



# **Alliance for Sustainable Holistic Agriculture (ASHA)**

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## **Farmer Suicides and Agrarian Crisis** **Roundtable Meeting with Hon'ble Members of Parliament**

**Organized by Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture (ASHA)**  
**Constitution Club, New Delhi; November 24, 2011**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture (ASHA) is a coalition of more than 400 organizations, farmer and agricultural worker unions, and many individual activists, scientists and academics committed to the cause of farmers' welfare and sustainable agriculture. ASHA and its members are working on addressing various aspects of agrarian crisis and making agriculture viable and sustainable especially for small farmers.

Concerned with the agrarian crisis, ASHA members have raised alarm over the recent reports of farmer suicides along with likeminded groups such as Vidarbha Jan Andolan Samiti. Fact-finding visits were organized in a few states to ascertain the alarming numbers of farmer suicides. The visits showed that the number of farmer suicides were far higher than what the state governments have been recognizing officially. Farmers were facing serious distress conditions and unless urgent effective action was taken, the number of suicides is likely to rise.

Therefore, ASHA organized the Roundtable meeting with Members of Parliament on Nov 24<sup>th</sup> 2011 in New Delhi, just as the Winter session began, in order to bring the issues to the serious attention of M.P.s and policy-makers. The meeting was attended by more than 30 people including nine Hon'ble Members of Parliament from various parties.

In the meeting, ASHA members made presentations on the farmer suicides, underlying causes of agrarian crisis and the demands from the network for immediate measures and for addressing the root causes. The Members of Parliament and other notable participants spoke on the various issues raised, and there was a broad consensus on the need for urgent attention and on the immediate measures demanded from the government.

The very next day, on Nov 25<sup>th</sup> 2011, there was a stark reminder of the disconnect between the government machinery and ground realities when the Minister of State for Agriculture Shri Harish Rawat gave a statement in the Rajya Sabha that the farmer suicides have declined drastically and only 242 suicides for agrarian reasons were reported so far in 2011 – with just 42 in Andhra Pradesh, 123 in Maharashtra, 77 in Karnataka and 0 in Kerala. In contrast, our fact-finding visits in A.P. showed 95 suicides for agrarian reasons had happened in just 1 month (Oct 7<sup>th</sup> to Nov 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011) in only 6 districts, and the figures collected in Maharashtra showed 680 suicides for agrarian reasons in 2011.

It is obvious that unless the extent of the crisis is recognized and acknowledged, one cannot expect action to address the crisis. Therefore, we hope that this report of the Roundtable meeting and the annexures are of use as more attention is inevitably brought to bear on the farmers' distress. For more information or clarifications, please contact: Dr.Ramanjaneyulu ([ramoo@csa-india.org](mailto:ramoo@csa-india.org), 09000699702) or Kiran Vissa ([kiranvissa@gmail.com](mailto:kiranvissa@gmail.com), 09701705743).

### **Attendees:**

#### **Members of Parliament:**

Capt. Jainarain Nishad (JDU, Lok Sabha)  
Dr. T.N. Seema (CPI-M, Rajya Sabha)  
Shri Bhartruhari Mahtab (BJD, Lok Sabha)  
Shri D. Raja (CPI, Rajya Sabha)  
Shri Hukumdeo Narayan Yadav, (BJP, Lok Sabha, former Union Minister of Agriculture)  
Shri M.B.Rajesh (CPI-M, Lok Sabha)  
Shri Mysura Reddy (TDP, Rajya Sabha)  
Shri Prakash Javadekar (BJP, Rajya Sabha)  
Shri Shivanand Tiwariy (JDU, Rajya Sabha)

#### **Other participants:**

Annie Raja (National Federation of Indian Women)  
Anupama Rai (researcher)  
Ashish Gupta (Organic Farmers Association of India)  
Dr Dinesh Abrol (All India People's Science Network)  
Dr. Archana Prasad (Assoc. Prof., Jamia Millia University)  
Harsh Mander (Member, National Advisory Council, Govt. of India)  
Krishna Bir Chaudhary (Bharatiya Krishak Samaj)  
P. Krishna Prasad (All India Kisan Sabha)  
Rupinder Kaur (student)  
Shaju Joseph  
Vijoo Krishnan (All India Kisan Sabha)

**Participants from ASHA network:** Kavitha Kuruganti (Convenor), Dr. G.V. Ramanjaneyulu (Centre for Sustainable Agriculture), Kirankumar Vissa (Association for India's Development), Dr. D. Narasimha Reddy (Chetana Society), Nishank (ASHA Secretariat Coordinator, New Delhi), K. Sajaya (Caring Citizens Collective, A.P.) and Pradeep Kumar (Haritha Sena, Kerala). Shri Vivekananda Matne from Vidarbha could not attend as his train was delayed by 8 hours.

