

...Mushkil Hai Jeena Ummeed Ke Bina...

(It is difficult to live without hope...)

This is a Social Watch Report on the Implementation of the Prime Minister's and Maharashtra State Government's Relief Packages announced for reducing Farmers' Suicides in Vidarbha region of Maharashtra.

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For
"Dushkaal Hatawu : Manooos Jagawu"
("Eradicate Drought : Save Humanity"...A War on Drought).

Study supported financially by
HelpAge India.
April 2007.

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“Choose a dignified life over suicide..”

This is the message that is being passed on by the agriculture department to the “suicide-prone” farmers (“suicide-prone” farmers is the term used internally by the various government departments while interacting upon the issue of farmers’ suicides and the relief packages) during the distribution of relief packages.

Local activists and the media started to highlight the issue of Vidarbha farmers’ suicides from 2003. By late 2006, activists claim that over 3,000 farmers have committed suicides in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra.

Maharashtra state government responded to these suicides with an INR 1,075 crore relief package in December 2005.

Promises like debt waiver and free electricity were made during the State Assembly elections in September 2005.

Suicides continued and the Prime Minister made a well publicised visit to Vidarbha in July 2006. During the visit the Prime Minister announced an INR 3,750 crore relief package for the Vidarbha farmers.

The state government machinery was charged with the responsibility of implementing both these packages.

A few months into the package implementation, development actors realised that the suicides continued unabated. HelpAge India called a meeting of various actors including NGOs, Agricultural Universities, consulting groups, corporate foundations to discuss possible way out of the crisis. In the

discussions it was felt that it was necessary to study the status of implementation of these relief packages. GreenEarth took up the responsibility of this study. The report, it was decided, will be presented to civil society and government for further action. HelpAge India came ahead and supported the study.

This social watch study would not have been possible without the assistance provided by Madhukar Dhas of Dilasa (Ghatanji), Ajay and Yogini Dolke of SRUJAN (Kelapur), Gajanan Dakore and Mansur Khorasia (Ralegaon), Shailesh Pisalkar (Yavatmal), Manohar Gade, Dr. Avinash Shirke (Principal, Savitribai Jyotirao College of Social Work), Dr. Bengale of HasreGharkul (Pusad), SAMPARK, Mumbai, Kishore Tiwari of VJAS, Navnath and officials from Revenue, Agriculture, Irrigation, NABARD, Co-operative and Banking departments. Special thanks are due to the Collector, C.E.O., Resident District Collector and Deputy SAO of Yavatmal district. Local correspondents of the Media shared the information they had.

The field investigation team consisted of Ganpat Bhise, Satish Kadam, Laxmikant Bansode, Gajanan Pawar, Niloba Jadhav and Ajay Pathrikar.

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April 2007

1. Background

1.1 Purpose

This purpose of this social watch study was-

- To analyse the design and implementation of relief packages announced for reducing farmers' suicides.
- To ascertain the impact of these relief packages and present the same to government, civil society and citizens of Maharashtra.
- To identify the lacunae, if any, in the design and / or implementation of the package.
- To develop recommendations that will enable better implementation and impact of the relief packages.

1.2 Who conducted the study

This study was undertaken by GreenEarth Social Development Consulting Pvt. Ltd. GreenEarth is a unit of social development consultants. GreenEarth works with development actors across 9 states of India. More details on GreenEarth are available at www.greeneearthconsulting.org. The study was undertaken as part of the "Dushkaal Hatawu : Manoos Jagawu" (DHMJ) Eradicate Drought : Save Humanity process.

DHMJ is a war on drought that was initiated by GreenEarth in Maharashtra in the summer of 2003. Members of the GreenEarth team observed that people lacked access to basic amenities of life (food security, potable water, employment, health care, education and clean environment). It was evident that a feeling of utter haplessness had taken a vice

like grip on the people. Development actors were not really addressing everyday issues of people. Also clear was the complete disconnect between the urban and rural areas.

DHMJ decided to address issues of the people. It developed a comprehensive definition of this phenomenon and defined it as **Drought**. For DHMJ, drought means a lack of basic amenities, a feeling of haplessness and the disconnect and disparity amongst people.

GreenEarth teamed up with NGOs implementing various developmental projects to address the drought issue. 263 field workers were trained in a comprehensive 5 day training programme. They started work in over 1000 villages across Marathwada and Vidarbha.

To gather momentum and assess peoples' reactions to drought, a 2-month Padayatra was undertaken across 9 districts of Maharashtra in 2006 (*detailed report of this Padayatra and analysis of the findings is available on request... please contact qrnearth@vsnl.com / 020-25466103*).

In course of the Padayatra, teams assessed the situation of drought in 60 villages across the Padayatra route. While analysing the findings of this assessment and other dialogue that the Padayatra established with the people, five areas of possible intervention have emerged. These are

- a. Community mobilisation and organisation

- b. Information Dissemination
- c. Appropriate Technology Harvesting
- d. Resource Mobilisation
- e. Social Watch.

1.3 Rationale for the social watch

Government is the biggest and most pervasive development actor. It has its own mechanisms of planning, monitoring, review and reporting. Rarely do the 'targeted beneficiaries' have a say in the design or implementation. This is because those who are in need of support are often voiceless.

It is therefore necessary for civil society to act as watchdog and monitor government programmes impacting wider public interest. There is a need for a mechanism for social watch that will keep tabs on the pulse of the society. This mechanism should observe movements in society closely and raising issues that are in public interest.

Social Watch is a mechanism by which regular studies are conducted to closely monitor the impact of various government schemes, missions, programmes, packages and other activities. A natural fall out of all social watch activities is public dissemination and therefore debate. Debate is expected to lead to better implementation and mid course corrections.

1.4 Study process

This social watch study was conducted by GreenEarth with a 9-member team. The process followed as a part of this study is as follows:

1. At the outset, desk study was conducted of the various reports (IGIDR, TISS, Sakal-AgroWon, Planning Commission), which had sought to analyse farmers suicides and agrarian crisis.
2. All the Government Regulations of announcement of the relief packages (State Government and Union Government) were obtained and studied ;
3. Though the packages are applicable to six districts in Vidarbha, it was decided that the study will focus on Yavatmal, known to be the epicentre of the crisis that is centred around cotton farming. Yavatmal district has five distinct regions each comprising 3-4 tehsils. One tehsil from each region was chosen. The five tehsils chosen were Ghatanji, Kelapur, Ralegaon, Yavatmal and Pusad.
4. A social watch study tool was developed based upon the sample and the desk research.
5. The 6-member field investigation team was trained and oriented.
6. 6 villages were selected from each tehsil. Thus in all 30 villages were covered in the study. These six villages were chosen based on (a) Whether any suicide has been recorded in the village over the last year (list taken from administration), (b) Villages where the relief packages have been implemented and there were clearly identifiable beneficiaries and (c) other indicators like distance from tehsil place, size of the village and population composition of the village. The effort was to get as much of a variety as was possible. However, the sample in no way purports to 'represent' the tehsil.
7. As a part of the field investigation, the member team-
 - a. Had a dialogue with the Collector and C.E.O. of Yavatmal district.

- b. Discussed with representatives from various government departments (Revenue, Agriculture, Co-operative / Banking, Irrigation and Zilla Parishad).
- c. Interacted with officials from the banking (Lead Bank and NABARD) sector
- d. Interacted with NGO representatives.
- e. Discussed with media personnel and other members of society.
- f. Carried out an in depth assessment at the village level by interacting with-
 - i. Suicide-affected families,
 - ii. Village level functionaries,
 - iii. Beneficiaries of the package,
 - iv. Some of the other villagers and
 - v. Women representatives of saving and credit groups.
- 8. One of the team members also met officials in Mantralaya and State Based Advocacy groups to get an understanding of the package implementation.
- 9. After the field investigation was completed, the team discussed their findings and deliberated at length upon their experiences. All the data that were gathered were collated and analysed by GreenEarth. These were shared with the field team and fine tuned.
- 10. This report was developed based on these findings and analysis.

1.5 Yavatmal district information.

This study was conducted in Yavatmal district. Yavatmal District is located in the eastern region (Vidarbha) of the Maharashtra state of India. Yavatmal, the name of district is said to be originated from Yeota, chief town of a pargana and the termination is either the word 'mal' or a 'hill' or a corruption of mahal. The district is located between 19.26 to 20.42 degrees north latitude and 77.18 to 79.98 degrees east longitude. Total area of the district is 13,584 sq. km. Out of this 224,456 hectares is forest land and 1,005,265 hectares is under cultivation. 77,309 hectares of land is not under cultivation.

The administrative set up of the district is presented in the following table:

#	Administrative category.	Number.
1	Sub - Divisional Offices.	5
2	Tehsils.	16
3	Panchayat Samiti.	16
4	Total Gram Panchayat.	1204
A	Group Gram Panchayat.	501
B	Independent Gram Panchayat.	703
5	Total Villages.	2117
A	Inhabited villages.	1845
B	Uninhabited villages.	272

- Source: Official Website of Yavatmal district.

The District consists of masses of hilly country broken by broad valleys and partially surrounded by plain. The southern half of Yavatmal tehsil, which is just in the middle of the District, is a plateau with very steep sides. Steep, rough ranges of hills occur to east and west right across the District. This mountainous terrain is a part of the Balaghat range.

The temperature peaks at 48 degrees Celsius during summer and lowers down to 5 degrees Celsius during winter. The average rainfall is 1056 mm. The districts of **Hingoli and Washim** are to the west of Yavatmal district **Amravati and Wardha** districts are to the north. The district of **Chandrapur** is to the east. **Nanded** district and the state of **Andhra Pradesh** lie to the south of Yavatmal district.

Majority of the populace in Yavatmal district comprises-

1. Kunbi. 22 % of the population. He cultivating caste spread across the entire district.
2. Mali. 4 % of total district population. Well spread across the district. Primarily undertake vegetable and garden crop cultivation.
3. Banjara. 6 % of the entire district population. Residing mainly in south and forest areas of the district.
4. Andh. One of the aboriginal tribe of central India.
5. Gond and Pardhan. Tribes of central India. Together about 10 % of the population.

6. Kolam. One of the primitive tribes of India. Mostly residing in the Kelapur and eastern parts of the district.

The principal crops of the district are:

Jowar, Cotton, Rice and Groundnut in Kharif.

Wheat and gram in Rabbi.

Sugarcane, Banana, Orange, Grape and Betel leaves are cultivated in irrigated areas.

Demographic details of Yavatmal district:

Rural population	17.20 Lakh
Urban population	3.57 Lakh
Total population	20.77 Lakh
S.C. population	2.27 Lakh
S.T. population	4.46 Lakh
Male	10.64 Lakh
Female	10.13 Lakh
Sex ratio	951
Density of population	153
Total percentage of literates.	57.96 %
Male literates.	70.45 %
Female literates.	44.81 %

2. The Relief Packages

Packages have been announced both by the State and Central government in an effort to address the crisis in Vidarbha. In this section we take a look at the packages themselves.

2.1 The Chief Minister Package

The Government of Maharashtra announced special package of Rs. 1,075 crore primarily based on the study conducted by Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research (IGIDR). The package is to be implemented in 5 districts of Amravati division namely Amravati, Akola, Buldhana, Yavatmal, Washim and one district, Wardha from the Nagpur division. The government resolution regarding special package was issued on 19th December 2005ⁱ. A special mission - **Vasantrao Naik Sheti Swavlamban Mission** was set up at Amravati for coordination and implementation of the package. The package includes short-term and long-term measures. Following are the salient features of the special package.

