. But it seems that the authorities are more concerned in justifying the suicides under different categories.

According to P. Sainath, the 2014 data on farm suicides are not comparable with the earlier years of farm suicide data. This is so due to major changes in methodology of the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) that has shuffled the suicide numbers across new or revised categories in the NCRB tables. The “fall” in farmer suicides accompanies a stunning increase in suicides by “Others”. The five States account for two-thirds of all farm suicides in the country, as National Crime Record Bureau data show. These are Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. The share of these ‘Big 5’ in total farm suicides was higher in 2011 than it was in 2001.

⁴¹ <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/interview>
⁴² <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/agri-business>



At the same time, the new Census data show that four of these States have far fewer farmers than they did a decade ago. The NCRB 2014 data also record thousands of tenant farmer suicides as those by "agricultural labourers." This too, helps dilute the numbers in the main "farmers" column in a big way.⁴³

Such an intentional ignorance towards a grave problem does not go with the title of welfare state that the governments give themselves. Fiddling of the data and diluting the severity of the agriculture problems must be considered as an offence against human rights of the rural masses by the government. The governments seem to suppress the crises rather than facing it. This is done by distorting the farm suicides data of various states. "Now with new categories and columns to shuffle the deaths across, state governments can more easily reduce the numbers in the main farmers group. The new (sub) categories include: farmers owning their land, those working on contract / lease, agricultural labourers and more, self-employed, sickness (most cases of terrible stomach ache after consuming pesticides) etc. This means that a constable at the lowest police station in a district will apparently lay down whether the person who committed suicide was a farmer, a cultivator, a tenant, landowner or labourer. Something that is difficult even for a trained surveyor."⁴⁴

The main reasons for farm suicides are indebtedness due to low agricultural incomes. The governments are not supporting the agriculture incomes. Providing subsidies on inputs, and procurement of output is not sufficient. It is the fixation of Minimum Support Price (MSP) that will determine some minimum income to the farmers.

Dr. Swaminathan has recommended the fixation of MSP on the basis of total cost of production plus 50 per cent principle.⁴⁵ This will provide farmers enough opportunities for saving money for meeting the challenge of unfavourable season. Also steps will have to be taken to stabilize yield under difficult growing conditions." With such a strong case for increasing the MSP, it becomes imperative for us to consider the data on the minimum support prices for some important agricultural commodities. The following table shows the year wise MSPs.

Table 7: Data on MSPs in Rs/per quintal

Commodities	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2018
Paddy (FAQ)	1000	1080	1250	1360	1410	1470	2620
Paddy Gr. A	1030	1110	1280	1400	1450	1510	
Jowar (Hybrid)	880	980	1520	1530	1570	1625	2063
Jowar (Maldandi)		980	1520	1530	1590	1650	1725
Wheat				1450	1450	1625	1625
Maize	880	980	1175	1310	1325	1365	1425
Bajra	880	90	1175	1250	1275	1330	1425
Gram	1760	2100	3000	3175	3175	4000	4000
Tur		3200	3850	4350	4625	5050	7700 & 5900
Moong		3500	4400	4600	4850	5225	5900
Urad				4350	4625	5000	
Cotton Med Staple	3000	3300	3900	3750	3800	3860	4020
Cotton long staple		3300	3900	4050	4100	4160	4220

Source : Economic Surveys of Maharashtra from 2010-11 to 2016-17
http://agmarknet.nic.in/rep1Newx1_today.asp prices as on 20th Feb, 2018

⁴³ <http://psainath.org/farmers-suicide-rates-soar-above-the-rest>

⁴⁴ <https://psainath.org/the-slaughter-of-suicide-data/>

⁴⁵ The National Commission on Farmers was chaired by Dr. MS Swaminathan in which the recommendations are made.

The comparisons of the above mentioned MSPs show minimal changes over the span of seven years. The MSPs have changed only by Rs.10 for Jowar (between 2012-15), by Rs.15 for Maize (between 2014-16), by Rs.25 for Bajra (between 2014-16) at all for two successive years. With such small changes, the income levels of the farming community has almost remained stagnant. And so there is a urgent need to make changes in the current MSP policy and implement the recommendations of the National Commission on Farmers.

Conclusion:

The situation of the agriculture in Maharashtra as well as other states is alarming and the crisis has deepened. The public expenditure has increased through the loan waivers, irrigation projects, agriculture credit, subsidies and procurement of farm produce. But there is no change in the plight of the farming community. The number of suicides have crossed three lakhs and the trend is still continuing. To summarize, the following steps are essential for short-term as well as long-term improvement in the agriculture sector performance.

- Implementation of the recommendations of National Commission on Farmers
- Fixing appropriate MSP as suggested by Dr. M.S.Swaminathan.
- Data audit of the NCRB farm related suicides to gauge the loss of farming population.
- Replacing the loan waiver policy by expenditure on the basic agriculture infrastructure by the government.
- Framing the export-import policy to benefit the farmers and the consumers both.
- Taking long term steps to improve water usage and management in the drought prone areas.

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S. Lawa