## **PROCEEDINGS OF ROUND-TABLE MEETING**

### **Agenda:**

Meeting hosted/moderated by Kavitha Kuruganti, Convenor, ASHA

- (1) Introduction by Kavitha Kuruganti
- (2) Presentation on the continuing Farmer Suicides by Kirankumar Vissa
- (3) Sharing of experiences from crisis-ridden states
- (4) Presentation on Agrarian Crisis – Causes and ASHA's Demands, by Dr. G.V. Ramanjaneyulu
- (5) Responses from M.P.s and other participants, and discussion
- (6) Summary and closing remarks

**Kavitha Kuruganti** welcomed the Hon'ble M.P.s and other participants to the roundtable discussion on Farmer Suicides and Agrarian Crisis, which is one of the very urgent situations demanding the attention of the nation. Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture (ASHA) is a coalition of more than 400 organizations, farmer and agricultural worker unions, and many individual activists, scientists and academics committed to the cause of farmers' welfare and sustainable agriculture. ASHA is very concerned with the continuing agrarian crisis where millions of farmers are in distress and getting pushed out of agriculture – due to various reasons like lack of support systems, high-risk high-input practices, degradation of soil and water, and the rising corporate control of land, water and seed. The rising farmer suicides are a crying reminder to the nation that this crisis needs our urgent attention. Fact-finding visits in a few states showed serious distress conditions this year and unless quick and effective action is taken, the situation might turn far worse.

Even though it was at short notice, ASHA decided to organize the round-table meeting in Delhi at the beginning of the Parliament session in order to bring the situation and the demands for action to the attention of the Parliament and the Central government. While this was not the best of processes to be run around the issue, given the short timeline available, ASHA adopted the best process it could, to highlight the new spate of suicides, she explained. Kavitha thanked the M.P.s and other distinguished participants for joining the meeting despite the short notice, and this indicated their seriousness about the issue. Mr. Kishor Tiwari from Vidarbha is unable to join the meeting because of other programs in Vidarbha on the same issue but will be reaching Delhi tomorrow; Mr. Vivekananda Matne who was expected to join has not arrived because his train has been delayed by more than 8 hours. However, we will have information presented from Vidarbha, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala as well as the national situation.

**Kirankumar Vissa** made a presentation on the situation of farmer suicides. In the past 16 years (1995-2010), 256,913 farmers have committed suicide across India as per the government statistics from National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). In 2010, there were 15,964 farmer suicides and the state-wise distribution shows that Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh stand out with , followed by Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal and Kerala. In 2011, the crisis is continuing. In 2011, in six districts of Vidarbha, as per Vasant Rao Naik Shetkari Swavalamban Mission, 680 farmer suicides were recorded which were due to agricultural distress.

It is a painful task to talk about the farmer suicides and their numbers. But it is important to do it because unless we recognize the enormity of the problem that exists, we cannot summon the will to address it. Obviously, it was a much more painful experience to actually visit the families where farmers had committed suicide very recently. In Andhra Pradesh, we visited 20 families earlier this month and all of the suicides were for reasons related to agriculture – due to crop failure and/or mounting debt. Similarly, in Maharashtra, Vidarbha Jan Andolan Samiti has been visiting most of the suicide cases. It is instructive to look at the discrepancy between what the government is recognizing as “genuine farmer suicides” and the actual number of suicides; for example, in 2010, NCRB reported 2525 suicides in Andhra Pradesh while the government of A.P. recognized only 158 farmer suicides. The table shows district-wise numbers from A.P. government for the past 10 years. This shows how the state governments are reluctant to recognize the farmer suicides and provide relief measures for the families as required by law. There is a list of 13 different documents which the families are supposed to provide to establish it as a genuine farmer suicide case. It also shows how the governments are trying to establish that they have been able to tackle the agrarian crisis and reduce the farmer suicides. Therefore it is very important for all the Members of Parliament and other respected participants to take note of the actual extent of the problem.

**Sajaya Kakarla (Caring Citizens Collective):** In Andhra Pradesh, we have been working since 2006 with families where farmers have committed suicide. We have found that the crisis is continuing and this year there have been many suicides in the districts where we are working. Many of them are cotton farmers, some of them cultivate paddy and other crops. All of them have accumulated debt due to crop loans and other expenses, and many of them borrow from local moneylenders or dealers. When the debt reaches around Rs. 1 lakh or more, they become desperate and some of them commit suicide. Though there is a G.O. of A.P. government that promises Rs. 1 lakh ex-gratia payment and Rs.50,000 as one-time settlement of loans, the government makes it very difficult for the family to get this successfully. With a lot of effort, we were able to get about 30% of the genuine cases to get the relief package. The situation for the women of the families is very difficult. The government should also address the unsustainable model of agriculture which is responsible for the distress – especially in the rainfed regions.