2.1.1 Salient Features of the Special Package

1. Immediate relief to the family members of the farmers who committed suicide: For this the compensation amount of Rs. 1 Lack is declared for each farmer family. Among these, Rs. 30,000 are payable by DD and Rs. 70,000 are deposited in Bank or post office as a fixed deposit.ⁱⁱ A few months later the scope of coverage of 'suicides' was expanded to cover all members of a farming family.
2. Rescheduling of the outstanding Crop Loan and subsidy on Interest to the indebted farmers (Rs. 225 crore): The crop loans up to Rs. 25,000 will be rescheduled and past interest will be waived on the above principal amount. Government will pay this amount directly to the banks. There will be a moratorium on repayment for first two years and then principal will have to be paid in three equal instalments. After rescheduling, fresh crop

loans up to Rs. 25,000 will be distributed through Kisan Credit Card system to eligible farmers.ⁱⁱⁱ

3. Ban on illegal private money lending and legalizing of licensed moneylenders: All the farmers who had any loans outstanding from the private money lenders were declared to be free of the loans. The authorized moneylenders should charge interest rate according to government regulation.^{iv}
4. Limiting the interest payable to the original principal amount: Farmers who have taken the loan from all types of co-operative credit organizations would not be required to repay the interest more than principal.^v
5. Disbursing crop loans through farmers' self help groups: Looking at the successful disbursement and recovery of loan through self help groups all over the State, the government decided to promote self help groups for loan disbursement. The different credit organization will be encouraged to distribute the crop loans to the eligible farmers.^{vi}
6. Enhanced subsidy on Crop Insurance Premium (30 Crores): The government would be paid 75 % and 50 % subsidy on insurance premium for small / marginal cotton farmers and other cotton farmers respectively. For other crops, government will pay 50% of the premium for small and marginal farmers.^{vii}
7. Financial assistance to the farmers to increase production (150 Crores): In the next three years 60,000 farmers from 6 districts, specifically from economically weaker category will be given financial assistance up to Rs. 25000 for land development, farm equipments, inputs like seeds / pest control measures and bio fertilizers etc.^{viii}

8. Promotion of agro based subsidiary livelihood options (30 Crores): To improve the economic status of the farmers, the farmers self help groups will be given loans and subsidies for agro based activities like dairy development, goatery and poultry. Every year 3000 farmers' SHGs including 60,000 farmers from 6 districts will be given financial assistance under this scheme.^{ix}
9. Promotion of agro processing industries through cooperative system: The government will pay share capital at the rate of 1:5 to encourage the agro processing industries on cooperative basis.^x
10. Promotion of joint cotton farming: Government encouraged the joint farming in cotton in which textile mills come forward and promoted farmers to cultivate the desired quality cotton and willing to pay better price to the farmers.^{xi}
11. Financial assistance for mass community marriages (6 crores): Government will encourage mass community marriages by involving social organizations. Farmers and agriculture labourers having marriageable daughter are to be encouraged by social organizations for community marriages. The government will make a grant of Rs. 10,000 per couple for expenses on marriage.^{xii}
12. Repayment of amount of Capital Formation Fund (370 crores): Government would repay the principal and interest due generated from farmers during the monopoly cotton procurement scheme within two years.^{xiii}
13. Financial assistance to Cotton growers (134 crores): The farmers who have faced economic loss due to heavy rainfall or lack of sufficient rainfall and due to failure in BT cotton production will be provided financial assistance for the year 2005-06 at the rate of Rs. 1000 / ha. up to 2ha.^{xiv}
14. Organic Farming technology mission (30 crores): In order to reduce cost of cultivation, to maximize the margin in farming and to generate employment at local level, government will promote organic farming techniques in the region. This promotion includes awareness generation, training promotion of organic inputs and their production.^{xv}
15. Vidarbha Watershed Mission (100 crores): The government has decided to implement comprehensive soil and water conservation measures for all round development of the region.^{xvi}
16. Help line For Farmers: To reach the farmers who are in immediate distress, to assist them and do the needful for them, government set up help line for farmers.^{xvii}

2.2 The Prime Minister Package

In his visit to the region on the 1st of July 2006, the Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh announced a Rs. 3,750 crore relief package for 6 districts of Vidarbha to address the agrarian distress. The districts are Amravati, Akola, Buldhana, Yavatmal, Washim and Wardha. The package has a number of immediate as well as long-term measures for above affected districts. The salient features of the package are listed below:

2.2.1 Immediate Relief

- The suicide-affected family will be given financial assistance up to Rs. 10,000 specifically to meet child education cost and health expenses on aged family members. For this Rs. 50 lacs are to be made available to the district collector of each district.
- The overdue interest will be waived off as on 30th June 2006 and all farmers will have no past interest burden. For this Rs. 712 crore will be provided.

2.2.2 Long-term Relief Measures

- For assured irrigation Rs. 2177 crore will be provided. It includes completion of 8 major, 9 medium and 500 minor irrigation projects in these districts over the next three-year period. It is estimated that nearly 1.59-lakh hectares agriculture land would be brought under irrigation due to above projects.
- Micro irrigation like drip and sprinkler irrigation will be expanded extensively to cover 50,000 hectares agriculture land in next three years. For this, Rs. 78 crore is provided.
- Nearly 90,000 hectares area will be treated under watershed development programme in each district. It includes construction of check dams (total 9,000) and rainwater harvesting structures all over 6 districts in next three years. For this Rs. 240 crore will be provided.

- A Quality Seed Replacement Programme costing Rs. 180 crore will be started so that the problem of obtaining quality seeds is reduced.
- Orange production will be promoted in six districts under National Horticulture Mission programme. Rs. 225 crore will be invested to address the problems in orange cultivation.
- To reduce the dependence on agriculture and to diversify the livelihood sources, Rs. 135 crore will be provided. It includes activities like dairy development and fishery development.
- For Agriculture extension programme 3 crore will be provided which includes training to farmers, agriculture demonstrations and farmers area visits.

The implementing agency for the Vidarbha package is National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD).

3. The Reality.

This Social Watch study was conducted in the months of February and March 2007. At the commencement of the study, it had been more than a year from the official announcement made regarding the Chief Minister's relief package and more than six months for the Prime Minister's relief package. This means that the government had substantial time to initiate the implementation of both the relief packages and thus have a positive impact (as in reduction of suicides) upon the agrarian crisis.

The social watch study team, while in Yavatmal for the study, focussed on interacting with the various arms of government, villagers and members of civil society to ascertain the reach and impact of the relief packages. This section looks at the observations and analysis done by the social watch team regarding relief packages and the impact of the same upon the villagers. Suggestions and recommendations for improvement of the package design and implementation have been made in a separate chapter. The reality as observed by the team and shared by villagers and the government has been presented below under the following five points-

1. Designing of the relief packages.
2. Special efforts taken for the packages.
3. Implementing mechanism.
4. Awareness regarding the package.
5. Reach, in reality, of the package.

Each point has been enumerated in detail below.

3.1 Designing of the relief packages.

Government initiated measures to tackle the problem of farmers' suicides in Vidarbha after the media and local activists raised the issue. The Chief Ministers' relief package, announced on 19th December 2005, was designed by the State government internal committee comprising the

Chief Secretary and other departmental representatives. Studies conducted by IGIDR, apart from others like those conducted by YASHADA, TISS and Sakal AgroWon) were taken as the basis for designing the package. Each study has come up with assessment of the crisis situation and the causes for the same.

In the monsoon of 2006, farmers' suicides continued in Vidarbha. This triggered a visit by the Prime Minister to the affected region. A central relief package, popularly known as the Prime Minister's relief package, was announced. This package was designed by the PMO (Prime Minister's Office). The Planning Commission had conducted an independent study of the agriculture situation in Vidarbha and had come up with specific observations and recommendations.

Various measures had been suggested in these reports and the relief packages have been designed taking into account the findings of these studies. While designing the relief packages, the State Government and the PMO had taken into consideration the suggestions of the district and division level administration.

However, while designing the relief packages neither the State government nor the PMO took into consideration the opinions of the following important societal constituents-

- Crisis-hit Vidarbha farmers were not called upon to suggest any measures to overcome the crisis. It was perhaps assumed by the government that whatever measures were devised would be acceptable to the farmers. . This did not happen. In fact in all the villages the farmers were quite vocal in denouncing the relief packages' measures. The farmers' demands to overcome the agrarian crisis, were different than those announced in the packages.

- There was little interaction with local civil society members by the state government and the PMO while devising solution for the farmers' suicide issue. This is evident from-
 - The marginal involvement of the NGOs and other civil society groups in the implementation of the package.
 - The vocal and popular denouncement of the package by civil society groups and a majority of local NGOs.
- Neither the government functionaries at the cutting edge nor the implementing officials (Tehsil level revenue, agriculture, co-operative, irrigation, extension and PWD departments) were asked to suggest measures to overcome the crisis. This has, most probably, resulted in the various departments dragging their feet during the implementation of the relief packages.
- Neither representatives from the Panchayat Raj System nor the official body (Z.P. Panchayat Samiti and the Gram Panchayat) were asked for assessment of the situation and suggestions to overcome the agrarian crisis.
- The social watch study team is of the opinion that local wisdom (be it government, civil society or the affected people themselves) is important while devising solutions to overcome any crisis of such a nature, scale and intensity.
- Further, it is quite clear that the design, in itself, of the relief packages is in reality an amalgamation of various existing government schemes. Of the 16 measures announced by the State government and a further 8-odd measures announced by the Prime Minister except for the "helpline for farmers" measure and the direct financial assistance provided to the suicide-hit family, rest all are existing government schemes for e.g. Support to farmers for improving their land quality or the Watershed development both are government schemes since a long time now.
- Both the relief packages lack innovation in the actual design as well as in the approach. Mere amalgamation of existing schemes cannot be presented as a relief package for a deep-rooted agrarian crisis. It is claimed that additional funds were pumped into these schemes under the garb of relief packages. This leads to many questions... Were the existing schemes not functioning "properly" and not reaching out to the farmers of Vidarbha? Why the original schemes were then not allocated the requisite funds in the first place? Should the government allocate additional (*or rather necessary*) funds into various schemes only when there is a crisis and suicides occur on a mass scale? If it is true that additional funds were pumped into the existing schemes to overcome the crisis then where have these additional funds come from or rather from which other schemes or other budgetary expenses have these additional funds been taken from (i.e. at what cost have these fund allocations being done)? Lastly, if the existing schemes are supposed to resolve the crisis then why did the crisis occur and reach such proportions? Does the government truly believe that amalgamation of various schemes under the relief package head will solve the crisis?
- The only innovation of the entire package i.e. "helpline for the farmers" has been observed to be of no use in curtailing suicides. It was shared by senior government representatives that the helpline is more of a headache rather than a tool to overcome the crisis. The administration shared the use of the helpline that had been done by the farmers. There has been no back up support system established for this helpline. In all the villages there was an unanimous feedback that no information is available on the helpline, if at all one is able to connect and there is a response.

What is the point of merely having a helpline in place if no solutions or assistance to resolve the query is being offered on the helpline? A helpline should work round the clock with effective query-resolution. What is the point of having a helpline that works as per the government convenience rather than the convenience of the people? Is it not dangerous to provide a half-baked solution that instead of reducing the anxiety increases frustration for the people?

- It is logical to expect that if there is an amalgamation of various schemes then there should be some mechanism to ensure co-ordination and smooth functioning of these various schemes. The collector of concerned district is the final authority for the various schemes in the relief packages. However, apart from that there is no co-ordination system for implementation. The problems that have cropped up in the implementation of the relief packages have been discussed in detail in point number 3 under the title Implementing Mechanism. How would amalgamation help if there is no co-ordination between various departments, which are supposed to implement the various schemes, regarding the actual implementation of the scheme?

