JETIR.ORG ISSN: 2349-5162 | ESTD Year : 2014 | Monthly Issue
JOURNAL OF EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES AND INNOVATIVE RESEARCH (JETIR)
An International Scholarly Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Farmers' Suicides in Telangana: Causes, Challenges & Policy Responses

Dr. N Soundarya
Faculty of Economics,
University PG College (OU), Siddipet,
Email: soundarya.numburi@gmail.com

Abstract

Agriculture is one of the major sources of livelihood in Telangana, supporting a significant proportion of rural households. Despite the development of irrigation infrastructure, agricultural technology, government welfare programmes and financial support schemes, farmers in several parts of Telangana continue to face economic uncertainty, crop-related risks, debt burdens and market instability. Farmer distress has emerged as an important social, economic and public policy issue, requiring attention from government institutions, agricultural experts, financial institutions and civil society.

Farmers' suicides in Telangana reflect a complex combination of economic, social, environmental and institutional factors. Uncertain rainfall, crop losses, rising cultivation costs, fluctuations in agricultural prices, limited access to institutional credit and inadequate risk protection can contribute to severe distress among farming households. The consequences extend beyond the individual farmer and affect families, rural communities, agricultural productivity and the overall development of the state.

This article examines the issue of farmers' suicides in Telangana, explores the structural factors associated with agricultural distress, analyses the economic and social consequences for farming households, and discusses policy measures that can strengthen agricultural sustainability, rural livelihoods and farmer welfare. It also highlights the importance of institutional support, agricultural diversification, financial inclusion, effective crop insurance, counselling services and community-based interventions.

Keywords: *Farmers' suicides, Telangana agriculture, agricultural distress, rural poverty, farmer indebtedness, crop insurance, agricultural policy, rural development.*

1. Introduction

Telangana is a state where agriculture plays a vital role in the rural economy, employment generation and food production. A large number of rural families depend either directly or indirectly on agricultural activities for their livelihoods. Crops such as paddy, cotton, maize, soybean, red gram, chilli and other commercial and food crops contribute to the agricultural economy of the state. However, farming is increasingly influenced by climatic uncertainties, rising input costs, market fluctuations, land-related challenges and financial pressures.

The issue of farmers' suicides has remained a serious concern in Telangana since the formation of the state in 2014. Official records and reports from farmer organisations have highlighted different trends over the years, including periods of decline and renewed concerns about distress. The issue cannot be understood only through the number of reported incidents; it also requires an examination of the structural weaknesses of agricultural livelihoods, rural credit systems, crop marketing and social protection.

Agricultural distress often develops through multiple interconnected problems. Farmers may face crop losses, low market prices, difficulties in accessing credit, high cultivation expenditure and uncertainty regarding future income. These challenges may affect the financial stability of farming households and contribute to emotional and social pressures. Therefore, farmer suicides should be viewed as a broader agricultural, economic, social and public health issue rather than as an isolated problem.

Telangana requires a comprehensive approach that combines agricultural development, rural financial support, social protection, responsive institutions and accessible support services to address the underlying conditions of farmer distress.

2. Agricultural Background of Telangana

Agriculture has historically been an important component of Telangana's economy and rural society. The state includes diverse agricultural regions characterised by varying rainfall patterns, soil conditions, irrigation facilities and crop production systems. Farmers cultivate both food crops and commercial crops, depending on land availability, climatic conditions, market opportunities and local agricultural practices.

The development of irrigation infrastructure, agricultural extension services, rural roads, procurement facilities and government support programmes has contributed to agricultural development in different regions. Nevertheless, access to these resources is not uniform across all farming households. Small and marginal farmers, tenant farmers and households with limited financial resources may experience greater vulnerability when agricultural conditions become unfavourable.

The agricultural sector in Telangana faces several challenges, including:

- Dependence on seasonal rainfall in certain agricultural areas.
- Rising costs of seeds, fertilisers, labour and cultivation inputs.
- Uncertainty regarding agricultural commodity prices.
- Limited access to affordable and timely institutional credit for some farmers.
- Crop damage associated with climatic and environmental conditions.
- Difficulties faced by tenant farmers in accessing formal support programmes.
- Unequal access to irrigation, technology, storage and marketing facilities.

These challenges influence the stability of agricultural income and the capacity of farming households to sustain their livelihoods over time.

3. Farmers' Suicides in Telangana: An Overview

Farmers' suicides in Telangana have been discussed extensively in government reports, parliamentary proceedings, academic studies, newspapers and civil society investigations. The data available from different institutions may vary because of differences in reporting periods, definitions, classification and data collection methods.

According to the Government of India parliamentary response based on NCRB data, Telangana recorded the following number of suicides among farmers/cultivators from 2014 to 2020.