**Dr.G.V. Ramanjaneyulu (Centre for Sustainable Agriculture) made a presentation on underlying causes and ASHA demands (See Annexure for more details):**

When we look at the underlying causes of the crisis, it is clear that most of them are policy-driven. The costs of cultivation have increased steeply and the dominant model of agriculture has pushed even small farmers towards high dependence on external inputs. The prices for the agricultural produce, on the other hand, often do not cover the cost of cultivation, let alone the rising living costs. The small and marginal farmers are especially vulnerable, and a large section of farmers who commit suicide are tenant farmers who are suffering from high tenancy costs and lack of access to credit, insurance, crop compensation, etc. Moreover, unsustainable cropping patterns and production practices are either being promoted by the government policies or being chosen by farmers due to lack of support for sustainable alternatives – for example, more than 50% of cultivated area in Maharashtra and 25% in Andhra Pradesh were sown with cotton this year, and this is clearly heading for a disaster. The crisis is most severe in the rainfed areas; the agricultural policies and models promoted are highly unsuitable for farmers in rainfed regions and this is a big reason for the crisis. Other reasons are trade policies

that do not favour farmers' interests, and inadequate support systems like credit, insurance, marketing, storage and farmer institutions.

On behalf of ASHA, we are demanding a few immediate measures to help the farmers, and further measures to address the root causes. The immediate measures include urgent compensation for all farmers who have suffered from crop failure not just this year, but any one of the past three years – at Rs.10,000 per acre at least, as recommended by the Hooda committee. Where export-import measures and trade policies are adversely affecting farmers, immediately revisit and modify them to favour the interests of farmers. The MSPs must be revised to provide remunerative prices; effective direct procurement from farmers should be initiated everywhere – many lacunae such as procurement from rice millers instead of farmers in A.P., and the non-opening of most cotton procurement centres in A.P. and Maharashtra, should be rectified immediately. Importantly, the governments must ensure that ex-gratia and loan-repayment support reach all the farmer suicide families – the states shouldn't be in denial mode.

To address the underlying economic crisis of farmers, the government should guarantee basic living incomes to all farming families – to be implemented by a statutory Farmers Income Commission. As part of this, a target price should be announced for all food crops which will ensure sufficient margins for the growers, and when the actual prices realized by the farmers fall below this target price, the difference should be paid directly to the farmer as price compensation. Low-cost sustainable agriculture should be promoted which reduces the risk and indebtedness especially for small and marginal farmers. A comprehensive mission for rainfed agriculture should be taken up based on diverse cropping, protective irrigation and livestock. Special attention should be paid to solving the tenant farmers' issues – by controlling tenancy costs, protecting their rights and ensuring access to insurance, credit, compensation, etc. Institutional credit and effective crop insurance for all crops should be ensured for all farmers.

We appeal to the Hon'ble Parliamentarians to call for a joint session of the Parliament to discuss farmer suicides and agrarian crisis, and to constitute a Parliamentarians Forum on Agrarian Distress to constantly address the problems of the farming community at the highest level.

**Shri Mysura Reddy (TDP, Rajya Sabha):** We have to thank the organizers for bringing these important issues for discussion. One of the problems is that we are still looking at only the issues directly linked to agriculture. But the family living standards and costs have also changed. Health, education, travel have all become more expensive. In A.P., crop holiday was declared in more than 1 lakh acres – this has direct implications for food security, so it should be a matter of concern for entire nation. Many Parliamentarians are well aware of the issues you are raising. We recognize the problems with pesticides and are discussing the Pesticide Management Bill. We are also fighting on the Seeds Bill.

During this session in Rajya Sabha, we are pressurizing the government to take up the agricultural distress for discussion under voting clause. We don't know whether the government will allow for the discussion under voting clause or a non-voting clause but we will definitely raise all these issues there.

**Shri Prakash Javadekar (BJP, Rajya Sabha):** I come from Vidarbha. I am well aware of the agriculture situation there and the various issues. In Parliament there are MPs concerned about agriculture from all parties. A classic example is the changes made in the Seeds Bill where almost 90% of the changes that we demanded have been made – this was possible through an all-party alliance. You please provide your literature and studies, and we will definitely raise the issues in the Parliament.

The input costs have increased enormously, and this has made profitable agriculture unprofitable. This is very important to address and bring down the input costs. In the rainfed areas like Vidarbha, farmers are facing a lot of problems. The rains have not been good. We need to promote micro-irrigation. It is important to provide assured water supply through major, medium, minor and micro irrigation is important for agriculture, depending on the region. The whole approach of the government is anti-farmer. This has to change.

Once again, we are very keen on raising agriculture issues, and you can send us your concerns and information from time to time.

**Shri D.Raja (CPI, Rajya Sabha):** Congratulations to Kavitha and the team for a sustained campaign on various issues concerning our farmers and agriculture. All political parties are taking up issues of farmers now – it is not that we are not raising the issues you have brought up. I agree with the demand that in the winter session, agrarian distress should be discussed thoroughly. We did take up Seeds Bill and Pesticides Bill. We have some issues on those Bills that we are still discussing with the government. Minister of Agriculture Shri Sharad Pawar is going to have one more meeting with MPs on the pesticide issues. Now we are also looking at the Biotechnology Regulatory Authority Bill (BRAI). There are many issues around it and I am well aware of the concerns you all are raising.