The designing process and the actual design (the relief packages) clearly demonstrate that the issue of agrarian crisis has perhaps not been taken seriously. This lack of seriousness and some degree of callousness was evident at all levels in government.

3.2 Special efforts taken for the package.

A deep-rooted crisis of this nature, intensity and scale merits special efforts to overcome the crisis. The relief packages were designed by the government only when the media and local activists incessantly highlighted the issue and the farmers' suicides showed no signs of reducing despite average monsoon. The packages were announced by

the state government and the Prime Minister in December 2005 and July 2006 respectively. The timing of the packages indicates that they were announced more as a compulsion rather than government initiative.

The government seeks to deploy the regular administrative set up for the implementation of the relief packages. All the concerned departments were told to ensure the appropriate implementation of the packages as per the guidelines developed in the relief packages. Additional fund outlay worth INR 4825 crore (1075 crore + 3750 crore) has been earmarked, over a period of three years, cumulatively for the various departments. A district level committee comprising the Collector, Superintendent of Police, NGO representative, Agriculture Officer, Progressive farmer and CEO was formed at the district level in six districts of Vidarbha. This committee was formed to decide whether compensation should be given or not to suicide affected families. Regular monitoring of the suicides is being done without fail. Reporting, right up to the PMO, is done on a regular basis regarding the incidence of suicides in Vidarbha. Revenue department had conducted detailed study at the village level in Vidarbha. Based on this study, the government has categorised all the farmers into various categories ranging from suicide prone to above danger.

However,

There is no evidence of a baseline data collected from the region. Is the categorisation of farmers sufficient?

What is the target set for the package? Is it linked to the timeframe?

What are the achievements? How are they being monitored? By whom?

What is the information dissemination plan regarding the packages? How is it being implemented in practice? What is the measure that the information dissemination is successful?

What are the operational budgets for various departments? If this is a special relief package then how is it expected that the regular

staff shall implement the package? Then, is the regular staff without adequate work? For how long shall the staff put in extra hours without adequate compensation or acclaim? If the staff can manage this extra load, are we to assume that they were under worked earlier?

Is the present man power sufficient enough for the implementation of the package?

How is popular education and awareness being undertaken?

Why stress on existing machinery for additional crisis resolution work of a three-year timeframe?

Is their any drive or special effort visible in commitment and action?

The social watch study team did not find any special efforts undertaken by the government in implementing the packages. For the record, the concerned government departments had initiated some efforts viz. conducting Gram Sabhas and doing the rounds of *certain villages* for making announcements regarding the relief packages.

Despite the fact that farmers are committing suicides at an abnormally higher than average rate, the administration has not wasted a single opportunity in highlighting a fact that the suicide rate of farmers in Maharashtra has always been around 300 per year. By this, the administration wants to prove that there is only a "slight rise" (term and rationale frequently used by the Amravati Divisional Commissioner and Yavatmal Collector) in the rate of suicides. Do such public utterances and official presentations and an approach that tries to brush things under the carpet demonstrate any special efforts taken by the government regarding the packages?

3.3 Implementing mechanism.

The relief packages have allocated funds to a tune of INR 4,825 crore for six districts of Vidarbha, to be spent over a period of three years.

According to the various government regulations, the revenue, agriculture, co-operative, irrigation and extension departments apart from the NABARD have been given the primary responsibility of implementing the relief packages. The Collector of the respective districts has been made the responsible authority for implementation of these packages. This social watch study looked at the following three aspects of the implementing mechanism-

a. Decision making.

The design of these relief packages is such that the relief is not going to reach all the farmers in distress. This makes the decision making process quite important for the successful implementation of the relief packages. In Yavatmal district it was observed that the decision making regarding the relief packages hinged upon the following two types of decisions-

- i. Selection of beneficiaries. In Yavatmal district, each concerned department was given the freedom to select the relief packages' beneficiaries. The packages focus on farmers at village level and irrigation projects at a collective level. Each department has developed broad selection criteria. A list of "beneficiaries" (*term used by the government departments*) has been developed by each department. Regarding the direct cash relief given to the beneficiaries, the regular hierarchy (from village level up to district level) link is used to put up the case and distribute the aid. The agriculture department, *criticised by one and all in Yavatmal* (even by some agriculture department officials!) *for its inept and corrupt implementation of relief packages*, uses its tehsil level officials to select the beneficiaries as well as the supplier (seed, pump set, sprinkler and pipeline) of relief material at the tehsil level. In all the villages studied, 3 to 17 beneficiaries had been selected, in total for various type of relief, by all the concerned departments for the relief packages.

The procedure followed by the departments for selection, however, was not clear to the villagers. *It was observed in all the villages that there were at the least 20-odd farmers who matched the selection criteria yet were not selected as beneficiaries for the relief packages.* The time-plan regarding the completion of irrigation projects was unclear to the social watch study team, despite various attempts to find out information. The selection process regarding soil and water conservation structures like check dams was also not clear. Not a single government functionary was able to satisfactorily clarify the selection process. *It is unclear as to how a particular beneficiary gets selected over others who fulfil all the criteria.* The social watch study team has its own interpretation of the selection process. Those villagers who are “mobile” i.e. are frequent travellers to the tehsil place; those villagers who are good books of cutting edge government and political functionaries; those who are “activists” of certain political parties; those who protest against any malpractices in implementation at village level (*In Varzhadi village in Yavatmal tehsil, a young villager who had not been selected in the initial list of beneficiaries of the package filed a query under Right To Information Act to understand the selection process... Before the fortnight was over a beneficiary from the original list was dropped and his name was included in the beneficiary list...*) and those who can demonstrate, on paper, that they fulfil the selection criteria are selected as beneficiaries. There are some genuine cases too! ...

- ii. Type of relief to be provided. Except the agriculture department, other government departments had clear cut instructions regarding the type of relief to be provided to the selected beneficiaries. The government regulations clarify the type of relief to be provided to the beneficiary. Loan interest waiver has been

done across board by the concerned department. Discretion, of the Collector regarding the INR 10,000/- (up to) direct aid to be given for health and educational purposes while that of the District Agriculture officer regarding the INR 25,000/- aid to be given for agricultural implements and pair of bullocks, comes into play. Several cases were observed at the village level where the farmers in need of pump set received a pair of bullocks while those in need of bullocks received pump sets. Farmers have received pump sets and pipelines as relief aid. That's good but in some cases these farmers don't really have access to water for irrigation... *then what is the use of such relief? In such instances the farmers have sold off the pump sets, at a premium of 20 to 40 %, to large land owners in the village...* The popular perception is that the tehsil level agriculture officer decides regarding the type of relief material to be supplied to the beneficiaries. Villagers from Kelapur tehsil complained that the agriculture department tehsil level officer acted in a high handed manner and was known to allocate particular relief to the villagers in an arbitrary manner. Accusations were made by the community regarding possible malpractice in the selection of vendors of pump sets and pipelines, seeds etc. The selection of vendors and distribution of relief need to be audited in a separate study.

b. Budgetary outlay.

The Maharashtra state government has earmarked INR 1075 crore while the Prime Minister has earmarked INR 3750 crore as relief packages. This social watch study was undertaken in the months of February and March 2007... i.e. after more than a year of implementation of the State government package and more than six months of implementation of the Prime Ministers' package. The usual government system of the revenue department and the concerned

department co-ordinating funds disbursement is being used while allocating the funds. Maharashtra state Home Minister, while answering to a query raised in the state assembly regarding the

implementation of the relief packages, has stated that 402,000 farmers have been cleared of the interest burden with INR 239 crore being provided to the concerned banks.

Details of fund allocation and expenditure under the Prime Minister's relief package as of 8th February 2007 (*source: government website relief package status*).

CATEGORY.	TOTAL ALLOCATION AS STATED IN THE PACKAGE (in INR crore).	BUDGET ALLOCATED TO CONCERNED DEPARTMENT (in INR crore).	ACTUAL DISBURSAL AS RELIEF (in INR crore).
Interest Waiver.	712	784.23	784.23
Pending Irrigation Projects.	2,177	882	293
Minor Irrigation.	78	15.23	8.28
Check Dam.	240	7.20	4.89
ATMA (Agriculture Technology Management System).	3	4.27	1.47
Seed Distribution.	180	17.50	13.22
National Horticulture Mission.	225	14.48	7.02
Agro-based Livelihood support.	135	6	0.18
TOTAL	3,750	1,730.91	1,112.29

The target of INR 718 crore for interest waiver and fresh loan disbursement has been met with (*in fact exceeded... INR 784.23 crore had been expended as of 8th February 2007 as per the government declaration*).

The Agriculture department has a significant responsibility of the relief packages' implementation. With the exception of relief material distribution under the INR 25,000/- and organic farming promotion categories the department has been slow in utilising the budgets. The agriculture department has spent INR 10.27 crores of the budgeted INR 11.40 crores on 13,200 beneficiaries under the up to INR 25,000/- support scheme. However, it has spent only INR 1.30 crore of the INR

10 crores available for building check dams. Irrigation department officials shared, *privately*, that funds for irrigation projects (*the highest chunk worth INR 2,177 crore from the relief packages*) had not been allocated till date. The official data shared by government states that only INR 293 crore had been allocated.

c. Administrative (inter departmental) co-ordination.

The revenue, agriculture, co-operative, irrigation and extension departments apart from the NABARD have been given the primary responsibility of implementing the relief packages. The Collector of the respective districts has been made the responsible authority for

implementation of these packages. No special mechanism has been evolved for implementing the package. Each department follows its usual style of functioning for implementation of the package. No inter departmental co-ordination was observed during this social watch study. In reality, each department has gone ahead in selection of beneficiaries as per each department's convenience rather than an integrated plan. This has resulted in the villagers getting a glimpse of the relief packages rather than reaping the entire benefits.

A special mechanism, comprising inter departmental representatives, could have been formed for the implementation of the packages. This might have smoothened the process of beneficiary selection, selection of type of relief category and distribution of relief. It was imperative to have an integrated approach rather than random selection of beneficiaries across the district in an attempt to cover the entire district. Departments with the responsibility of implementing the relief packages were in a way "jealous" of the agriculture department since it had the maximum discretion and budgetary allocation.

Implementation of these relief packages is being done in the "usual" government style of functioning. Meaning, there is no special motivation or drive for implementation; there are questions raised about selection of beneficiaries; neither budget allocation nor the expenditure meet the stated intentions and public announcements made by the government.

3.4 Awareness regarding the package.

The success of these relief packages hinges on the information regarding the packages passed on to the intended beneficiaries. The social watch study had thus also focussed on understanding the level of awareness regarding the relief packages. This level of awareness was assessed of the following three sections of the society-

- a. Community level. The target of these packages was the crisis-hit farmers from Vidarbha. There was a provision in the relief packages for conducting awareness programmes at village level regarding the relief packages. Provision was for hiring vehicle to do the rounds of the villages, printing posters, conducting village meets and other such promotional activities. It was observed by the social watch team that the various departments had undertaken some promotional activities. In some villages, special Gram Sabhas were conducted by the Gram Sevak to explain these relief packages. Jeeps were hired by the agriculture department and rounds of villages were undertaken.

However, all the villages were not covered by these activities. In all the 30 villages that the social watch study team visited across Yavatmal district, there was not even a single farmer who knew the packages entirely. The villagers had heard about the relief packages. Some of the farmers in every village knew about specific provisions of the relief packages. Most of the relief packages' beneficiaries were only aware about the details of the benefits received by them but were ignorant about rest of the provisions of the packages. The sources of peoples' information about the relief packages were- articles in local newspapers especially *Deshonnanti*; word spread by the administration; discussions at tehsil places; sharing by beneficiaries and Gram Sabhas in some villages on the explicit orders of the CEO of Yavatmal ZP.

