



The Hidden Realities: Addressing the Struggles of Today's Farmers

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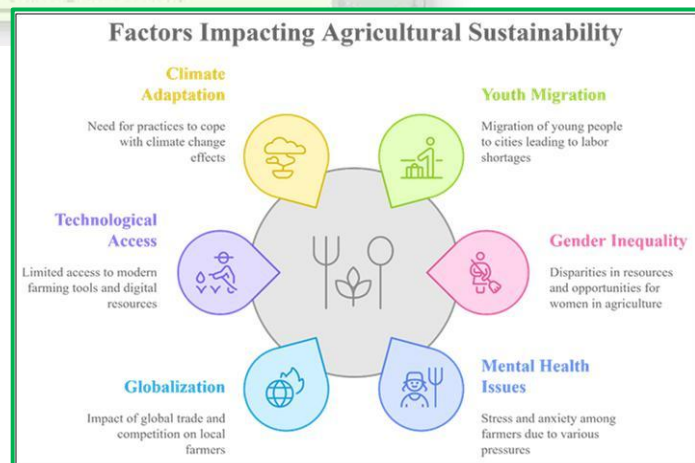
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Farmer is the back of the nation often toiling in the field with the hope of feeding millions. Agriculture farming is contributing major role in an Indian GDP. Despite their indispensable role in feeding the world. however, their lives are marketed by a series of complex and inter connected struggles many of which remain hidden behind the veil of produce market. This struggle is not only physical but are social, technological, physical, and environmental in nature. This article highlights the multiple challenges face today. By understanding these challenges that face by farmers.

Economic challenges

One of the most significant challenges farmers faces is the disparity between production costs and the prices they receive for their crops. This gap often leaves farmers in a perpetual state of financial strain.

- **High input cost:** - Farmer spending money on the seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, machinery, and irrigation from more the years. the rising of the cost of seed, chemical fertilizer, it will be a burden on the small-scale farmer who is depending on the traditional farming.
- **Low return:** - The market offers

