The official asked for sexual favour in exchange of support for my case. A proposed gender resource centre at every taluka level should receive such complaints and act on them. A helpline for women farmers can also support women in distress.

Both these consultations highlighted the key concerns of the women farmers from suicide affected households. While the larger policy thrust has to be towards making agriculture a sustainable and viable proposition through robust state support, recognizing the role of women farmers in agriculture and providing them support in a critical issue needs to be taken on board. Immediate relief and rehabilitation of the women farmers from suicide affected households should become the priority agenda for the government. A detailed database of women farmers from the 14 suicide affected districts should be made for better policy and programmatic outreach. Such a database would also help in tracking and monitoring the implementation of schemes and services.

Following the two consultations, certain steps have been taken by the government towards addressing some of the demands of the consultation. In Wardha district, there is an effort to install Rural Information Centre. However budgetary provisions for the same are required to make the idea a viable one. In Marathwada, as promised by Divisional Commissioner a survey of suicide affected households was conducted. The next step would be to provide these women, access to various schemes based on the surveys.

We can’t give up even though the fate has turned against us.

We have to build our lives again—woman farmer from Vidarbha

We can’t give up even though the fate has turned against us. We have to build our lives again—woman farmer from Vidarbha

Farmers keep dying, but service people get 7th pay commission—woman farmer from Wardha district

My brother-in-law raped me for a year after my husband’s death—woman farmer from Marathwada

The official asked for sexual favour in exchange of help with my case—woman farmer from Wardha district

• Various schemes such as Sanjay Gandhi Nigaha/Yojana, widow pension schemes, sharawad yojana need to be given to the women of these households on a priority basis.
• New category of women from suicide affected households be created for accessing health services on a priority basis. Health services be made available free of cost.
• Proper implementation of rural health schemes/initiatives like the Prerna Prakalp for mental health is required.
• Fees for education of children from these households should be waived and hostels facilities should be organized for them.
• Opportunities for jobs for the young members of these households too to be explored.

Access to agricultural and irrigation schemes and livelihood opportunities

Lack of landownership has forced most of the women from these households to exit out of farming and either become labourers or look for other ways and means of employment which renders them vulnerable. Women said that they are in need of work and have not found easy to find anything in their village. It is important that livelihood schemes around farming be extended on a priority basis to these women. Agricultural schemes provide a viable alternative for the programme budget for women. This should be on a priority basis be given to women from suicide affected households and other single women. An outcome budget statement for the same needs to be issued for these areas specifically.

• MINREGA works should be implemented in these districts on a priority basis and job cards should be given to the women survivors.

• Under the pariparaish farming scheme women should be supported in organic farming and seed and other inputs for the same need to be given to them.

• For farming to become a viable activity it is important that irrigation facility is provided. Women should be given access to schemes for wells and solar/pumping engines.

• Defying, harassing and other allied activities should be supported through the different schemes that are currently available with the Agriculture department.

• Linkages with markets are also important. Women cotton farmers are unable to reach the markets, depending on the men of the household who then do not allow them to access to the hard earned money. Cotton collection too should be on the lines of sugarcane at the farm level.

• It was said that tractors too are resorting to suicides and this was evident in Yavatmal district. Under the INP women were trying to avail of schemes meant on a priority basis for suicide affected households. However, there was denial for the same.

Issues of violence and sexual harassment

Although the consultation did not bring this out as a thematic every woman who spoke in both the consultations spoke various forms of harassment they faced both at the hands of their family members as well as government officials and money lenders or even EFMs. Women were asked for sexual favours in return for services given by lower level government officials. Women also reported the violence meted out to them by their own family members and one woman also reported repeated rape for over a year now by her brother-in-law after her husband committed suicide.

The government needs to provide protection to these women who are subject to sexual harassment and violence. A proposed gender resource centre at every taluka level should receive such complaints and act on them. A helpline for women farmers can also support women in distress.

Both these consultations highlighted the key concerns of the women farmers from suicide affected households. While the larger policy thrust has to be towards making agriculture a sustainable and viable proposition through robust state support, recognizing the role of women farmers in agriculture and providing them support in a critical issue needs to be taken on board. Immediate relief and rehabilitation of the women farmers from suicide affected households should become the priority agenda for the government. A detailed database of women farmers from the 14 suicide affected districts should be made for better policy and programmatic outreach. Such a database would also help in tracking and monitoring the implementation of schemes and services.

