5. Agrarian Distress- Economy

Farmer suicides in India- 28 years of data shows Agrarian distress in India intensified in 2023 with a 75% surge in suicides (10,786 deaths), where agricultural laborers outnumbered cultivators for the first time due to wage insecurity, debt, and climate stress. Despite interventions like PMFBY and the National Suicide Prevention Strategy, structural issues such as indebtedness and market volatility persist, necessitating reforms like legal MSP and climate-resilient agriculture.

Agrarian Distress and Farmer Suicides in India (NCRB Data Analysis)

Overview and Key Statistics

Historical Scale (1995–2023)- According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), India witnessed over 3.9 lakh suicides among farmers and agricultural laborers during this period.

Regional Concentration- Five states—Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Telangana—account for over 70% of all recorded suicides.

Recent Surge (2023 Data)- After a decade of gradual decline, the year 2023 marked a severe reversal with a 75% increase in suicides compared to 2022.

Total Deaths- 10,786 lives were lost in 2023.

Shift in Vulnerability- Laborers vs. Cultivators

A significant structural shift occurred in 2023, highlighting deepening rural distress among the most marginalized.

Category	Deaths in 2023	Vulnerability Factors
Agricultural Laborers	6,096	Overtook cultivators for the first time. They suffer from wage insecurity, seasonal unemployment, and a lack of social protection.
Cultivators (Farmers)	4,690	Face direct risks from crop failure, debt, and market price volatility.

Root Causes of Agrarian Distress

The crisis is driven by a combination of structural inequality, policy neglect, and market vulnerability.

Indebtedness and Credit Crisis

Private Moneylenders- Over 11,000 suicides annually are linked to unpaid debts. Smallholders often resort to private lenders who charge exorbitant interest rates of 24–60% per annum.

Credit Trap- High input costs and repeated crop failures trap farmers in a cycle of debt, while institutional credit remains largely inaccessible to small farmers.

Crop Failures and Climate Stress

Erratic Weather- Factors include irregular monsoons, prolonged droughts, and pest attacks.

Hotspots- States like Maharashtra, Telangana, and Madhya Pradesh are witnessing climate-induced yield collapse.

Input Cost Inflation

Rising Expenses- The cost of essential inputs (fertilizers, seeds, diesel) has risen faster than the Minimum Support Price (MSP).

Low Recovery- Farmers investing ₹20,000–₹30,000 per acre often recover less than half of their investment.

Market Distortions and Price Volatility

Lack of Assurance- Absence of assured procurement and heavy dependence on middlemen.

Glut- Market gluts for perishable crops often push selling prices below the cost of production.

Institutional Failure

Delayed Relief- Compensation schemes like Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) often face mismanagement or delays, leading to despair after harvest losses.

Socio-Psychological Factors

Stigma- The cultural stigma surrounding bankruptcy, combined with long-term debt and a lack of social security, triggers severe mental health issues.

Land Fragmentation

Unviable Holdings- 85% of landholdings are under 2 hectares, making them economically unviable for investments in mechanization or irrigation.

Regional Analysis of Distress

1. Southern and Western India- These regions account for 72.5% of all farmer suicides since 1995.
2. Andhra Pradesh and Telangana- Together, these states have reported over 170,000 suicides.
3. Telangana's Crisis- Since its creation in 2014, Telangana emerged as a high-crisis zone, primarily due to the inheritance of vulnerable cotton-growing districts.
4. Madhya Pradesh- Consistently ranks among top contributors, proving that agrarian distress transcends specific regional boundaries.

The Role of MGNREGA and Historical Relief Trends

Period of Decline (2010–2019)- Farmer suicides saw a significant decline during this decade across multiple states.

Impact of MGNREGA- The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act was pivotal. It provided wage security during droughts and non-farming seasons, acting as a financial buffer.

State Success Stories

1. Kerala- Suicides fell from 1,118 in 2005 to 105 in 2014.
2. West Bengal- Reported zero suicides by 2012.
3. Madhya Pradesh**-** Experienced sustained reduction after years of crisis during this specific period.

Key Government Interventions

The government has introduced various schemes to address financial insecurity and mental health.

Financial and Agricultural Support

Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)- Aims to reduce financial distress by covering losses due to natural calamities, pests, and diseases.

Kisan Credit Card (KCC) Scheme- Offers short-term credit at subsidized interest rates to reduce reliance on high-interest informal loans.

Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN)- Provides direct income support of ₹6,000 per year to small and marginal farmers to ensure basic financial security.

Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

National Suicide Prevention Strategy (2022)- India's first comprehensive policy aiming to reduce suicide mortality by 10% by 2030.

1. Tele-MANAS- A 24/7 tele-mental health helpline.
2. District Mental Health Programme (DMHP)- Offers community-based services.
3. Manodarpan**-** Focuses on adolescent mental health and counseling.

Legal Reforms

Mental Healthcare Act, 2017- Decriminalizes suicide and mandates access to mental healthcare.

Health Policy 2014- Recognizes mental health as a critical public health component.

Way Forward and Strategic Recommendations

To address the structural inequality and market vulnerability, the following long-term changes are recommended

Institutional Credit Access- Strengthen rural banking systems to break the grip of informal moneylenders.

Legal Backing for MSP- Implement the Supreme Court panel's recommendation to legally guarantee MSP, providing a definitive safety net.

Mental Health Support- Expand rural mental health infrastructure and work to destigmatize mental illness in farming communities.

Climate-Resilient Agriculture- Promote sustainable farming practices and crop diversification to mitigate the risks posed by climate change.

Source- [https-//www.downtoearth.org.in/agriculture/farmer-suicides-in-india-what-28-years-of-data-shows](https://www.downtoearth.org.in/agriculture/farmer-suicides-in-india-what-28-years-of-data-shows)