- b. Administration and People's Representatives level. The concerned departments regarding the implementation of the relief packages were aware of their respective responsibilities of the packages. The people's representatives right from the village level up to the Z.P. level were not fully aware about the

relief packages. Some of them were aware only about the INR 100,000/- compensation; INR 10,000/- support; INR 25,000/- agriculture support and loan waiver provisions of the relief packages. There was ambiguity about the exact details of the provisions but they had heard about these.

The field investigation team ended up reading and explaining the government regulations regarding the relief packages and also distributed copies of the package documents to the people in almost all the villages visited for field investigation as a part of this social watch study. People were of the opinion that the packages are meant only for suicide-hit, adivasi and marginal farmers' families. Administration is fully aware of the provisions of the relief packages though only to the extent of the departmental purview. Neither the peoples' representatives nor the NGOs have shown the initiative that was expected of them.

3.5 Role of the NGOs.

It was the incessant pressure and media advocacy undertaken by Vidarbha Jan Andolan Samiti that brought to national highlight the issue of farmers' suicides. Apart from the media advocacy and highlighting of the issue, not many NGOs working in Yavatmal were seen to be undertaking efforts to resolve the issue of farmers' suicides. In Ghatanji, Pusad and Kelapur tehsils 2-3 NGOs were actively pursuing soil and water conservation measures as a solution for the farmers' suicides issue.

However, by and large it was observed and there was a general feel of either unconcern or an inability to take up action for resolving the issue of farmers' suicides. Many NGOs were heard to criticise the relief packages while some had taken the route of being agents for promotion of contract farming.

In the relief packages, NGOs have a very marginal role to play. The focus of their involvement is on promotion of organic farming and implementing watershed development programmes through NABARD. Those NGOs who are directly assisting in the implementation of the packages have detailed awareness of those provisions wherein they are involved. Some of the NGOs have a complete understanding of the relief packages.

There are more than 4,000-odd NGOs in Yavatmal district. Yet, the social watch study team is of the opinion that only a few of the NGOs in Yavatmal have raised the issue or are playing the expected of acting as a watch dog on government implementation and agent for popular awareness building.

3.6 Reach.

Ultimately, the number of farmers benefited resulting into reduction of suicides and the agrarian crisis getting resolved is of primary importance. This means that the number of farmers and the quality of relief accessed are the two criteria upon which the success of these relief packages hinges.

The following table depicts the reach of the relief packages to the intended beneficiaries. Figures are updated as of 12th March 2007.

#	CATEGORY OF RELIEF.	DEPARTMENT.	RELIEF DISTRIBUTED		TOTAL FUNDS ALLOCATED IN THE PACKAGES.
			NO. OF BENEFICIARIES.	TOTAL AMOUNT DISBURSED.	
A	INDIVIDUAL LEVEL			In INR.	YAVATMAL
1	Interest Waiver, Debt Rescheduling and Fresh Loans.	Co-operative / Banking.	225,952	8,537.1518 crore	9137.79 crore.
2	Direct support worth INR 100,000/- to family of suicide case.	Revenue.	400 valid from the 807 cases considered.	400 lakh.	400 lakh.
3	Direct support up to INR 10,000/- to families in distress.	Revenue.	804	5,190,000/-	8,000,000/-
4	Subsidised support worth INR 25,000/- over three years for pair of bullocks and agriculture implements.	Agriculture.	Till date 32,179 farmers applied while 13,200 were selected and 11,136 have benefited.	1051.08lakh.	1,140 lakh.
5	Crop Insurance	Revenue.	223,539.	44,484.93 lakh.	44,599.24 lakh.
6	Ban on loans sought from illegal private moneylenders.	Revenue / Co-operative.	13 instances of illegal money lending penalised.	217 instances checked till date.	292 instances of private money lending reported.
7	Promotion of Cotton growing through financial assistance and repayment of capital formation.	Cotton Federation and Agriculture.	254,630.	34.90 Crore.	34.90 crore have been allocated against a demand of 36.750 crore.
8	Crop loan (Kharif, Existing and New account holders and SHG)	Banking and Co-operative / Revenue.	376,402.	71,784.71 lakh,	NA
B	COMMUNITY LEVEL				
1#	Support for expenses incurred during Mass Marriages.	Extension	1007	75.02 lakh.	1 crore.

#	CATEGORY OF RELIEF.	DEPARTMENT.	RELIEF DISTRIBUTED		TOTAL FUNDS ALLOCATED IN THE PACKAGES.
			NO. OF BENEFICIARIES.	TOTAL AMOUNT DISBURSED.	
2	Extension Budget for outreach programmes.	Extension and Concerned departments.		52.46 lakh	84.77 lakh.
3	Agro-based livelihood Support	Agriculture	2789	381.12 lakh.	428.92 lakh.
4	Organic Farming	Agriculture	29,388.	97.40 lakh.	194.06 lakh.
5#	Micro Irrigation	Agriculture	3562 farmers irrigating 3562 hectares.	295.07 lakh	295.07lakh.
6 #	Watershed Development (Soil and Water Conservation activities).	NABARD, Agriculture and Forest	No figures available. Target is 151 structures.	176.50 Lakh.	411.50 lakh.
7 \$	Pending Irrigation Projects.	Irrigation	8 major, 9 medium and 500 minor irrigation projects have been selected. 2 projects have AIBP clearance.	293 crore.	882 crore
8 *	Joint Cotton Farming Promotion.	Agriculture.	1281 farmers covering 3675.50 hectares along with 6 ginning mills.	NA	NA
9	Helpline for farmers' in distress.	Revenue.	556 calls received.	49,515/-	NA
10	Seed distribution for diversification from cotton farming.	Agriculture.	65,074.	19,519 quintal seeds at a cost of INR 453.34 lakh with 50% subsidy.	19,653 quintal seeds were supplied.
11	Horticulture promotion.	Agriculture.	543 projects.	229.47 lakh.	312.06 lakh.
12*	Alternative livelihood promotion.	Extension and Revenue.	107 proposals.	1025.49 lakh.	NA.
13	Check dam construction.	Agriculture.	57 check dams were completed from the sanctioned 65 check dams.	114.57 lakh.	130 lakh.

Source: Compiled data from Revenue department as reported to the Amravati Divisional Commissioner.

Rows marked with a # show data that does not tally with reported government figures.

B-1) Revenue department hand out shows 1007 marriages with INR 75.02 lakh expenditure as of 24th July 2006 while the Amravati Divisional Commissioner website shows 1,003 marriages with INR 1.10 crore expenditure as of 8th February 2007.

B-5) Micro irrigation support provided as reported by the revenue department handout of 12th March 2007 shows that INR 295.07 lakh irrigating 3562 hectares... while the Amravati Division Commissioner website states that INR 195.25 lakh were expended irrigating 2551 hectares.

B-6) Data specific to state government relief package actual expenditure as of 8th February 2007 states that of the INR 52 lakh allocated INR 47.56 Lakh have been expended while the combined state and PM relief packages' data handout of the revenue department states that INR 176.50 lakh have been expended but there are no figures about the number of structures constructed and the location of the same...

B-11) data provided by the Amravati Division Commissioner website as of 8th February 2007 shows that 543 projects were sanctioned on which INR 229.47 lakh were expended under a budget allocation of INR 312.06 lakh. While the handout provided by the Revenue department shows varying figures.

* Rows marked with * signify data that are unclear .

\$ Row marked with \$ indicate that the data available is an aggregate of six districts.

It is clear from the table depicted above that the relief packages have not reached the intended beneficiaries fully. A lot of emphasis was stressed upon settling the loan-related dues. It appears that the banks are the

primary beneficiaries of the debt waiver. Some of them would have probably sunk if the bail out package had not come up. Crop loan distribution increased by nearly 268% in 2006-07 over 2005-06. The loan repayment for bank loans taken in 2006 is not seen at all (normally 30% of loans would have been repaid as farmers prepared themselves for the next loan) this year... *In Bechkheda village of Yavatmal tehsil, farmers privately shared with the study team that they have been repaying interest as well as principal amount of the loans taken from BASIX, a private MFI. The loans amount to INR 50 lakh in this single village. This is a routine practice for the past three years... In the same village, government and other co-operative sector banks were finding it hard to recover loans from the farmers.*

The support up to INR 25,000/- for agriculture implements has been done as per target. Till date 32,179 farmers applied while 13,200 were selected and 11,136 have benefited. There are 2100-odd villages in Yavatmal. 259,868-odd farmers have been found eligible for interest waiver. It is said that there are 450,000-odd farmers in Yavatmal out of which 225,000-odd farmers are supposed to be small and marginal farmers. It is interesting to note that the relief packages have selected 13,200 farmers out of these 225,000 small and marginal farmers... This means 6 to 10 beneficiaries, on an average, should exist per village in Yavatmal. During the social watch study, it was observed that in 4 villages there were only 2-3 beneficiaries while in one village (Khadki in Ralegaon tehsil of Yavatmal district) no benefits had trickled down... This might be an aberration but the study team does not feel so looking at the overall experience at the village level. *It was shared with the study team that some people had sold off assets for accessing the relief packages. Many have complained of the ad hoc nature of distribution regarding agriculture implements.*

The reality of up to INR 25,000/- relief under the packages:

#	Category of Support	Subsidy in Percentage.	Upper limit of Expenditure on the Category in INR.	Market price of the category in INR.
1	Land development (up to 1 hectare).	50	20,000	25,000.
2	Agriculture Inputs distribution (up to 1 hectare).	100	1,500	3,500.
3	Crop Protection / Improved agriculture implements.	100	6,000	15,000.
4	Pair of bullocks.	50	As per IRD criteria.	50,000 (for a decent quality)
5	In-well boring.	100	8,000	25,000
6	Repair of old wells.	50	4,000	10,000
7	Pipe line.	50	As per NABARD guidelines up to 300 meters.	7,500.
8	Pump-sets.	100	10,000	5,000 to 12,000.
9	Horticulture.	100	2,000 (up to 0.25 acre)	Depends.
10	Kitchen Garden.	100	200 (per Guntha).	Depends.
11	Organic fertilisers / NADAP.	100	5,000	3,000
12	Vermi-fertilizers.	100	5,000.	3,000

This table shows the comparison of announced subsidy and the market prices of the items provided on subsidy to the farmers under the relief packages. The last column shows that some items are priced lower than the market price where the farmers have to purchase on their own and the government shall provide a fixed subsidy (for e.g. the price of a pair of bullocks is nearly 45,000 while the government is providing subsidy worth 4,500). There are some items that are priced higher than the going market rate... these items are those where 100% subsidy is being provided. *Villagers were complaining that as regards items with 100% subsidy, the subsidy is in reality benefiting the manufacturing companies. A 100% subsidy for a higher priced product means indirect benefits to the manufacturing companies.*

Mass community marriages have not been promoted and only 20-odd percentage of funds allocated under this provision have been utilised, as reported by a local newspaper, *Deshonnanti*. *Marrying off one's daughter in grand style is a status symbol. Mass community marriages go against the prevalent social mannerisms. These need large scale mind-set change. Are people willing to do that? What efforts have been made?*

There are 1919 farmers who practice organic farming covering an area of 3631.60 hectares in Yavatmal district. The government has targeted 29,388 farmers under the relief packages to take up organic farming. This means that at the least 10 farmers would be exposed to organic farming in every village of Yavatmal. The study team found promotion of organic farming in only 6 villages of the 30 studied under the social watch study

and even in these 6 villages it was bare minimum. The Vermi compost pits constructed as demonstration to the village farmers were lying in a condition of disarray and ill-use (Pahapal village in Kelapur tehsil of Yavatmal district).