Coming to the farmer suicides, the root cause is indebtedness. Institutional credit is not reaching a majority of the farmers and they have to raise loans informally at very high interest rates. The next issue is remunerative prices. Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee said that consumer prices will go up if Minimum Support Prices (MSPs) are raised so they cannot raise MSPs. The government comes up with such arguments! We should fight hard about the issue and not accept that the farmers don't get a fair MSP. Another important issue is the impact of international trade. Now, a free trade agreement with Europe is coming up. We have to oppose these agreements which have negative impact on farmers. Prakash Javadekar said that this government is anti-farmer. But that's not enough. What do we do to get out of the situation?

In Pondicherry, people are asking for a ban on real estate development because much of the agricultural land is being lost. We have to face a major issue with land being taken over for other purposes. Also, it is not enough to talk about farmers and tenants as you have done, but also about agricultural workers. How do we address their issues? We need to take a holistic view of agriculture.

We need to pressurize the government. But we also need to take up the issues at the people's level. Only then, these problems can be addressed comprehensively.

**Shri Hukumdeo Narayan Yadav (BJP, Lok Sabha, former Union Minister of Agriculture):**

We thank you very much for organizing this roundtable discussion. The farmer suicides are a very important matter. We should also understand that the suicides form only one aspect. We need to look at the root causes.

In my 52 years of political life, I have seen that there is no party dedicated to farmers' issues. There is no major *kisan* party. The class character of the Members of Parliament has also changed. You see that the Parliament is disrupted on various issues, but there is no disruption on farmers' issues – though the MPs are saying that they are serious about farmers' issues. At the national level, there is no one who can be considered a farmer leader. We used to have Choudhry Charan Singh, Shri Devi Lal, Shri Bhairon Singh Shekhawat. Now there is no one.

Let us look at some underlying issues. 64.77% of those engaged in agriculture are marginal farmers or landless, i.e., less than 2.5 acres. If the holding itself is so small and uneconomical, how can agriculture be economical? This is the root cause. Now, take the credit waiver to farmers – Rs.51,000 crores was waived. But for employees, Rs. 1,32,000 crores has been waived. In 3-year period, the entire loans taken by farmers who form more than 60% of the population is Rs.5,67,476 crores. But the loans taken by employees is more than Rs.10,00,000 crores. These are figures from Government of India – in response to my starred question in Parliament dated 30/8/2011.

There should be a Commission that balances the value of industrial and agricultural products. The farmers are always buying at higher price – which are industrial products; and selling at a lower price – which are agricultural products. This is exploitation of farmers through unfavourable terms of trade.

All suicides are from hybrids and Bt cotton. These hybrids need drip irrigation, sprinklers. The government is promoting hybrids with high-tech, which is not suitable for small/marginal farmers. We also need a debate on foreign companies in our agriculture, of which not enough has been said or heard.

To solve the agriculture crisis, we need to progress in a completely different direction.

**Dr. Bhartruhari Mahtab (BJD, Lok Sabha):** I am curious about one piece of information – how many farmer suicides are happening in West Bengal? (He was informed that there were 993 farmer suicides in West Bengal in 2010 as per NCRB). On the question of tenant farmers, that issue was solved in West Bengal through the revolutionary measures in late 1970's. There the tenant farmers have full recognition unlike the issues that are being raised from other states.

Since agriculture is a State subject, it boils down to the respective state governments to take action. It will be prudent if you take action with the particular state governments where farmer suicides are happening. It will be interesting to see how much percentage of the farmer suicides are by tenant farmers.

The nature of moneylenders has changed. Now, moneylending is done by input dealers.

While I agree with the points raised by Shri Hukumdeo Narain, the distress is not only confined to hybrids. The problem of high input costs is very crucial one to address.

**AFPRO representative:** We need to emphasise the need for cutting input costs through adoption of organic farming. The water issue is the critical one to address. Based on our field work in agriculture, in rainfed areas, it is very important to provide protective irrigation. It is also important to reduce input costs through organic farming. We have successfully organized farmers to grow cotton organically. They are doing well economically because their input costs have reduced and their net returns have improved to 150% of what they were getting before.

**Shri M.B. Rajesh (CPI-M, Lok Sabha):** The crisis is directly related to agricultural policy. The public procurement should be strengthened. Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) are another reason for the farmers getting exploited. Another issue is cheap and accessible credit for farmers. In Kerala, farmers are being forced to depend on Micro-Finance Institutions.

**Dr. T.N. Seema (CPI-M, Rajya Sabha):** Many important points have been raised. I would like to stress that the situation of women should be considered. It seems that the majority of farmers who are committing suicide are men. That leaves the women of the families even more vulnerable to exploitation. How can the woman be left alone to fend for the children and herself, and handle the debts? I feel that there should be special emphasis on support to women. For instance, credit for widows must be a big issue.

I also believe that implementation of the market policies of the government has been a major cause for the current problem. Futures Trading is an example. The Food Security Bill also brings forward more concerns.

It should also be stressed again that this distress is policy-driven so we should work to change the underlying policies.

