

India's farmer-friendly federal budget attempts to alleviate farmer suicide epidemic

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Last month, [India](#) unveiled its latest federal budget. To the surprise of many, it includes a strong emphasis on farming. . . .

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. . . A cycle of drought and debt has brought great suffering to millions of Indian farmers. "Agrarian distress," . . .

It has also exacerbated an alarming epidemic of farmer suicides—a decades-long national affliction that is as complex as it is tragic and is a major threat to the country's most critical economic sector.

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. . . [Some] have implicated genetically modified cotton seeds, which require high levels of inputs, ample irrigation, and complicated cultivation techniques—all challenges for impoverished and poorly educated small farmers. Studies have indeed found that [heavy use of GMO seeds](#) can increase the risk of bankruptcy for Indian farmers. . . . Yet farmer suicides in India long precede the formal introduction of GMO crops in India in 2002.

One more possible explanatory factor—as plausible as it is delicate—is illness. [According to the NCRB](#), nearly 40 percent of farmer suicides in 2014 can be attributed to "illness" or "other causes" (possible euphemisms for mental illness). . . . one U.S. study finds that [frequent contact with pesticides](#) (which certainly applies to Indian farmers) can contribute to depression.

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. . . . Ultimately, however, there's no one single explanatory factor for such a complex and widespread tragedy.

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. . . . India should embrace modernization and urbanization, but not at the cost of neglecting its struggling rural citizenry—of which suicidal farmers are but one tragic manifestation. In this regard, India's farmer-friendly new budget. . . is a welcome development.

Read full, original post: [Down on the Farm](#)