Year	Reported farmer/cultivator suicides
2014	898
2015	1,358
2016	632
2017	846
2018	900
2019	491
2020	466

Source: Government of India, Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Lok Sabha answer to Question No. 5476, dated 5 April 2022, citing NCRB data. These historical figures are not a current annual estimate.

The figures illustrate fluctuations in the reported number of farmer/cultivator suicides over the period. The data demonstrate that agricultural distress is not necessarily uniform across years and may be influenced by a combination of economic, climatic, institutional and social conditions.

More recent reporting also highlights the importance of interpreting figures carefully. Official NCRB statistics and estimates compiled by farmer organisations may differ in scope and methodology. Researchers should clearly identify the source, period and classification used when presenting statistics.

4. Major Causes of Farmers' Suicides in Telangana

4.1 Agricultural Indebtedness

Financial indebtedness is one of the major concerns associated with agricultural distress. Farming requires expenditure on seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, irrigation, labour, machinery, transportation and other agricultural activities. Farmers may borrow money to meet these expenses, expecting to repay the loans through the sale of agricultural produce.

When harvests are inadequate, market prices are unfavourable or payments are delayed, repayment becomes difficult. Some farmers may depend on multiple sources of borrowing, including informal credit arrangements, which can increase financial pressure.

The inability to manage agricultural debt may create long-term uncertainty for farming households. The problem is particularly serious when agricultural income is insufficient to meet both cultivation expenses and household needs.

4.2 Rising Cost of Agricultural Inputs

The cost of agricultural inputs has become an important challenge for farmers. Expenses associated with fertilisers, seeds, pesticides, labour, machinery, fuel and irrigation can significantly influence the cost of cultivation.

Small and marginal farmers often have limited financial capacity to absorb unexpected increases in input costs. When the cost of cultivation increases without a corresponding improvement in crop prices, farmers may experience reduced profit margins or financial losses.

The rising cost of agricultural inputs can also increase the dependence of farmers on credit and reduce their capacity to invest in future agricultural activities.

4.3 Crop Losses and Climatic Uncertainty

Agriculture is influenced by rainfall, temperature, soil moisture, water availability and seasonal climatic conditions. Telangana's agricultural sector is vulnerable to irregular rainfall, drought conditions, excessive rainfall, crop damage and other environmental challenges.

Crop losses may reduce agricultural income and affect the ability of farmers to repay loans and meet household expenses. Climatic uncertainty also makes agricultural planning difficult, particularly for farmers who have limited access to irrigation, weather information and risk-management services.

Agricultural resilience requires improved water management, climate-adaptive farming practices, agricultural extension services and reliable mechanisms for protecting farmers against crop losses.

4.4 Market Price Fluctuations

Agricultural markets play a critical role in determining farmers' income. Farmers may invest substantial resources in cultivation but receive lower prices when agricultural produce reaches the market.

Price fluctuations may result from seasonal supply, market demand, transportation costs, quality requirements, storage limitations and market intermediaries. In some circumstances, farmers may have limited bargaining power and may be unable to wait for favourable market conditions.

The gap between the cost of production and the selling price can affect agricultural profitability. Effective procurement mechanisms, market information, storage facilities, producer organisations and transparent market systems are important for improving farmers' income stability.

4.5 Challenges Faced by Tenant Farmers

Tenant farmers represent an important segment of agricultural activity in Telangana. They cultivate land belonging to others and may pay rent through cash payments or other arrangements. However, tenant farmers may experience difficulties in accessing institutional credit, government assistance, crop insurance and other agricultural support programmes.

The lack of formal recognition or documented tenancy arrangements can create difficulties in establishing eligibility for certain benefits. Tenant farmers may also face uncertainty regarding land access, cultivation costs and the duration of tenancy.

Improving the identification and inclusion of tenant farmers in agricultural welfare programmes is important for strengthening rural livelihoods and reducing economic vulnerability.

4.6 Limited Access to Crop Insurance and Risk Protection

Agricultural insurance and risk-protection systems can help farmers manage financial losses associated with crop damage. However, coverage, awareness, registration, claim assessment and payment procedures may present challenges in some circumstances.

Farmers may not always understand the eligibility requirements, documentation procedures or claim settlement process. Delays in claim payments or inadequate coverage can reduce the effectiveness of risk-protection programmes.

An effective crop insurance system should be accessible, transparent, timely and responsive to the agricultural conditions of different regions.

4.7 Social and Psychological Pressures

Agricultural distress may affect the emotional and social well-being of farmers and their families. Financial uncertainty, livelihood insecurity, social expectations, family responsibilities and difficulties in managing agricultural expenses can contribute to severe stress.

Farmers require accessible community support, counselling, social protection and timely assistance from local institutions. Agricultural development programmes should recognise that financial assistance alone may not address every dimension of distress.