**Vijoo Krishnan (AIKS):** I wish that all the MPs listen to the responses from others regarding the points they made and that the format adopted for the discussion was different. For example, some of them raised problematic issues regarding the crop holiday situation but they didn't talk about tenant farmers. At the policy level, if we look at neo-liberal reforms, whether it is BJP or Congress there is a continuity of policy. They blame each other as being anti-farmer but their policies regarding agriculture are mostly same.

We need to identify the culprits, and not be afraid of naming which party's policies have affected the farmers. We should be sharper in our critiques. If we look at the import duty on raw silk being reduced, the government has said that this measure will benefit the silk weavers. Thus they have ostensibly pitted the weavers against the farmers.

We have data to show that smallholdings are not uneconomical, in response to one of the points made earlier. Similarly, we should acknowledge that C2+50% as the price support to farmers is not a magic formula if many other things don't change.



To get out of the current situation and policy environment, we need to build a broad-based movement, we need to build strong farmer organizations.

**Shri Krishna Bir Chaudhary (Bharat Krishak Samaj):** If we look at some of the farmer organizations, the name is of farmers and the work is for corporations. We need to have a constant farmers' lobby in the Parliament. We have good members in the Agriculture Standing Committee. There was a good debate on the Seeds Bill, but the Seed Price control is still not there.

Now the government is talking about Second Green Revolution. Why is the government assaulting the farmers again? We haven't yet addressed the problems caused by the first Green Revolution! If we take the fertilizer subsidy, the Finance Minister talks about pro-farmer budget but takes money away from farmers. We need to get farmers on the same platform, we need a strong lobby. The government holds detailed pre-budget discussions with the industry, but not with the farmers. Even agriculture is represented by a few agri-businesses.

What we need in agriculture is a farmer-centric model, a natural resource centric model.

**Harsh Mander (National Advisory Council):** What I see is that there is an epidemic of despair, a situation where the mindset and conditions of despair are spreading from farmer to farmer. Traditionally in India, the farmers had enormous mental strength which is essential in the face of drought and floods. Now things are changing. I am sure that the larger processes have played a role in the crisis – such as the exposure of farmers to globalization. In terms of food security system, there is a strong case for a guarantee to farmers in terms of remunerative prices and decentralized procurement system.

One issue that I hear in discussions on agriculture is a criticism of the NREGS saying that the employment guarantee scheme is responsible for further distress in agriculture – that the labour wages have increased, workers are not available in plenty like earlier. Even at the highest level, I have heard this said that Punjab agriculture is suffering because the numbers of migrant workers from Bihar have reduced and this is attributed to NREGS. If indeed poor workers have stopped migrating from Bihar to Punjab due to NREGS, that is a big success of NREGS; we should not be treating that as a negative impact. We should not expect that the agriculture system continues to run based on exploitation of the agricultural workers. We need to look at ways of both farmers and workers benefiting.

**Capt. Jainarain Prasad Nishad (JDU, Lok Sabha):** Quoted a couplet in Hindi:

Of what use is new thinking if the practices remain the same?

Of what use is a new boat if the boatman remains the same?

Farmers' issues are not being taken seriously in the Parliament. If inputs are available at low cost, then there is no crisis. If the Employment Guarantee Scheme is spending so much to provide just 100 days of labour, then why don't they spend just 60% of it and give livelihood to even more people?

We should retain the subsidy on fertilizer and remove the subsidy on LPG. Give the subsidy directly to the farmer instead of benefiting the companies.

**Pradeep Kumar (Haritha Sena, Kerala):** In Kerala, we are seeing an increase in farmer suicides. In the past few days, we have documented 11 suicides. There are many reasons but an important one is price collapse in crops like ginger and banana. The ginger price was more than Rs.2000 per bag (60kg) last year but now it is only Rs.500 per bag. The other issue is the indebtedness and lack of institutional credit. The Securities and Interest Act was amended to make it easier for financial institutions to initiate recovery proceedings on farmers. This is one of the reasons farmers are being pushed to suicides due to the pressure and humiliation.

**Dinesh Abrol (All India People's Science Network):** Fundamental issue is that we need to address the unsustainable model of agriculture. We need to look at an alternative model. We should not be making the same demands as earlier, which led to this current situation. As has been pointed out, with neoliberal policies and globalization, the earlier systems have been weakened or abandoned. But we should not be thinking only in terms of bringing back the earlier systems that were given up. Rather we should think about newer support systems for a sustainable model of agriculture. For example, rainfed regions and promotion of coarse grains.

In the mainstream political space, there is still a lack of understanding that the existing model of agriculture has failed. We need to work on that in order to address the real problems.

**Krishna Prasad (AIKS):** I am glad that the real crux of the crisis is coming out in the discussions. We also need to focus on the issues of value addition and processing where the farmers are losing out. We are seeing industrialization of agriculture under the corporates. If we look at the Wynad situation, 60-70% of the area is under coffee cultivation, mostly by large corporations. When coffee price was Rs.12000 per quintal, Nestle was selling instant coffee at Rs.900/kg. While the coffee price plummeted to Rs.2400 per quintal, Nestle's instant coffee price went up from Rs.900/kg to Rs.1100/kg! So there is this huge disconnect between the profits of the corporates after processing, and the margins that the farmers get from growing the crops.

