

Nearly 11,500 farmer suicides in last six years

Around 11,500 farmers have committed suicide in different parts of India in the last six years, most of them due to their inability to pay debts, says a new study that indicates the problem is bigger than what has been reported so far.

The study, carried out by a conglomerate of voluntary groups called the National Social Watch Coalition (NCWC), says that at least 11,387 farmers have committed suicide between 2001 and 2006. The situation has gone from bad to worse in several states, the report points out.

According to the 'Citizen's Report on Governance and Development - 2007', over 5,980 farmers from the southern Indian state of Karnataka have committed suicide and more than 2,410 farmers ended their lives in Andhra Pradesh since 2001.

In Karnataka, 2,505 farmers committed suicide in 2001-02 alone. In Andhra Pradesh, 1,126 farmers ended their lives in 2004.

In the last five years, at least 2,280 farmers have committed suicide in Maharashtra.

In 2001, the state reported 50 cases of farmer suicides. The figure went up to 122 in 2002 and 170 in 2003 before jumping to 620 in 2004. There was a slight dip in 2005 with 572 farmers ending their lives, but it rose sharply to 746 in 2006.

'Interestingly, the prime minister's visit along with the agriculture minister to the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra on June 30, 2006 was followed by an increase in the number of suicides in the region. Over 150 suicides occurred between July 2 and August 21,' the report says.

Atul Sood, the co-author of the report, said: 'We are not sensitive to the problem of farmers in our villages. I think the government's apathy towards millions of farmers in the country is leading to suicide in our country.'

'They take loans to complete their crop cycle but when it comes to procuring the food grains, neither the central government nor the state government shows any interest. This attitude forces them to stay indebted and commit suicide,' Sood, an associate professor at the Centre for the Study of Regional Development at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) here, told IANS.

Among other states, Kerala has witnessed 506 cases of farmer suicides since 2001, while Punjab has reported 179, Gujarat 24 and Orissa eight.

The report further reveals that 434,242 farmer households in the country are in debt, including a whopping 69,199 in West Bengal and 49,493 in Andhra Pradesh.

Maharashtra is home to over 36,000 indebted farmers, Madhya Pradesh 32,110, Tamil Nadu 29,000, Rajasthan 27,828, Karnataka nearly 25,000, Bihar 23,330, Orissa 20,250, Kerala 14,126 and Haryana over 10,000.

Arunachal Pradesh is at the bottom of the list with 72 households in debt while Meghalaya has 103 indebted farmers and Mizoram 184.

'Crop failure and drought may have been often quoted as the reason behind the extreme steps by the farmers but our field survey and data available with the government itself suggest that the leading cause of farmers' suicide is indebtedness,' said Jagadananda, a co-convenor of NCWC.

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