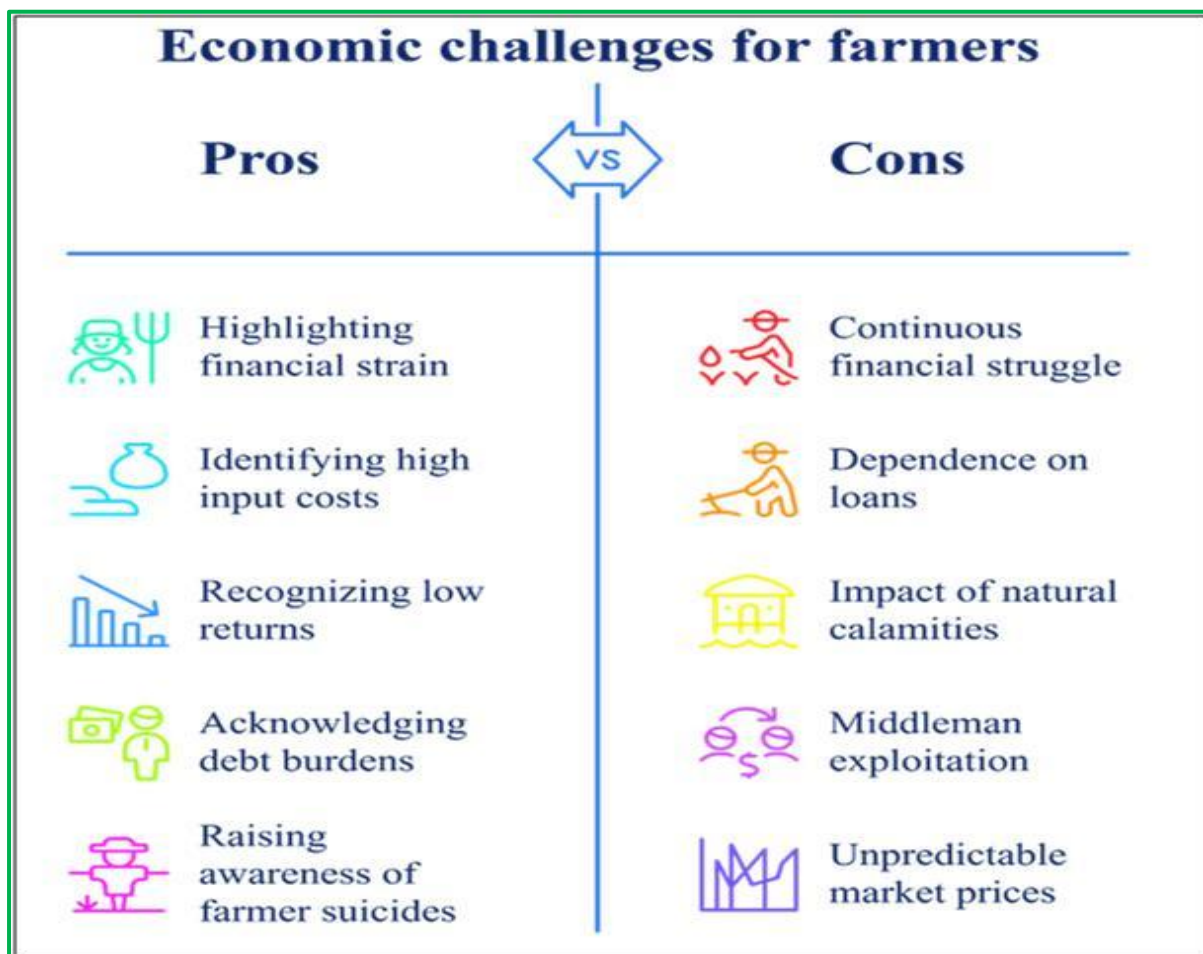


unpredictable prices for agricultural produce. Surplus harvest frequently led to a price crash, leaving farmers unable to recover their investments.

Example: In India, farmers growing onions often sell their produce for pennies per kilogram during surplus years, while consumers in cities pay exorbitant prices for the same product. The middleman-dominated supply chain amplifies this inequality.

Debt Burdens: When farmers fail to earn enough from their harvests, they often turn to loans to finance the next crop cycle. A single failed crop due to natural calamities or pest infestations can push them into a vicious cycle of debt.

- **Debt Trap:** High-interest loans from informal lenders lead to mounting debt. Inadequate income prevents repayment, worsening their financial struggles.
- **Farmer Suicides:** Many farmers, unable to cope with this stress, resort to tragic ends. For example, Maharashtra, India, reports one of the highest farmer suicide rates globally due to debt-related pressures.



Limited Access to Credit and Insurance: Smallholder farmers often lack the financial literacy or collateral required to secure institutional loans. Even when crop insurance schemes are available, delays in compensation discourage participation.

- **Example:** A rice farmer in Bangladesh who loses crops to floods may not receive insurance payouts for months, leaving them financially crippled until the next planting season.

Environmental Challenges

Impact of Climate Change: Climate change poses a significant threat to agriculture, with farmers bearing the brunt of its effects.

- **Unpredictable Weather Patterns:** Erratic rainfall, extended droughts, and sudden storms reduce crop yields.
- **Extreme Events:** Cyclones, floods, and heatwaves destroy fields and infrastructure, leaving farmers to rebuild from scratch.

Example: In Kenya, coffee farmers have reported yield reductions due to higher temperatures, which affect coffee bean quality and growth cycles.

Soil Degradation: Years of unsustainable farming practices, including overuse of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, have led to declining soil fertility and productivity.

- **Erosion:** Excessive tillage and deforestation accelerate soil erosion, reducing arable land.
- **Nutrient Depletion:** Monocropping strips the soil of essential nutrients, forcing farmers to use more synthetic inputs, which exacerbate the problem.

Water Scarcity: Agriculture accounts for 70% of global freshwater use, but water scarcity is becoming a critical issue in many regions.

- **Dependence on Rainfall:** Farmers in rain-fed agricultural regions struggle with unpredictable rainfall patterns, leading to crop failures.
- **Overextraction of Groundwater:** In areas like Punjab, India, farmers overexploit groundwater for irrigation, leading to long-term depletion.

Technological Gaps

Lack of Modern Tools: Smallholder farmers often lack access to advanced machinery, modern irrigation systems, and precision agriculture technologies that could improve productivity and reduce labour.

- **Example:** In sub-Saharan Africa, the average farmer still relies on manual tools like hand hoes and Plows, which limit productivity.

Digital Divide: While digital technologies are transforming agriculture in developed countries, many farmers in developing nations lack access to smartphones, internet connectivity, or tech literacy.

- **Limited Market Access:** Farmers without access to digital platforms cannot compare market prices, leading to exploitation by middlemen.
- **Precision Agriculture:** Technologies like drones, soil sensors, and GPS-guided machinery remain inaccessible to most small-scale farmers due to high costs.

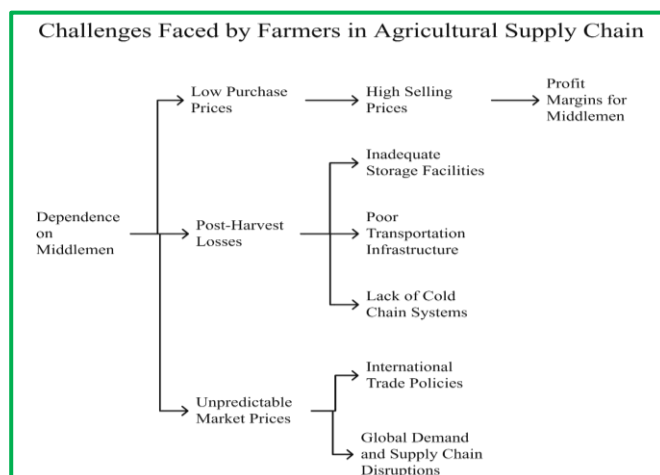
Market and Policy Constraints

Exploitation by Middlemen: Farmers often depend on middlemen to sell their produce due to the lack of direct access to markets. These middlemen purchase crops at low prices and sell them at significantly higher rates in urban markets, pocketing the majority of the profits. For instance, a farmer in India might sell vegetables at a wholesale market for minimal returns, while consumers in metropolitan cities pay a premium for the same produce.