Helpline for farmers was established by the revenue department as per the relief packages. However, No data is available on the action taken by the government on the 556 calls received on the helpline in Yavatmal district. The administration appeared to be unenthusiastic and not believing in the utility of the helpline.

3562 farmers, irrigating 3562 hectares of land, benefited from the minor irrigation support under the relief packages. Yavatmal district has nearly 2100-odd villages. This means that at the least 1 farmer in every village should have received the benefits. The study team in the 30 villages did not come across even 1 beneficiary of this micro irrigation provision.

There are 274,909-odd farmers cultivating cotton in Yavatmal district alone as per the government figures... The area under cotton is 445,168.68 hectares in Yavatmal district. The relief packages have selected farmers from amongst these. The packages intend to reach out to a select lot amongst these... The plan of the various departments, jointly, about whom to select and reach out to is unclear. The strategy as shared by the administration is to reach out to a handful of farmers per village and expect the others in that village to initiate changes as demonstrated by those selected farmers.... This strategy has resulted in a few beneficiaries in most of the villages but the important question still remains that whether such a strategy is going to be reduced and eliminate suicides?

In 2008 the loan burden is going to be almost double. Farmers would have to repay the principal of earlier loans along with

interest and principal of fresh loans accessed in 2006 and 2007. There is no guarantee that produce will have increased and farmer will be in more serious trouble... If the monsoon of 2007 fails, then suicides may actually go up in the coming year. In the meanwhile private money lenders are either collecting back their loans or refusing support... Only 13 cases of private money lending were declared illegal by the government under the relief packages' provisions.

3.7 Field work Impressions

Designing of the relief packages was primarily done by high ranking officials from Mumbai and Delhi.

Lack of ownership regarding the relief packages on the part of government and implementing NGOs was observed and experienced.

Existing machinery was used by all the departments during the implementation of the relief packages. No special efforts, apart from putting in extra hours, were taken by the government for the implementation of the relief packages.

Distribution of agriculture implements is dependant upon the agriculture department officials.

The real beneficiaries of the packages are banks and companies, which produce pump sets and agriculture implements.

Funds allocated for extension activities are not being expended.

In quite a few cases, the agriculture implements were not of any use to the farmers due to the poor quality of the implements or the lack of relevance to the farmers of the implements distributed.

Pesticides distributed were past their expiry dates in many instances.

There are many complaints regarding the selection of beneficiaries.

People in general were not excited about the packages.

It is quite clear that the people still lack detailed information about the relief packages.

The village level Panchayat Raj functionaries have not been taken into consideration while selecting the village level beneficiaries.

People in general feel that the relief packages are only meant for those families where suicides had occurred.

Either there is no allocation done as yet for completion of pending irrigation projects, as stated in the relief packages, or the allocated funds have not yet been utilised. Hence, there is no work on irrigation activities.

Village levels committee for the implementation and overseeing of the relief packages have not yet been formed.

To conclude,

Relief is characterised by the speed of response... It is apparent that funds, earmarked for the relief packages, were not allocated to the extent stated in the various public announcements made by the Chief Minister and the Prime Minister. The affidavit filed by the Maharashtra state with the Supreme Court of India in answer to a PIL filed in the Supreme Court of India, as reported in the media in February 2007, mentions the lack of timely allocation of stated funds. *This might have prompted the PMO to authorise an enquiry visit by Intelligence Bureau officials in Yavatmal district.*

Line management system for the implementation of the package is not clear. The approach is clearly "top down"... The package has been designed by high ranking officials sitting in Mumbai and Delhi. Selection of beneficiaries and distribution of type of relief aid is the decision of tehsil and district level officials. It was a common grouse shared by almost all the villagers interviewed that the official is the boss.

Has any Member of Parliament from Maharashtra spoken on this issue or raised this issue in the Parliament? NO should be the answer since one or two MPs making statements does not mean raising the issue at a national level.

Looking at the design and the implementation reality of the relief packages it is quite obvious that those concerned are callous about this issue. Providing lip service to a crisis should not be considered as concern... it comes under the category of "supposed doing" things... A crisis of such a grave nature, intensity and scale needs not only an all round and fundamental thinking but also the intentions backed by actual body language and the drive shown... all this was found lacking in Yavatmal district... amongst all those who should be concerned (people, NGOs, administration, people's representatives, industry and members of society)... at all levels... Mere amalgamation of existing schemes and increase in fund allocation shall not solve this crisis.

It was observed that the implementation was more in the letter rather than in spirit of the package. This was most apparent during the distribution of relief... *distribution of relief was done as per availability of funds / relief material rather than need of the farmers... Pumps being bought and sold without even being used... Farmers buying his own bullocks... Pipes being bought only on paper... Out of date Pesticides being distributed... Subsidised seeds more expensive than open market seeds... Goats and poultry being sold off the day it was bought... Rampant corruption at the official and community level... Almost no soil conservation action seen at the village level except that which has been initiated by NABARD... Such occurrences were many.*

The relief packages have reopened the option of accessing credit for the farmers. Credit that was denied to a majority of farmers due to non-repayment would now be available. However, is this the solution for non-repayment? Promoting organic farming is fine but how is it being assessed whether the farmers are going in for organic farming because it is part of the package or because they are genuinely convinced? The packages have provided a lifeline for some farmers (*some farmers since the packages are not designed for all the farmers*)... however, it is just postponing the crisis since the farmers would have to repay the principle

amount of earlier loans along with interest and principle of fresh loans. What is the guarantee that agriculture would be remunerative in the coming years? Where is involvement of Gramsabha in deciding beneficiaries? If everything is decided centrally and given as relief then where is the dignity for the farmers? Where are the mechanisms to make the farmers self reliant? What is the plan to make agriculture a dignified and respected profession? Where is the debate on making agriculture a

viable industry? If the government's analysis about agriculture is that it is unviable then where is the plan to either make it viable or evolve alternatives and options for the agriculture-dependant populace? Surely the package was found wanting on these grounds.

4. Impact upon the elderly in Yavatmal.

Data published in various studies as well as government websites clearly show that more than 3,000-odd farmers have committed suicides in Vidarbha over the past 4-5 years. These studies clearly point out that majority of the suicides have been committed by farmers who are more than 30 years old. This means that these farmers were the principal bread earners for their families. In Vidarbha, the principal bread earner usually does all the financial transactions. Generally, the family members are not aware of these financial dealings... hence, after the suicides committed by the main bread earner from the family, the other family members would usually not know of the loans and other borrowing done by the farmer who has committed suicides. *Suicides do not solve the problem. Suicides merely transfer the problem to other family members who survive... It is usually the survivors who have to face the situation... A situation that is already grave which now has worsened further due to suicide...*

This social watch study assessed the situation of some of the suicide-hit families regarding the following two aspects-

4.1 Situation of the family immediately after suicide.

The social watch study team interviewed and discussed, at length, with the suicide-hit families and neighbours regarding the situation of the family immediately after the principal bread earner committed suicide. A four-month period was taken into consideration. *It was definitely difficult to ask the family members to share their distress and pain... the field investigation team handled these delicate moments with care and genuine concern hence the family members did open out... after this study was completed, the field investigation team was not able to rest peacefully for days... the anguishing experiences and the suffering observed has made the team restless...*

The situation of suicide-hit families immediately after the suicide can be summarised as follows-

- The suicide of the principal bread earner of the family came as a shock to the family members.
- The parents and the widow of the person who had committed suicide were not able to lead their daily lives for months at end... *not that the situation is normal now... however, the realisation has sunk in now...*
- Village elders and functionaries assisted in completing the formalities so as to register the suicide as “genuine” (*this categorisation as genuine and not genuine has been done by the government... how this is possible is the immediate question that comes to mind... both, ethically as well as legally... a suicide is a suicide... how can the government determine whether it is genuine or not... and, how can the government break its own rules... by officially sanctioning a suicide case as genuine when suicides are termed as illegal and constitute a criminal offence under the IPC Act.*) and thus make the family members eligible for INR 100,000/- compensation from the government.
- *It is unfair to talk about the dead... and it is also unfair to question people’s helpful nature...yet, it was noticed by the study team that even when there was a death due to normal circumstances and not necessarily due to financial compulsions the villagers would officially state in the panchanama (a legal procedure) that the death was due to agrarian crisis and was a suicide... nobody did this for money or fame except with the feeling of assisting the family members... But is it right? And how is the government overcoming such instances, which are known to be quite a few?*

No wonder there is a subtle hint by all sections of the society, including government officials, that the INR 100,000/- aid should be stopped and substituted with some genuine and concrete actions...

- The family members, especially the father and the widow had to make efforts and do all the paper work and other formalities so as to convince the government that the suicide had occurred indeed due to agrarian crisis. The completion of these formalities forced the family members to relive the trauma of suicide day in and day out.
- Activists and Media personnel and later on agency-representatives who were conducting various studies in a way forced the family members to relive the anguish of suicide again and again... (*This social watch study team is also guilty of this fact*)...
- Once the financial compensation was received and the public attention around the suicide case had subsided (*this took at the least one month...*), creditors started making demands for fulfilment of loans and other borrowings done. In most of the cases, this follow up was targeted at the father of the deceased who was unaware about his son's financial dealings. Hence, the aged father was in no position to either to negotiate or to deny any repayment since these were the same creditors whom he would have to turn to in the future. He would thus pacify these creditors and would try to return some of the debt.
- It was now the responsibility of the aged father to sustain his already old and ailing wife apart from the widowed daughter-in-law and grandchildren. He had in most cases, retired from shouldering the responsibility of the family. Now, the aged father was forced to earn and support the family. Agriculture land was there but the father was lacking in physical capacities due to old

age. It was also difficult to go ahead with share-cropping since by then the market forces and reality of survival of the fittest had struck in... In some cases, the father along with his widowed daughter-in-law and school going grandchildren bravely went ahead with farming... which brought food security for the lucky ones and more debt and frustration for the unlucky ones...

- The six months immediately after the suicide were equivalent to hell for those families who had no reserves and options (*which in fact had been utilised by the deceased in an effort to prevent the crisis*)... Petty credit for daily consumption items started drying up in the third month... A young widow presented a scenario of "easy availability" to unscrupulous village men and some of the creditors... Food security was non-existent... Pride and Status had taken a hit... It was not practical to be a burden upon the relatives for long... In most cases the widow's parents shirked their responsibility and refused to take her back... The situation of the aged parents was poignant... They had mentally prepared for a relaxed life with their son and daughter-in-law taking care of them (*whatever limited amount of care a son can take in rural Maharashtra!*) but they were forced by the circumstances to face the brutal reality of starting all over again, with enhanced difficulties... This harsh dual reality of son's suicide and taking care of the family would definitely take a toll...

4.2 Impact of package upon the suicide-hit family.

The relief packages focussed more on reducing future suicides with some provisions for suicide-hit families. The impact of these relief packages upon the suicide-hit families is summarised below-

- The direct financial assistance of INR 100,000/- proved to be a lifeline for the suicide-hit families. *Though, it is unclear whether this 100,000/- was sufficient to payoff all the debt and assist in managing the family finances. Whether such payments should be*

made by the government and wash off all its responsibilities is another question...