The question is how to support the peasants. The peasants never asked for doles. There should be a system and policy for processing and value addition that is in favour of small and marginal farmers. For this, collectivization of small and marginal farmers is necessary. We should focus efforts on building collectives of farmers who can control the processing and value addition.

**Dinesh Abrol:** There are two models of building agro-industry. One is the large corporate model. The other is through the network model. Basically, we need an alternative model of industrialization; instead of avoiding discussion of industrialization we should demand an alternative model of building agro-industry.

**Ashish Gupta (Organic Farmers Association of India):** While changing the model of agriculture is desirable, we cannot expect it to happen overnight. We need to find a middle path where farmers in both existing model and alternative model make a decent living. Forming collectives is a good way to go. In our work, we find that farmer collectives at a small scale are

working very well. Our farmer collectives have a few hundred farmers in Himachal Pradesh – they are making better income by doing collective marketing and value addition where possible.

### **ASHA'S RESPONSES TO POINTS RAISED BY THE PARTICIPANTS:**

There were some specific responses from ASHA to points raised by the Hon'ble M.P.s and other participants. These are recorded below and could provide the basis for further discussion.

- (1) In response to the point raised by Shri D.Raja that the government cites the concern about rising consumer prices as a reason for not increasing MSPs, ASHA's proposal of Price Compensation system was highlighted. The basic argument is that if the agricultural prices are to be kept low for the benefit of consumers or industry, the burden should not be borne by the farmers. The Price Compensation system requires that for each food crop, a Target Price is declared which provides at least 50% above the cost of cultivation. Whenever the actual prices realized by the farmers (through procurement or open market) are below the Target Price, then the difference between the realized price and target price should be paid to the farmers. Essentially, this is an alternative option to ensure fair returns to the farmer, without impacting the actual market prices or consumer price. ASHA's note on Price Compensation system was made available to the M.P.s.
- (2) In response to the points raised by Shri Harsh Mander and Capt. Jainarain Nishad about NREGS and agriculture, ASHA's position is in favour of a system that benefits both farmers and agricultural workers, and that counters the trend towards heavy mechanization of agriculture which is being pushed by the governments in some regions citing the labour shortage or higher labour wages and is likely to be detrimental to small farmers and agricultural workers. The labour subsidy system being proposed doesn't cut into the 100-day work guarantee under NREGS; in addition to the 100 days of work under NREGS, the government can provide a labour subsidy for 40 person-days per acre at minimum wage level which is directly paid to the workers. There would be a provision for the workers to negotiate an additional wage payment directly from the farmers.
- (3) In response to the point raised by Shri Hukumdeo Narain about the unviability of small holdings, it was pointed out that there are positive experiences such as Community Managed Sustainable Agriculture program by the government of Andhra Pradesh which has demonstrated how the small and marginal farmer agriculture can be made sustainable by reducing the use of external inputs, and managing pests, diseases and soil fertility through locally available inputs instead of chemical pesticides and fertilizers. Recent study by the Acharya N.G.Ranga Agricultural University of 3000 farmers who are part of this program showed the positive impact. In villages where this program is running successfully, there have been very few farmer suicides. The other important aspect is that the initiative is led by women's self-help groups which are federated as mutually-aided cooperatives. This and other experiences show that adoption of low-input agriculture along with building collectives for planning and marketing go a long way to ensure viability and sustainability for small and marginal farmers.

(4) It was agreed that a special focus on women farmers is important, especially in the cases of families where the male farmers have committed suicides. Credit plus a special support package for women-headed households should be an important focus.

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS:**

In the closing discussion, the following was agreed upon by the attendees as the sense of the house:

- Among all the attendees of the round-table including the MPs, there was a broad consensus on the fact that suicides of farmers are a result of faulty, anti-farmer policies. There was also a broad consensus on the immediate demands put forward by the ASHA coalition. The demands in detail are stated in Annexure 1. In brief, the demands are (1) immediate compensation to farmers for crop failure in any one of the last 3 years, at Rs.10,000 per acre (at least); (2) modifying export-import policies and import tariffs/duties immediately in favour of our farmers; (3) revising the Minimum Support Prices to remunerative levels and implement efficient procurement operations directly from farmers; (4) providing prompt support to families of farmer suicides scrapping the unfair procedures of identifying farmer suicides. A couple of additional points were also proposed to be added to the immediate demands – which were (a) special package for women-headed farmer households including NREGS wages for working on their own land; (b) adoption of the ex-gratia payment and loan settlement measures for farmer suicide families in all states.
- The M.P.s promised that detailed discussion will be taken up in the Parliament on the farmer suicides and agrarian crisis. They also declared their readiness to engage with ASHA and receive reports and concerns raised by the Alliance. Some M.P.s also supported the demand for formation of a Parliamentarians' Forum on Agrarian Crisis.
- There was a broad consensus about the dire situation of farmer suicides needing our attention and the need for action on agrarian crisis. Many important points emerged about the underlying causes and how to address them. ASHA and the various participants will continue to engage in these discussions and in advocacy with Parliamentarians and the government.