Post-Harvest Losses: Inadequate storage facilities, poor transportation infrastructure, and lack of cold chain systems lead to significant post-harvest losses, particularly for perishable crops like fruits and vegetables. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 30-40% of food produced globally is wasted, with much of it lost during the post-harvest stage in developing countries. This results in wasted labour and resources, further deepening farmers' financial struggles.

Unpredictable Market Prices:

Farmers often lack bargaining power and are at the mercy of volatile market prices. Factors like international trade policies, global demand, and supply chain disruptions significantly affect the prices of agricultural commodities, leaving farmers with little control over their earnings. For instance, the global decline in wheat prices during certain years severely impacted farmers in exporting nations like Australia and the United States.



Social Challenges

1. Youth Migration and the Decline of the Agricultural Workforce: As agriculture becomes increasingly unprofitable, younger generations are migrating to urban areas in search of better job opportunities. This migration leaves older generations to manage the farms, often using outdated and inefficient methods. As the average age of farmers increases, there is a risk of agricultural knowledge being lost. The lack of interest in farming among youth is a global issue. In regions like Southeast Asia, Latin America, and parts of Africa, young people are moving away from farming, and as a result, agricultural labour is becoming scarcer, more expensive, and less skilled. This poses a long-term risk to food security and agricultural sustainability.

2. Gender Inequality in Agriculture: Agriculture is a sector dominated by men in many regions, yet women play a crucial role in food production and farm labour. However, gender inequality remains a significant barrier to progress. Women farmers often lack access to land ownership, financial resources, and training opportunities. In many countries, inheritance laws prevent women from owning land, and societal norms often prevent them from participating in decision-making processes regarding farming activities. This gender disparity means that women often work harder for fewer rewards, without the resources they need to improve their productivity. In India, for example, women make up around 60-70% of the labour force in agriculture but own less than 15% of the land. Bridging this gender gap is essential for improving agricultural productivity and ensuring the equitable distribution of resources.

Mental Health Crisis: The stress of financial instability, crop failures, and market volatility often leads to depression and anxiety among farmers. Rural areas typically lack adequate mental health services.

Globalization and Trade Pressures

Competition from Imported Goods: Farmers in developing countries often face stiff competition from cheaper imported products, especially when these imports are subsidized by foreign governments.

Unfavourable Trade Policies: Global trade agreements often prioritize large-scale agribusinesses, leaving small farmers vulnerable to exploitation.

Pathways to Solutions

Policy Support: Governments can support farmers by ensuring fair prices, providing subsidies for sustainable inputs, and offering robust crop insurance programs.

Technological Access

1. Lack of Access to Modern Technology: One of the key factors hindering agricultural productivity is the limited access to modern farming tools and technologies. In many developing regions, farmers continue to rely on traditional methods that are labour-intensive and inefficient. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, where the majority of farmers still use manual tools such as hoes and machetes, productivity remains low compared to regions with access to mechanized tools like tractors and harvesters. The lack of modern tools extends beyond machinery. Smallholder farmers also face difficulties in adopting precision farming technologies, such as drones, soil sensors, and GPS-guided equipment, that can optimize resource use and increase yields. These technologies are often prohibitively expensive, and the lack of infrastructure in rural areas makes it difficult for farmers to access them.

2. The Digital Divide: Another challenge is the digital divide. While digital technologies are transforming agriculture in developed countries, many smallholder farmers in the Global South have limited access to the internet, smartphones, and digital platforms. This restricts their ability to access crucial information such as weather forecasts, market prices, and best practices in crop management. Mobile apps and digital platforms have the potential to revolutionize farming by providing farmers with real-time data and connecting them directly with buyers. However, these technologies are often inaccessible due to poor internet

connectivity, high data costs, or low digital literacy. This leaves farmers vulnerable to exploitation by middlemen who manipulate market prices or withhold information about favourable selling opportunities.

Climate Adaptation: Investing in drought-resistant crops, water-efficient irrigation techniques, and sustainable farming practices can mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Market Reforms: Strengthening farmer cooperatives and direct-to-consumer platforms can reduce reliance on middlemen and increase farmers' share of profits.

Awareness and Education: Training farmers in sustainable practices, financial management, and mental health awareness can improve their resilience and well-being.

Conclusion

The silent struggles of farmers are a stark reminder of the systemic issues in agriculture that demand urgent attention. While they work tirelessly to feed the world, they often face hunger, debt, and despair themselves. Empowering farmers through policy changes, technological access, and climate adaptation is essential for a more equitable and sustainable future. It is time to honour farmers not just as "Anna data" (food providers) but as the true lifeline of our society.

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