- ❑ The relief packages had also made provision for direct financial aid up to INR 10,000/- to the affected families for educational and health purposes. The discretion of this support was left with the Collector of the concerned districts along with a committee. The Yavatmal district Collector has met the INR 5,000,000/- and has sought for more. This financial assistance has had the intended impact. *Some of the beneficiaries shared about instances where they had to "lubricate" the system to avail of this assistance.*
- ❑ In some families, where the suicides had occurred more than a year ago, the situation is returning back to normalcy. The families have availed of some benefits, like availability of seeds, crop loans, pesticides and agriculture implements support, under the relief packages.
- ❑ Support under the relief packages has, however, not reduced the hardships and burden of the aged parents and the widow who have to fend for themselves... The study team does not suggest that the government should support the suicide-hit family all its life... However, the social watch study team has observed that agriculture is still an unviable source of livelihood for the suicide-hit families...
- ❑ Out of the total families met where suicides had occurred in the last five-odd years, nearly 65 % families still exist in similar circumstances of uncertainty and financial doldrums despite the relief packages. Food security for these families is only up to three to four months, *which is less than the normal food security of nearly 8 months for an average rural family in Vidarbha.* In the remaining families, there were instances of determined fight against the circumstances and assistance from family and friends that helped the family in returning back to financial normalcy.

- ❑ In all the families met where suicides had occurred, the work load of the aged parents has definitely increased. The father of the deceased has to toil on the farmland while the mother of the deceased and the widow have to work as agricultural labourers to ensure food security... It has become a daily struggle for mere existence... The number of increase in school drop outs cannot be accurately calculated but the study team came across quite a few children who had given up schooling in order to assist their mother and grandparents. The relief packages have not been able to reduce this burden and misery of the suicide-hit families.

4.3 Impact upon the elderly.

- ❑ Change in equations within a family after death. In the areas assessed during this social watch study, it was clear that a joint family type of family was the most prevalent form of family. In such a family type there are usually 3-5 male earning members. The eldest male member of the family is the head of the family and has a major part to play in the decision making at the family level however, men (either his younger brothers or his sons) who are the principal earning members of the family are also known to be more and more independent in decision making particularly about agriculture (the main source of livelihood). In reality, many decisions especially related to agriculture and labour are taken by those family members who are involved in the actual activity. Suicide, thus, by the principal earning member i.e. the son has resulted into a void for the family, especially from the livelihood angle. The elderly members of the family who were dependant in the family "hierarchy" / power structure have suddenly been forced into contributing for the daily fight for survival of the family. This has also resulted in the elderly,

especially the men, gaining more “voice” in the family power structure but the real question to be asked is: *whether they were really interested in shouldering the responsibilities of managing an increasing family at this advanced age?* It was observed by the social watch team that the elderly are playing an additional role and have an increased say in the decision making (regarding those families where suicides had occurred) but it is more out of compulsion rather than choice. At a subtle level, within the family, the blame game for determining who is responsible for the suicide has increased the frustration and angst of the elderly. Economic conditions and a limited access to livelihood have caused a slight change in the diet pattern of the elderly within the family. The social watch study team is not in a position to make a generalised statement that the elderly have been forced to skip a meal due to the suicides but it can be surely noted here that there is a reduction in the quantity consumed per meal and in certain situations the nutrition intake quality has also undergone a change for e.g. elderly who used to consume milk on a regular basis have reduced the daily intake of milk. *Ofcourse, all these are observations in select families where the study was conducted and can not be generalised as a norm for the entire region. A detailed and separate study needs to be conducted for the overall change in diet pattern...* It was quite obvious to the social watch team that the work load of the elderly has definitely increased after the suicide in their immediate family. This increase in workload was observed as putting in additional efforts to access livelihood, dealing with the creditors and media and arranging for short term debt so as to tide over the strained financial position. Aged men (father of those who have committed suicide) have been forced to compete with young

and able bodied men for putting in physical labour on their own farms or on other farms as daily wage labour. This strain and stress at this age (more than 48 years old) would definitely take its toll on their health. The relief packages were meant for either the dependants of the one who has committed suicide or for preventing future suicides. There are no specific provisions meant for the elderly in the relief packages. *There is a scramble on the part of the people, at least those who have heard about it, to access the relief packages. In this mad scramble for the relief provisions, often it was observed that the elderly were forced to do the follow up with departments concerned with the relief. It was shared by the villagers to the social watch team that it was the elderly who invariably were seen to wait in the lines at the tehsil places for application for relief material. Younger members of the family would work on the farm while the elderly would queue up at various tehsil offices for seeking relief applications.* No significant change was observed, by the social watch team, regarding the social standing of the elderly at the village level.

- Behaviour of younger members towards the older after the relief money is received. The change, if any, in the behaviour of the young towards the elderly after the receipt of the relief depended upon who received the money. If the elderly had received the relief money then two distinct yet subtle behavioural changes was observed amongst the young family members. There was a marked “positive” behaviour as in non-exclusion from decision making, non taking for granted and generic out of the way good behaviour. If the relief money was received by a younger family member then it was observed that this young family member did not go out of the way to ill treat his elderly parents. If there was a limited

economic deprivation and the young family members felt confident to find a way out of it then there were no hardships to be faced by the elderly.

- Status of older women particularly those widowed and dependant on family of the son. There has not been a significant difference observed in the status of older women be it then from the suicide-hit family or any other family. Elderly women particularly widowed and dependant on family of the son, are forced to lead an existence where they have to give up the role of the decision maker, at least regarding daily household level decisions, and get into a role of being constantly instructed upon by younger members of the family. In case, where the elderly woman was widowed due to her husband committing suicide then her sons and the other young members of the family would put pressure, albeit indirectly, upon her for the relief benefits. ***In Bechkheda village of Yavatmal tehsil, the social watch team came across a suicide-hit family. In this family, the elderly widow was treated with respect and care by her sons and other young members of her family after the suicide and even after accessing the relief compensation.***

“Why don’t you commit suicide? As it is you are not earning anything and are a burden upon us... at least after your suicide we shall benefit by Rs. 1 lakh...” These were the taunts aimed at Shamrao (name changed) an elderly farmer resident of Hasra (name changed) village in Ghatanji tehsil of Yavatmal district. He was incessantly taunted by his son and daughter-in-law. He was heckled day in and day out by his son after the son got to know that the government was providing relief to suicide-hit

families... Tired of this constant nagging and feeling frustrated with the apparent uselessness of life Shamrao was about to commit suicide when he was stopped by an activist and was persuaded to give up his resolve for committing suicide...

This incident might be an aberration but instances of such nagging and taunting done of the elderly were brought to the notice of the study team.

It is a known fact that the aged family members usually get the least priority in all aspects (health care, food security, conduct and decision making), in the family, during limited resources. However, the aged would not be forced into ending their lives...

The social watch study team does not wish to conclude that the relief packages have prompted an increase in the incidence of suicides by the elderly but such instances do raise certain difficult questions...

The government is widely publicising that the rate of suicides in Yavatmal and Vidarbha region has started to come down... However, The Indian Express reports in its 3rd April 2007 internet edition that the parliamentary committee on agriculture has questioned the relevance of the data presented by the administration and the analysis of the crisis as presented by the government... This fact is a telling comment upon the impact of the relief packages...

The social watch study team is of the opinion that the relief packages have provided a lifeline to suicide-hit families but nothing beyond that... these packages have merely postponed the impact by interest waiver and availing the facility of fresh loans... There is however no specific provision for the elderly populace left behind due to suicides of their sons...

5. Coping Mechanisms.

The social watch study team is aware of the fact that most of the farmers in Vidarbha... Maharashtra... and India are in debt either to the private moneylender or to the co-operative banks or to both. These debts have been availed of for the same reasons as that of the Vidarbha farmers. Agrarian crisis exists not only across Vidarbha but also other parts of rural Maharashtra and India for that matter. It is also known to the team that Vidarbha has faced many droughts over the past decades. However, these past droughts and natural disasters did not prompt large number of suicides. Hence, the social watch study team tried to find out the traditional coping mechanisms over drought and natural disasters of the Vidarbha farmer. This information was difficult to obtain since the youth and the populace in general has become quite used to the modern lifestyle. Also, it was not easy to coerce the elderly population in the villages to recall their systems and the difference in the present and the past. It was hard to compare the past with the present... Many a times the response was tending towards generic praise of the earlier days and a generic abuse of the present systems.

Following is the summary of coping mechanisms resorted to avert and overcome an agrarian crisis-

- “Gao Gada” (a system of trust and dependency amongst the villagers, established over the past centuries, wherein the entire village lived and existed as one unit) was prevalent and all pervasive. A farmer in distress would be assisted by his cousins or his caste brethren or by the economically well off in the village.
- There was an environment where the farmer in distress could air his suffering and grief. This had an effect of counselling, in a way. *The last few minutes and the days leading up to the suicide are quite critical, according to medical experts, if in these crucial moments the person who is going to commit suicide talks with*

someone and is able to find hope then the suicide is averted. The environment available would act as sponge thus soaking the critical amount of haplessness in the process averting the suicide.

- There was a major difference in farming practices. These acted as inbuilt coping mechanisms, which averted an agrarian crisis. These differences have been enumerated below:
 - Farming technique was less dependent upon external inputs thus requiring less finance which reduced the costs of production. This lessened the need of debt.
 - Many farmers at the village level shared their physical labour as well as agriculture implements and bullocks thus reducing the dependency upon external factors as well as reducing costs (out of pocket payments to be made).
 - Seeds were stored from the crop produce hence there was neither any dependency nor any costs to be paid for accessing seeds to be sowed.
 - Most of the farmers possessed cattle in large numbers. This provided an assured and free of cost organic waste for use of fertilizers and pesticides thus reducing the costs.
 - Mixed cropping and integrated pest management were routinely practised.
 - Agriculture was primarily subsistence rather than market oriented. This obliterated the “market risks”.
- Wants were limited and well within the means of the agriculture produce and other income of the family and were based upon the needs unlike the present wants, which are based more upon advertisements rather than need.

- The king and the administration of the day would waive off any taxes and other dues to be paid by the populace in case of a simultaneous bad monsoons.

Looking at the coping mechanisms based on the erstwhile lifestyle it is not surprising that we are in the middle of an agrarian crisis and the popular response is suicides and relief packages.