The participants also resolved to send a message of solidarity and support to the farmers of the nation that their distress is a cause of concern to the entire nation, and appeal to them not to embrace suicide as a way out.

## **ANNEXURE-1: ASHA Statement**

### **Causes of Farmer Suicides and Agrarian Crisis; Demands to M.P.s**

The continuing spate of farmer suicides is a blot on the nation's conscience, and this is an issue that demands urgent attention and action from the government and all the parties. Based on our work with farmers and analysis, the main causes of the situation are briefly as follows:

1. Increasing costs of cultivation of all crops, particularly in the current model which depends on high external inputs, often eroding the productive natural resource base too.
2. Unremunerative prices both in the markets and in government procurement system, which are not covering the total costs of cultivation, let alone providing for all the rising living costs of the farmer families.
3. Unsustainable cropping patterns and crop production practices, for example, huge dependence of mono-cropping of cotton and other commercial crops in rainfed areas
4. Trade liberalization and impact of export-import policies; for example, the input tariffs on silk have been lowered, and this has led to many suicides of silk-farmers in Karnataka.
5. Lack of support systems for farmers such as institutional credit, effective crop insurance, markets, storage and farmer collectives. Lack of recognition for tenant farmers and provision of access to credit, insurance, crop compensation, etc to tenants and sharecroppers.
6. Neglect of rainfed agriculture which constitutes more than 60% of the crop area, and lack of policy focus on sustaining farmer livelihoods in these areas

We demand the following actions to address the farmer suicides and the underlying causes.

### **IMMEDIATE MEASURES**

- (1) Immediately identify all the farmers who have suffered crop failure in any one out of the last three years, and provide them compensation of Rs.10,000 per acre – ensuring that tenant farmers are also included. Assessment of crop failure should begin immediately, and the compensation disbursed with no delay so that the farmers are reassured that they are not going to go into further debt. This will prevent thousands of more suicides.
- (2) Modifying the agri-exim policies and import tariffs/duties immediately to ensure that international trade does not adversely impact prices for our farmers and take corrective measures in favour of our farmers.
- (3) Immediately revise the MSPs to remunerative levels, and ensure procurement operations. The prices should provide the farmers sufficient margins above the actual cost of cultivation. Timely and effective procurement directly from the farmers by government agencies such as FCI and CCI should be ensured, for paddy and cotton as well as dryland crops.

- (4) Effectively implement the 'relief package' for families of farmers who have committed suicides. Take action against officials who fail in their duty to identify farmer suicides and issue relief payments in a time-bound manner. The categorization of suicides into "genuine" and not genuine should be immediately scrapped. For example, the government of Andhra Pradesh recognized only 158 cases as "genuine farmer suicides" while Crime Bureau Records show 2525 farmer suicides.

### **ADDRESSING THE ROOT CAUSES OF AGRARIAN DISTRESS**

- (5) The government should introduce a "Price Compensation" system, especially for all the food crops where MSP is declared. Whenever the MSPs or actual market prices do not meet the target price (equal to Cost of Cultivation + 50%), the shortfall should be paid to the farmer directly. The farmer should no longer be forced to bear the burden of keeping food prices low for consumers.
- (6) Government should ensure income security for all farm households, including resorting to direct income support for covering living costs for dignified livelihoods if other measures don't provide the same.
- (7) Promote sustainable agriculture that will reduce costs of cultivation and reduce crop risk by agri-diversity based and agro-ecological farming. A programmatic thrust along with appropriate and adequate support systems is required to spread sustainable agriculture like the CMSA program in Andhra Pradesh. The importance of grassroots farmer institutions cannot be overemphasized.
- (8) For rainfed areas which constitute about 60% of the total cultivated area in India, there should be a comprehensive mission to sustain agriculture and farmer livelihoods. This should be focused on diverse cropping systems, ensuring protective irrigation and strengthening livestock systems. Government investments in rainfed areas should be immediately doubled.
- (9) Provide bank credit to the farmers with adequate scale of finance, increase priority sector lending for agriculture and ensure correct implementation to reach small farmers.
- (10) Provide effective crop insurance and credit to majority of farmers including tenant farmers and non-loanee farmers and ensure proper implementation.

### **WE URGE ALL PARLIAMENTARIANS TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR SERIOUS INTENT OF ADDRESSING THE AGRARIAN CRISIS, AND TAKE REAL MEASURES TO HELP THE FARMERS IN DISTRESS**

- (11) Convene a Joint session of the Parliament during the ongoing winter session to discuss the spate of farmer suicides, steps to prevent them and to address the underlying agrarian crisis. Parliamentarians should demonstrate to the agricultural community that forms 60% of the population that the country and its political class are ready to address the crisis sincerely.
- (12) Constitute a Parliamentarians' Forum on Agrarian Crisis cutting across party lines immediately so that the causes of the crisis are addressed, and distressed farmers and their representatives can represent their problems at the highest level.