Social support systems, agricultural advisory services and accessible mental-health care can help farming households navigate difficult circumstances.

5. Economic Consequences of Agricultural Distress

Agricultural distress has consequences for individual farming households as well as the wider rural economy. When farmers experience financial losses, the effects may extend to household consumption, children's education, healthcare, employment and rural economic activity.

5.1 Reduction in Household Income

Agricultural income is often seasonal and depends on crop production, market prices and cultivation expenditure. Crop losses or lower prices can reduce the income available to farming households. Such financial difficulties may affect the ability to meet basic needs and maintain economic stability.

5.2 Financial Burden on Farming Families

Agricultural debt and income uncertainty can place considerable pressure on family finances. Households may experience difficulties managing loan repayments, agricultural expenses and essential household expenditure. Strengthening financial support systems and livelihood opportunities can help reduce household vulnerability.

5.3 Impact on Rural Employment

Agriculture supports employment for cultivators, agricultural labourers, transportation workers, market traders and other rural occupations. Agricultural distress may reduce economic activity in villages and affect employment opportunities for people who depend on farming-related activities.

5.4 Impact on Agricultural Investment

Financial uncertainty can affect farmers' willingness and capacity to invest in improved seeds, irrigation, machinery, technology and other agricultural resources. Lower investment may influence agricultural productivity and the sustainability of rural livelihoods.

6. Social Consequences for Farming Households

6.1 Family Welfare

Agricultural distress can affect family welfare, particularly when households face income insecurity, financial obligations and limited access to essential services. Family members may experience difficulties in maintaining their standard of living and accessing education or healthcare.

6.2 Educational Challenges

Financial difficulties in farming households may affect the educational opportunities of children and young people. Household income uncertainty can create challenges in meeting school expenses, transportation costs, educational materials and other requirements.

6.3 Rural Social Stability

Agriculture is closely connected with rural social and economic relationships. Agricultural distress may influence community participation, local economic activity, family stability and the overall development of rural communities.

6.4 Support for Affected Families

Families affected by farmer suicides require appropriate support from government departments, financial institutions, local authorities and community organisations. Support should include access to eligible compensation, social protection, educational assistance, livelihood programmes and counselling services.

Such assistance should be delivered through transparent procedures that respect the dignity and privacy of affected families.

7. Government Initiatives and Agricultural Welfare Programmes in Telangana

The Telangana government has introduced several programmes intended to support farmers, improve agricultural production, strengthen rural infrastructure and provide financial assistance. The effectiveness of these initiatives depends on their accessibility, implementation quality, coverage and timely delivery.

7.1 Rythu Bandhu and Agricultural Investment Support

Agricultural investment support programmes aim to provide financial assistance to farmers for meeting cultivation-related expenses. Direct financial support can help reduce the immediate burden of agricultural expenditure and improve the capacity of farmers to plan their agricultural activities.

However, programme design and eligibility should consider the circumstances of tenant farmers and other vulnerable agricultural households.

7.2 Rythu Bharosa and Farmer Support

Agricultural welfare programmes designed to support farmers' cultivation expenses and livelihoods are important components of state agricultural policy. Their effectiveness depends on clear eligibility criteria, timely payments, adequate coverage and transparent implementation.

7.3 Irrigation Development

Irrigation development can reduce dependence on rainfall and support agricultural production. Telangana has invested in irrigation infrastructure and water-resource development to improve agricultural water availability.

The sustainable use of irrigation resources, groundwater management, water conservation and equitable access to irrigation facilities are essential for long-term agricultural development.

7.4 Crop Procurement and Minimum Support Price

Government procurement systems and Minimum Support Price (MSP) mechanisms are important for protecting farmers against certain market risks. Agricultural procurement should be accessible to farmers, transparent in its procedures and supported by adequate infrastructure.

Farmers require timely information regarding procurement centres, quality standards, crop eligibility, payment procedures and market prices.

7.5 Agricultural Extension and Technical Assistance

Agricultural extension services provide information regarding crop management, soil health, irrigation, pest management, agricultural technology and market practices.

Effective agricultural extension systems can improve farmers' knowledge and support informed agricultural decision-making. Agricultural officers, research institutions and local agricultural organisations should work together to provide accessible and practical information.

8. Role of Financial Institutions in Reducing Agricultural Distress

Financial institutions play a significant role in supporting agricultural livelihoods. Banks, cooperative institutions and rural credit agencies can contribute to agricultural sustainability through accessible financial services.

The following measures are important:

- Improving access to institutional agricultural credit.
- Promoting transparent loan procedures.
- Providing timely credit for cultivation activities.
- Improving awareness of agricultural loan schemes.
- Strengthening financial literacy programmes.
- Supporting appropriate loan restructuring mechanisms in eligible circumstances.
- Improving access to financial services for tenant and small farmers.
- Strengthening farmer-oriented banking and cooperative services.