6. Voices from the ground.

As a part of this social watch study, the team interacted with villagers, government officials, activists, media personnel, contract farmers, dealers, wholesalers, academicians, political parties, private sector, social development experts and NGOs. Many shared their personal opinions regarding the crisis and the relief packages. Quite a few requested not to quote them. Following are some of the opinions shared by these individuals (these are presented in a transcribed form without editing) -

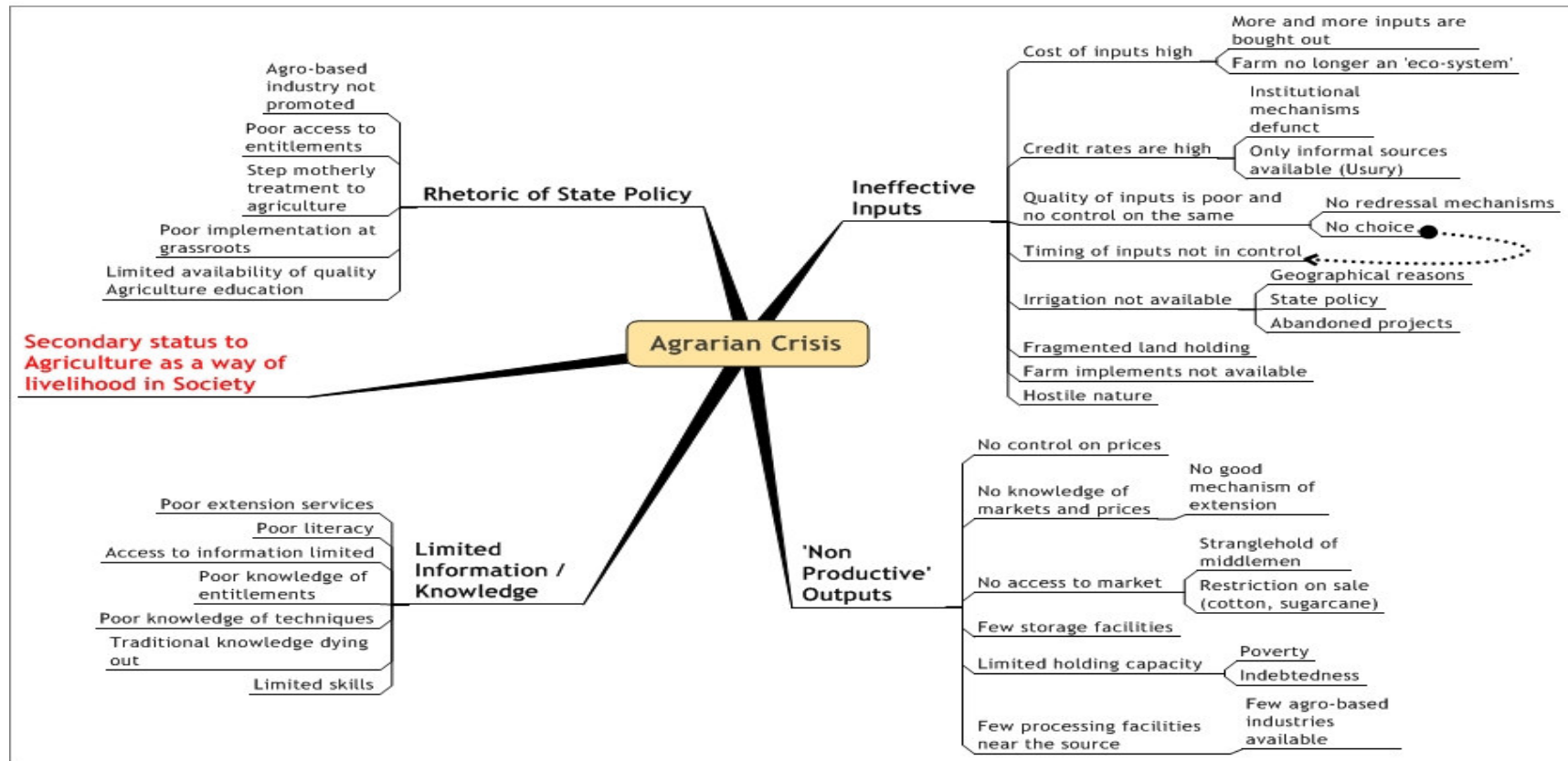
- ❖ *The packages will not work... The situation shall return back to "jaise thee" (as it was) within no time...*
- ❖ *The direct financial grant of INR 100,000/- should be discontinued...*
- ❖ *It is impossible for any farmer to obtain support under these relief packages without "chiri miri" (lubrication for the system)...*
- ❖ *The persistent suicides shall not have any impact upon the Z.P. and Panchayat Samiti elections... (It did happen that way... the ruling combine at the state level came in power despite the much touted anti-incumbency factor... This prompted the Chief Minister to publicly claim that people had voted for Congress to show their support to the packages and the party for bringing such packages...)*
- ❖ *The relief packages are beneficial more to the co-operative sector banks and companies manufacturing pesticides, pump sets, engines, sprinklers and pipe lines...*
- ❖ *The relief packages are only for S.C. and S.T.*
- ❖ *Aandhala daaltaya ani kutra pith khataya... (the dog is eating the flour as the blind man mills it... he who is implementing is unaware of who is benefiting)*
- ❖ *Banks were saved from bankruptcy...*

- ❖ *Instead of in kind or subsidised assistance, the relief packages should have paid direct cash or in total assistance to the farmers...*
- ❖ *The agriculture implements distributed under the relief packages are of no use in practice...*
- ❖ *It is fine that the interest has been waived off, but do the farmers have the ability to pay off the principal?*
- ❖ *Out of date (i.e. goods past their expiry date) pesticides have been distributed...*
- ❖ *The benefits of the relief packages are reaped by those well connected or those in the good books of the government officials or political parties...*
- ❖ *The relief packages shall neither reduce nor stop the farmers' suicides...*
- ❖ *Selection of beneficiaries and the implementation of the relief packages is done in an ad hoc manner as per the whims and fancies of the concerned department officials...*
- ❖ *Those not in need of the relief end up receiving the benefits directly or indirectly...*
- ❖ *The packages should not have targeted a few in every village instead the packages should have been provided to all the farmers...*
- ❖ *Those who have been regular in their loan repayments are left out of the relief packages... it is like punishing honest and good behaviour...*
- ❖ *The relief packages have considered only those who are landowners and most importantly have the title deeds of their land...*

7. The REAL Agrarian crisis and the Relief packages.

The social watch team is of the opinion that farmers' suicides are occurring due to the collapse of agriculture. The trigger for individual suicides can be various but the root cause is the agrarian crisis. The crisis has its roots in the way we perceive agriculture and the way in which society thinks. We have tried to reach out and understand the crisis and in

that context look at the relief package. In course of this study we interacted with a number of stakeholders who have an understanding of the agrarian crisis. In the mind-map below we have tried to represent the issues that plague agriculture and the farming community



It is possible that some issues may have been left out. Further all of these are not stand-alone: they are all connected with each other.

The PM and CM packages address, to a certain extent, issues of inputs, improvement in quality of land, irrigation and credit. The reader can see that all of these are in one arm of the mind-map. The remaining 4 related to outputs, information, state policy and secondary status of agriculture remain almost completely unaddressed. Our contention is that the issues that plague agriculture are complex. Simplistic or piecemeal (knee-jerk) solutions are not going to work. When we look at the package, a few questions come to mind

- Have the package planners looked at the holistic picture?
 - The reports that form background to the design of the package are impressive and exhaustive (and exhausting to read). Jointly and severally they delineate issues that have caused this crisis. The package has been designed based on these reports. It is supposed to be a combination of immediate relief and long term asset / infrastructure building. However, the package does not address the issues listed adequately. For instance, the Planning Commission report (section 1.24.3, page 59) clearly mentions that a farmer planting Bt cotton on 1 Ha of land can expect revenue of around Rs. 20,100/- with the inputs costing Rs. 16,000/- A majority of the farmers own less than 2 Ha of land. Even if one assumes 2 Ha of land ownership, the best profits that a farming family can expect from cotton after a full season of work is Rs. 8200/- Even assuming that the farmer takes an intercrop that yields the same profit, it means an income of around Rs.16,000 for the family from its 2 Ha holding. Does this statistic not beg other questions; to wit

- How can a family of say 5 members live on Rs. 16,000/- over the year especially if they have to buy all their food?
- Can the family realistically expect to be ever able to think beyond mere survival?
- Will the family be ever able to withstand the brunt of ONE failed crop?
- Should the family not look at diversification of their livelihood sources?
- How will they access the skills to do so if they are fighting for survival each day?

To our mind, either the issue analysis remains disconnected from the package design or there has been a deliberate attempt to not look at the whole picture.

- When are we going to garner adequate political will to make strong, sensible and wise decisions?
 - The voices from the ground (we will cover that in detail later in the report) are unequivocal in decrying some of the measures like compensation for victims of suicides. There is no doubt that the compensation provides immediate relief to a family that has lost its primary bread earner. It is also a support. However the limited reach and administrative blocks in availing this relief have made it by and large inaccessible to those that genuinely deserve the support. Having said that it will be almost impossible for government to withdraw this offer : the political backlash will be too difficult to handle. The machinery will continue to implement the scheme that they privately disagree with completely.

- Similar is the situation with waiver of interest on debt. This waiver has created good opportunity for defaulters to come back into the loan eligibility but it has sent a message to those who paid up on time : it was foolish of you to do so. If you had waited a bit we would have waived your loans. The result is that this year almost no repayment has happened. Farmers are clear : they will not even contemplate paying off the loan. They feel that government should write off loans each year. Will government have the financial muscle to indefinitely support these waivers? Or the political courage to deny waivers the next year? Or the strength to face any reaction that comes from the farmers?

The era of coalition governments has resulted in the development of a mindset amongst our political leaders – survival of government above all. This is always on top priority. If one can postpone a crisis and survive – so be it. Even if one is aware that what will happen later will be even more troublesome but then distant dangers seem less threatening than immediate ones.

- Where is the innovation?

For the last six decades governments, State and Central, have been launching and implementing packages for support / development of the poor. There is hardly an area of development where there is no government scheme. If one analyses the various components of the packages, it is evident that the packages are merely an amalgamation of schemes that are already in place. After all the government was undertaking watershed, it was promoting organic farming and horticulture, it was providing support to farmers for implements, goateries and poultry promotion has also been around. There is one difference though. Since this amalgamation goes under the glorified name of a 'package' there is a bit more political focus on the implementation. Normally no one would bother about what happened to the scheme once it was announced. There is also some extra budget. There is hardly any aspect, either in the design or in the implementation that can be called innovative.

This is an unusual problem and it is going to take something extraordinary to deal with it. Innovation and thinking out of the box is going to be necessary. This is sadly lacking from the design of the packages.

8. Recommendations

While developing the recommendations the authors of this report have tried to follow a few principles. We have tried to ensure that the recommendations avoid utopian concepts and they be grounded in reality. We have tried to build these around existing governance mechanisms. We have tried to ensure that they follow scientific management principles. Wherever possible, we have tried to suggest operating mechanisms as well (*naturally delineating it to the level of immediate implementation is outside the ambit of this study*). Above everything else, we have tried to ensure that they will result in the impact that the packages aim to achieve.

8.1 Constant monitoring.

The packages that are being implemented need to be constantly monitored. In order for this to happen government will have to go beyond announcing the schemes. It needs to get down to framing indicators of success, developing means of verification for these, freezing baselines for these indicators and establishing monitoring systems. These aspects are presently absent from the package announcements (and from public domain). We are taking the liberty of making concrete recommendations on each of these aspects.

8.1.1 Indicators that package is working :

Some of the indicators (quantitative and qualitative) that c(sh)ould be used for identifying whether the packages are making an impact or not are as under

- i. Overall reduction in rate of suicides : there is no point in only tracking suicides that the government machinery claims are eligible for compensation. That will be a poor indicator because it is often dependent on (1) interpretation and therefore subjectivity and bias and (2) guidelines which for instance do

not accept suicide by a sharecropper as eligible. Let us track all suicides. Every death counts and hence count every death.

- ii. Increase in repayment of debt : since the packages talk only of waiver of loans for a specified period and a moratorium on interest payments, it is natural that at some time repayments must start. Robustness of the package and policy will also be evident by repayments. Please note that one needs to track repayment of all debts not just crop loans.
- iii. Completion of long pending irrigation projects : which form a major component of the packages.
- iv. Increase in land under assured irrigation : which is a direct measure of the effectiveness of irrigation schemes and small support to farmers for wells and pumps.
- v. Increase in production : land development and agriculture extension inputs are expected to contribute to increased production. One can use control and intervention areas to analyse this indicator.
- vi. Increase in acreage under organic farming : which is a direct measure of all the training, exposure and capacity building that is happening as part of the packages.
- vii. Increase in acreage under horticulture : a direct reflector of the promotion of shift to horticulture.
- viii. Extent of diversification of farmers from the not so productive cotton to other crops (cash or otherwise)
- ix. Increase in productivity : productivity differs from production (yield) since it also tracks input costs. One can use control and intervention areas to analyse this indicator.