## ANNEXURE-2: Farmer Suicide figures from National Crime Records Bureau

### A. Farmer Suicides from 1995-2010: 256,913



### B. Farmer Suicides in 2010: State-wise list

Source: National Crime Records Bureau

|   | States            | Male | Female | Total |
|---|-------------------|------|--------|-------|
| 1 | Andhra Pradesh    | 2130 | 395    | 2525  |
| 2 | Arunachal Pradesh | 18   | 0      | 18    |
| 3 | Assam             | 352  | 17     | 369   |
| 4 | Bihar             | 91   | 4      | 95    |
| 5 | Chhattisgarh      | 778  | 348    | 1126  |
| 6 | Goa               | 15   | 0      | 15    |
| 7 | Gujarat           | 458  | 65     | 523   |

|    |                        |              |             |              |
|----|------------------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| 8  | Haryana                | 261          | 36          | 297          |
| 9  | Himachal Pradesh       | 59           | 2           | 61           |
| 10 | Jammu & Kashmir        | 16           | 2           | 18           |
| 11 | Jharkhand              | 150          | 23          | 173          |
| 12 | Karnataka              | 2128         | 457         | 2585         |
| 13 | Kerala                 | 797          | 98          | 895          |
| 14 | Madhya Pradesh         | 973          | 264         | 1237         |
| 15 | Maharashtra            | 2947         | 194         | 3141         |
| 16 | Manipur                | 0            | 4           | 4            |
| 17 | Meghalaya              | 15           | 1           | 16           |
| 18 | Mizoram                | 5            | 0           | 5            |
| 19 | Nagaland               | 0            | 0           | 0            |
| 20 | Odisha                 | 145          | 17          | 162          |
| 21 | Punjab                 | 80           | 0           | 80           |
| 22 | Rajasthan              | 351          | 39          | 390          |
| 23 | Sikkim                 | 19           | 0           | 19           |
| 24 | Tamil Nadu             | 442          | 99          | 541          |
| 25 | Tripura                | 46           | 12          | 58           |
| 26 | Uttar Pradesh          | 432          | 116         | 548          |
| 27 | Uttarakhand            | 33           | 6           | 39           |
| 28 | West Bengal            | 800          | 193         | 993          |
| 29 | Andaman & Nicobar      | 8            | 0           | 8            |
| 30 | Chandigarh             | 0            | 0           | 0            |
| 31 | Dadar and Nagar Haveli | 10           | 0           | 10           |
| 32 | Daman & Diu            | 0            | 0           | 0            |
| 33 | Delhi                  | 9            | 0           | 9            |
| 34 | Lakshadweep            | 0            | 0           | 0            |
| 35 | Puducherry             | 4            | 0           | 4            |
|    | <b>TOTAL</b>           | <b>13572</b> | <b>2392</b> | <b>15964</b> |



## **ANNEXURE-3: Revealing numbers from crisis areas: A.P. and Maharashtra**

### **A. Farmers Suicides in One month Period in 6 Districts of A.P.**

(From 7<sup>th</sup> October to 8<sup>th</sup> November 2011)

Source: Newspaper reports (Eenadu, Andhra Jyothy, Sakshi, Namaste Telangana)

Out of these, ASHA teams conducted fact-finding visits to 20 sample cases and it was verified in all the cases that suicides were due to agrarian reasons.

| <b>District</b> | <b>No of Farmer Suicides due to agrarian reasons</b> |
|-----------------|--|
| Ananthapur      | 24   |
| Adilabad        | 18   |
| Medak           | 13   |
| Karimnagar      | 13   |
| Khammam         | 17   |
| Mahaboobnagar   | 10   |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>95</b>  |

### **B. Official figure of farmer suicides since 2001 in just 6 districts of Vidarbha**

From National Crime Records Bureau and Vasantnao Naik Sheti Swavalamban Mission

| <b>Year</b> | <b>As National Crime Records Bureau</b> | <b>As per Vasantnao Naik Sheti Swavalamban Mission (Govt. of Maharashtra) and Crime Records data of six district of West vidarbha</b> |
|-------------|---|---|
| <b>2001</b> | <b>116</b>                              | <b>59</b>   |
| <b>2002</b> | <b>254</b>                              | <b>105</b>  |
| <b>2003</b> | <b>328</b>                              | <b>143</b>  |
| <b>2004</b> | <b>456</b>                              | <b>441</b>  |
| <b>2005</b> | <b>666</b>                              | <b>431</b>  |
| <b>2006</b> | <b>1886</b>                             | <b>1215</b>   |
| <b>2007</b> | <b>1556</b>                             | <b>1160</b>   |
| <b>2008</b> | <b>1680</b>                             | <b>1080</b>   |
| <b>2009</b> | <b>1954</b>                             | <b>991</b>  |
| <b>2010</b> | <b>2023</b>                             | <b>1060</b>   |
| <b>2011</b> | <b>N.A.</b>                             | <b>680</b>  |