Institutional credit systems should be designed to support agricultural production and reduce dependence on less transparent financial arrangements.

9. Role of Social Work in Addressing Farmers' Distress

Social work has an important role in addressing agricultural distress because the issue involves economic, social, psychological and community-level challenges.

9.1 Community-Based Support

Social workers can collaborate with village-level organisations, agricultural institutions, self-help groups and community leaders to identify livelihood-related challenges and improve access to welfare services.

9.2 Counselling and Emotional Support

Farmers and family members experiencing severe distress should be able to access confidential, respectful and professional counselling services. Community-level support systems can help individuals connect with appropriate professional care and social protection services.

9.3 Welfare Programme Awareness

Social workers can assist rural households in understanding welfare programmes, accessing eligible benefits, completing applications and connecting with government departments.

9.4 Support for Affected Families

Social work interventions may include helping affected families access educational assistance, livelihood support, financial entitlements, healthcare and community-based services.

9.5 Advocacy and Policy Participation

Social workers, researchers and civil society organisations can contribute to policy development by documenting rural challenges, promoting inclusive welfare policies and encouraging participation of farmers in decision-making processes.

10. Policy Recommendations

Addressing farmers' suicides in Telangana requires sustained and coordinated action. The following policy recommendations may contribute to reducing agricultural distress and improving rural livelihoods.

10.1 Strengthening Agricultural Income

Agricultural policies should focus on improving the stability and sustainability of farmers' income. Support for diversified agriculture, value addition, producer organisations and better market access can help improve livelihood opportunities.

10.2 Improving Institutional Credit

Farmers should have timely access to affordable institutional credit. Financial institutions should simplify procedures, improve credit awareness and provide appropriate assistance to vulnerable farming households.

10.3 Improving Crop Insurance

Crop insurance systems should be transparent, accessible and responsive to local agricultural conditions. Registration, assessment and claim settlement procedures should be simplified wherever possible.

10.4 Supporting Tenant Farmers

Tenant farmers should be considered in the design and implementation of agricultural welfare programmes. Appropriate documentation and eligibility systems can help improve access to credit, financial assistance and risk protection.

10.5 Agricultural Diversification

Farmers should be encouraged to explore suitable diversified agricultural activities, including horticulture, livestock-related activities, agroforestry and other locally appropriate farming systems. Diversification should be supported through technical guidance, market access and financial assistance.

10.6 Improving Rural Infrastructure

Investment in storage, transportation, irrigation, agricultural processing, market infrastructure and rural connectivity can improve agricultural efficiency and reduce certain production and marketing challenges.

10.7 Strengthening Community Support

Village-level support systems, agricultural extension services, social welfare institutions and counselling services should be strengthened to provide timely assistance to farmers and their families.

10.8 Monitoring Agricultural Distress

Government departments, agricultural institutions and researchers should develop reliable monitoring systems to identify areas experiencing agricultural distress. Data should be used to improve policy planning, service delivery and programme evaluation while protecting the privacy and dignity of affected families.

11. Conclusion

Farmers' suicides in Telangana represent a serious social, economic and agricultural development challenge. The issue is associated with multiple structural factors, including agricultural indebtedness, increasing cultivation costs, market uncertainty, climatic risks, limited access to institutional support and livelihood insecurity. These challenges may affect farmers' financial stability, family welfare and overall quality of life.

Although Telangana has implemented various agricultural development and welfare programmes, further efforts are required to ensure that support reaches small and marginal farmers, tenant farmers and other vulnerable agricultural households. Sustainable agricultural development requires more than financial assistance. It requires reliable markets, affordable credit, effective insurance, water management, agricultural diversification, social protection and accessible support services.

The role of government institutions, financial organisations, agricultural researchers, social workers and civil society is crucial in addressing the underlying causes of agricultural distress. A coordinated approach that combines economic support with social welfare and community-based assistance can strengthen the resilience of farming households.

Farmers are essential to food security, rural development and the economy. Protecting their livelihoods, improving their economic security and ensuring access to dignified support services should remain a priority in Telangana's development agenda.

References

1. Government of India, Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare. (2022). *Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 5476: Suicide by Farmers in Telangana*. Parliament of India.

2. National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). *Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India*. Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.

3. Telangana Today. (2021). *One year, 402 farmer suicides: Resurgence of agrarian crisis feared in Telangana*.

4. Telangana Today. (2022). *Farmer suicides go up by 15 per cent in Telangana*.

5. Development and Environment Foundation of India. *Agriculture in Telangana: From Plight to Pride*.

6. Government of Telangana. Department of Agriculture. Agricultural development, farmer welfare and agricultural extension programme materials.

7. Government of India. Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare. Agricultural policy, crop insurance and farmer welfare programme reports.