- x. Participation of the community in operations and maintenance of common structures : which will reflect the feeling of ownership of the community and also indicate the long term sustainability of these structures.
- xi. Increase in the industrial / co-operative units meant to add value to farm produce
- xii. Increase in Off-farm activities as means of livelihoods
- xiii. Increase in number of couples getting married in mass ceremonies : that are being promoted for consumption reduction.
- xiv. Increase in the Standard of living of the farmers targeted by the package : the packages purport to be a combination of immediate and long term measures. They therefore need to result in increased standard of living. Government can use well defined scales for standard of living or even the Human Development Index. *Please note that in keeping with the spirit of realism, the authors are NOT recommending analysis of improvement in quality of life. That will become relevant only in the very long term.*

This is only a partial list and does not purport to be exhaustive. The idea was to give a clear indication of the line of thought that is necessary for developing impact indicators. The planners need to develop these and other indicators if they are every to make a judgement on whether their packages have been useful.

8.1.2 Means of Verification for these indicators

We have developed means of verification for one of the indicators above – extent of diversification of farmers from cotton. There are two data elements that are needed for this indicator to be analysed – present acreage under cotton and number of farmers sowing cotton.

This indicator must be measured each year at the beginning of Kharif. These data can be obtained from land records (7/12), village level data maintained by the gramsevak / talathi. These data must be verified through a combination of (1) random sampling and physical verification of reports and reality in the field, (2) public hearing at the village level and (3) number of farmers selling produce at ginning mills.

Similar exercise can be and must be carried out for the remaining indicators.

8.1.3 Baseline:

The baseline for each of these indicators must be developed and recorded as soon as possible. Only then will any agency be able to monitor the progress.

8.2 Establishing oversight mechanisms.

“Who will guard the guardians themselves” said Juvenal in his commentary on corruption and human foibles enshrined in his Satires. Since government is by and large in charge of designing and implementing the packages, this report feels the need to recommend an oversight mechanism. The following measures are suggested for the same

- Establishment of an independent committee with a fixed tenure and roving brief to monitor the implementation of the package on a periodic basis. This committee could comprise people from academia, social development, government, political leaders and even industry. The committee should have a budget under its control so that it can institute measures for monitoring. The committee should report directly to the Governor of the State on the CM package and the President of India on the PM package. At the very minimum the committee must present reports every 6 months. These reports should necessarily be in public domain

and an interested person / agency should have access to the same.

- Public announcement of the planned outputs which are to be achieved by these relief packages. These can be published in local and state newspapers and also displayed on tehsil notice boards. Copies should be freely available, may be with cost recovery, to any citizen who wishes to inform herself / himself of the situation.
- The tehsildar must be made responsible for a public hearing on 2 fixed dates at the tehsil office. In these hearings the progress on the relief package implementation can be made public.
- Detailed information on the implementation and outputs (beneficiaries, benefits, costs etc) should also be dealt with in the same manner.

8.3 Revisiting the packages.

There are some areas where the packages are definitely weak and may need revisiting. Some of the weak areas where action needs to be taken are as under

- Subsidies for farm inputs and implements : currently the package talks of subsidies to the tune of 50 to 75% for inputs like (seeds, pesticides and fertilisers) and implements (like pumps, pipes, bullocks and cart). That a subsidy regime merely helps manufacturers and traders more than farmers is well known and almost axiomatic. In some cases the farmer may not be able to take advantage of a good deal because he may not have the funds to cover his costs. Another problem is that it encourages farmers to opt for this option even though they may not actually need the input (In the field study we have met farmers who have bought discounted pumps when they did not

have wells only to sell them off at a small premium (ultimate price less than market price so that the sale can be made). This is an avoidable leakage of subsidy. It may be advisable for government to offer 100% subsidy. This can be made as a loan to the farmer. Thus a farmer who needs a particular piece of equipment will be able to buy it without worrying about contribution. Since it is a loan he will also ensure that the equipment is used so that he can repay. This system will eliminate the benefit being looked at as a windfall / largesse. It will restore dignity to the support. As a by-product it will also reduce corruption that is endemic to all such schemes.

- The packages need to address the real issues of the landless who sharecrop. This system is common in the region, especially in Yavatmal where absentee landlords are many. Today the sharecropping farmer is denied any compensation / benefit because he does not have any paperwork (land titles / lease agreements). This issue can be overcome by a simple measure of empowering the gram sabha / gram panchayat to issue a certificate that this person is a sharecropping farmer. This certificate should be adequate documentation to ensure that the sharecropper comes in at the start line to avail relief / compensation.
- The packages accept that they cannot reach all the farmers in a concrete / significant way. The hope is that the few beneficiaries will act as demonstrators for the rest of the population. In normal course this idea has merit. NOT IN DISASTER SITUATIONS. In sudden impact disasters like floods and earthquakes, ALL the affected are provided relief. There is a parallel in this slow onset disaster as well. Government should look at increasing coverage and making the package universal. If the suggestion just above (i) is

accepted, government can actually reach out to more farmers with lesser financial outlay. This blanket availability of support and relief will also weed out favouritism, bias and corruption.

- The method of determining whether a suicide case is eligible for support needs to be revisited. *For this to happen government should stop 'accepting' that 300 farmers will commit suicide each year in each district (we have been told this 'fact' time and again by government officers). This is a cynical and appalling point of view. Is 300 farmer suicides per district per year an acceptable norm in this country? The World Health Organisation in its report on suicides has said that the rates of suicides all over India have gone up from 6.3 (per lac population) to 10.5 from 1980 to 2002. Interestingly suicides by men outnumber women by a factor of 25-37%. With the population of Yavatmal in the region of 30 lacs, the national suicide rate would mean that one can expect 300 suicides in Yavatmal each year. However these will be across the population and not only in farming families. Why is it that one does not hear of people in banking or business or government committing suicide in large numbers? What is the number that will energise government into action? Once the suicide definition has been revisited the system of support of Rs. 100,000 also needs to be revisited and restructured. The experiment has been on for a number of years now and it should be possible to evaluate (1) whether it has made a difference, (2) whether it has had any adverse side effects, (3) whether it should be changed or (4) whether it should be discontinued.*

8.4 Watching other regions carefully for signs of crisis.

There is no reason to believe that the agrarian crisis is restricted to only six districts of Vidarbha. Government needs to have a better and robust mechanism to assess the gravity of agrarian crisis in other regions of Maharashtra. Waking up after a crisis like increased suicides / violence cannot fall under good governance.

8.5 Implementation level.

The implementation of the package has remained by and large under the aegis of government (some NGOs and private parties are involved but they are at the periphery and in secondary roles). This has meant the officialdom is completely in charge of all aspects of the implementation. That has led to (1) pressure on the machinery to perform, (2) abdication of all responsibility by local self government institutions (Panchayat Raj Institutions at all three levels) and (3) charges of bias and leakages. The packages have completely ignored the principle of decentralisation of democratic decision making as enshrined in the Panchayat Raj Act (and subsequent 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments).

This report seeks to make a slew of recommendations to rectify this situation. The study team is aware that the Panchayat Raj system is not as robust as it should be to implement all of these recommendations in the letter and spirit. However, that robustness and strength cannot come unless these bodies are entrusted with some responsibility and **authority**. Else years will pass and officialdom will continue to bemoan the fact that the panchayats cannot be entrusted with decision making because they are weak (never mind the fact that there is no evidence to prove that officials have more wisdom than panchayats). One has to cut the Gordian knot somewhere and this is as good a place to start as any.

- The Gram Panchayat should be made accountable for implementation of the packages at the village(s) level. The same responsibility must be given to the panchayat samiti (at the block) and zilla panchayat (at the district). At the village level the gramsabha must be made responsible for selection of beneficiaries and type of support to be given to the selected beneficiaries. This will ensure transparency in the process. The oversight committee (mentioned in ¶ above) can

be empowered to appoint observers for these gramsabhas to ensure fairness.

- Funds meant to be expended at the village level should be routed through the Gram Panchayat with accountability to the Gram Sabha. Why should the officialdom be in charge? It only fosters corruption and a feeling of the beneficiary being a supplicant.
- The beneficiaries must be allowed to source the material they are getting as relief, farm implements (bullocks, cart, ploughs, hoes, pumps, pipes etc), inputs (seeds, pesticides etc) and even training from a **supplier of their choice**. Government can empanel contractors and enter into rate contracts with them. These rate contracts should be widely publicised. The present system of near monopolies of some vendors merely leads to inefficiencies and corruption.

8.6 Grievance redressal.

A grievance redressal mechanism should be constituted at the tehsil level. This body should report to the oversight committee (mentioned in ¶ above). This body must be available for addressing any and all issues related to the implementation of the package in the field.

There are two mechanisms by which this body can interact with the people – the first is to be available at the tehsil level for any person

who comes with a grievance. Another mechanism is to **go to the villages on a fixed schedule and be available for the people to present their grievances**.

In either case the contact numbers / addresses or the schedule of village visits must be widely publicised.

8.7 Working out a probable solution on ground.

A holistic solution involving interventions on all the five aspects of the agrarian crisis (refer to mind map in chapter titled, *The Real Agrarian crisis and the relief packages*) viz.

1. Input level.
2. Output level.
3. Information and Knowledge level.
4. Policy level.
5. Status to agriculture.

This solution should be conducted in a cluster of 10-odd villages over a 5-year timeframe. Regular monitoring and meticulous documentation of this holistic intervention should be carried out. Once this solution is proven as a success it can be scaled up in multi-sector across state implementation.

9. Conclusion

Any human being takes the drastic step of committing suicide when (s)he feels hopeless about the situation and does not see any solution for the problems being faced. The social watch study team is of the opinion that the package should have presented hope for the farmers in Vidarbha apart from concrete measures to resolve the agrarian crisis. *Yet, despite the package suicides continue and in fact have spread to other regions in Maharashtra (sugarcane farmers committing suicides in Marathwada) hitherto suicide-free till date.* The social watch study team concludes that the package has failed to deliver hope to the farmers in Vidarbha and the measures, which are being taken by the government, seem to offer piecemeal solutions to a deep-rooted crisis... *to offer an analogy the doctor has applied first aid when the need of the hour is surgery... (akash phatala aastana thigala lavanyacha kaam chaala aahe...).*

This leads to few pertinent questions viz. what are the means available to the society to review the doctor's (government's), to continue with the analogy stated above, assessment of the ailment? What are the measures to overcome the agrarian crisis? Is anyone in the society really concerned about the agrarian crisis? What is the plan to counter the crisis that shall hit the society three years down the line? Has the government planned for this? What is the society's role in this? Do the members (individual citizens, NGOs, industry, academicians, professionals, activists and volunteers) of the society feel any responsibility regarding the agrarian crisis, which has taken a vice like grip across Maharashtra?

The situation on the ground in rural and tribal areas reflects stark haplessness in the eyes of the people. The increasing and widening disconnect between the urban and rural areas is evident. There is noticeable difference in the standard of living between the fast growing

urban areas and rapidly degenerating rural areas. The rural folk have access to sights and sounds of the urban areas through television. The urban area has no idea of what happens (nor does it care in most cases) in rural areas. Urban India is fixated on a romantic and untrue picture of rural idyll. This is what we have been brought up on and perhaps it is also convenient to think that way and not face up to reality.

The disparity amongst the two worlds is heading towards a societal crisis. The poor cannot endlessly wait to get out of the poverty trap even as their fellow countrymen in urban areas are racing ahead in terms of opportunity. We must remember that it was these types of crisis and disparity that gives rise to all the revolutions in human history.

Are we prepared for a revolution? Do we want one to happen? Or should we be taking steps to prevent one? These are issues that government will have to face in the coming years. Does it have any answers? Does it want answers?

If such questions trouble you please feel free to contact us at:

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