

Weekly Livelihoods Update

12 June 2018

Agriculture

- ✚ **Agri-Distress:** It's been a depressingly familiar scene across the country over the first ten days of June: angry farmers refusing to bring their produce to city markets; many standing vigil on roads to block supplies of vegetables, milk and poultry; numerous instances of protesting farmers dumping trolley-loads of vegetables and dairy supplies on streets. The Gaon Bandh (#VillageShutDown) called by some 130 farmer organisations under the guidance of the AIKSCC was a collective cry of anguish by India's farmers. India's agriculture sector, which contributes just 16 per cent of the GDP but provides livelihoods to nearly 60 per cent of the population, has been in deep distress for many years now. Farm experts say the demands made by the protesting farmers- immediate implementation of the M.S. Swaminathan Commission recommendation on crop procurement prices and a complete waiver of all agricultural loans- are not unreasonable. The NITI Aayog's own numbers are revealing: between 2011-2012 and 2015-2016, farm incomes increased by just 0.4 per cent a year. Farmers are being forced to cultivate losses in such scenarios. (Visit <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/up-front/story/20180618-upfront-cultivating-losses-agri-distress-farmers-1252729-2018-06-08> for further reading)
- ✚ **Farm Income:** Farmers across India are on a nation-wide protest from June 1, 2018, demanding better prices for their produce and loan waivers to pull them out of debt traps. They are asking the government to guarantee a minimum income for farmers. According to Ashok Dalwai Committee Report on Doubling of Farmers' Income a farmer can earn an additional Rs 80,000 per hectare (ha) if they replace staple crops with horticulture. In fact, Rs 1,939 crore (at 2015-16 prices) is the estimated additional income farmers can earn if the area under horticulture is increased by just 1 per cent. (Visit <http://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/farm-income-can-go-up-by-rs-1-939-crore-on-one-condition-60814> for further reading).
- ✚ **Sugarcane Farmer's Woes:** On June 6, the Union cabinet announced a Rs 7,000 crore bailout package to 'deal with the current crisis in the sugar sector'. The government's use of the word 'current' is curious as it is unlikely to provide any substantial and immediate relief to sugarcane farmers or the sugar industry. Of the Rs 7,000 crore package, only Rs 1,175 crore (17% of the total) has been allocated to pay the pending dues of sugarcane farmers. The rest, worth Rs 5,732 crore, is aimed towards providing financial assistance to

sugar mills in order to augment capacity by investing in infrastructure. Sugarcane farmers in the country are currently owed Rs 22,000 crore, but the government has allocated only Rs 1,175 crore a mere 5% of the total pending dues to be credited directly into the accounts of farmers. The government's package has focused heavily on long-term investments in sugar industry, the benefits of which will not accrue to sugarcane farmers who are facing a crisis in the present. Of the Rs 22,000 crore owed to sugarcane farmers in the country, sugar mills in Uttar Pradesh alone owe Rs 13,000 crore. Sugar mills in UP have not paid 37% of the amount owed to sugarcane farmers. As estimates show, the sugar industry and sugarcane farmers are likely to be in a similar crisis next year too as domestic production is likely to be in excess of domestic consumption. The steps announced by the government in theory, would benefit the industry in the long-run, but will fail to deal with the current crisis – an objective that the government had set for itself. (Visit <https://www.thewire.in/agriculture/farmer-centre-sugar-sector-bailout-does-little> for further reading).

Rights and Entitlements

- ✚ **Women Build a Road the Government Couldn't:** According to a report in Telegraph, more than 130 women from Nima Village in Bihar's Banka district have pooled together to fix the lack of road in three days. The move came after the difficulties the locals were facing as they could not even get to the block headquarters, hardly 2.5 km from the village. Many deaths have also occurred especially of pregnant women as they could not reach the health centres in time. After seeing the suffering of the local people due to the lack of connectivity the women wanted to get the roads to be ready before this year's rainy season. According to these women, there was some talk of the government working on a road in the area about three or four years ago, but it went nowhere. (Visit <https://thewire.in/women/in-bihars-banka-women-build-a-road-the-government-couldnt> for further reading).
- ✚ **In Rajasthan, Adivasi Women Are Coming Together to Assert Their Rights** Last month, braving the sweltering heat, more than 1,500 women and men marched to the Udaipur district collector's office, putting forth their demands on their public entitlements. The scene was composed of a sea of women in colourful *ghagaras* and men in white turbans, raising their slogans against the careless attitude of the state's Labour Department. The protestors came largely from the remotest Adivasi communities of the area and are part of the

Aravali Nirman Majdoor Suraksha Sangh, a registered union of construction sector workers that has been functioning in the area for over seven years. The major reason for the protest was that as daily wage labourers, they bear the brunt of the delayed payments and denial of benefits by the BOCWWB, which has been set up under the Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996. (Visit <https://thewire.in/rights/in-rajasthan-ativasi-women-are-coming-together-to-assert-their-rights> for further reading).

Miscellaneous:

- ✚ **The Cooperative Way!**: The government has targeted to electrify all villages by the end of 2018. But simply establishing electric connections does not translate into adequate, affordable and good quality supply. This article examines the possibility of setting up rural electric cooperatives and assesses the successful examples in some other countries. (Visit <https://www.epw.in/journal/2018/23/commentary/universal-electricity-access.html> for further reading).
- ✚ **Stepwells in Gujarat are a lesson on community-based water harvesting** As Gujarat's already acute water crisis takes a grim turn this summer, the authorities are scrambling for new ways to quench people's thirst. (Visit <http://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/pride-in-ruins-60781> for further reading)