Following the two consultations, certain steps have been taken by the government towards addressing some of the demands of the consultation. In Wardha district, there is an effort to install Rural Information Centre. However budgetary provisions for the same are required to make the idea a viable one. In Marathwada, as promised by Divisional Commissioner a survey of suicide affected households was conducted. The next step would be to provide these women, access to various schemes based on the surveys.

Key concerns of women farmers from suicide affected households of Maharashtra

Maharashtra State Women Commission
http://www.mswc.org.in

Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch (MAKAAM)
http://makam.org

Contact:
MAKAAM, Maharashtra
C/o: SOPPECOM, 16, Kale Park, Somnathwadi Road, Pudhe, Pune- 411 008
Phone: 230 2588545, 2521168 | Email: makam.maharashtra@gmail.com

Official data of National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), shows 72,656 farm suicides have taken place in Maharashtra between 1995 and 2016, 80% of them being men. This has meant that 65,312 women have been suddenly left behind to fend for themselves, and manage the home and the farm with few resources and a lot of stigma.

Marathwada has consistently reported the highest number of farm suicides in the country (NCRB data compiled from 1995–2016). Of the total farm suicides in India, 20% are in Maharashtra. Vidarbha and Marathwada are the two most affected regions of the state. The 14 districts spread across these two regions have been officially declared as suicide affected districts. The first reporting of farmer suicides came in from Vidarbha in 1995, largely a cotton growing region. However, since 1995 the numbers have grown and farm suicides are no longer restricted to the cotton growing districts of Vidarbha alone but have spread to Marathwada as well.
After my husband’s death my father-in-law told me that I should either go back to my parent’s house or I should drink the poison as well – woman farmer from Osmanabadd

Situation of women farmers from suicide affected households

The suicide of the male farmer changes the social relations within the family. As widows, women are left behind for their children, their elderly, as well as dealing with the household of debt collection. Additionally, they are also left coping with harvest failures and crop failures and the burden of expenses for education for other children, marriages of their daughters and caring to diseases among various other things. Instigation of depression, cancer, kidney troubles have been reported by women requiring medical help and counseling. The struggle becomes even more difficult as in most cases the husband was her name, an unquestionable maternal family that does bear access to the relief measures offered by the government, very often to the extent of selling crops.

To highlight these issues and concerns of women farmers from suicide affected households two committees were recently held in Vidarbha and Marathwada regions of Maharashtra. However several suicide cases have come up as a sign off issue in both the committees. In many cases women have not been able to avail of the supports schemes because land has not been transferred in their name. The government should have a priority to implement the scheme in the suicide affected areas.

Access to credit

Women spoke of several challenges they faced to receive the ex-gratia amount of Rs. One lakh that is meant for family members of suicide farmers. The first hurdle was considered as eligible as a beneficiary as per the criteria for farmer suicide. The next hurdle was to get the ex-gratia payment which often was not in the name but in the name of some member of the family. Women narrated their experiences related to getting the Rs. 35,000 cash amount, much of which often went towards paying bribes to local level officials. Women also felt that the present amount of one lakh is inadequate keeping the delays in trying to avail this amount. Pradeep Adabhoosh has through a proposal and order in 2015 increased the amount to Rs. 50,000 and additionally 5% it has increased the amount to Rs. 55,000. Government of Maharashtra could follow the laws of MP.

The other important concern raised by women was regarding the implementation of the loan and the arrangements for the women of the suicide affected households that their names are not the list for loan waivers. With old loans still against the families for farmers – the procedure for loan waiver schemes or any kind of aid should be easier for women to access. The demands made by women were:

• New category of women from farm suicide household’ be created for accessing bank credit on a priority basis.
• Crop loans to be extended to women from these families.
• Districts of the Vidarbha region should include this category and allocate budgets for their welfare.
• MISRA (Emertil) and other livelihood focused programmes should bring out their score card with relevance to the suicide affected district and implementation of various programmes for women farmers from suicide affected households.
• Maharashtra NABARD should actively support these women with their loan schemes in which women can invest in agriculture.
• Various NABARD schemes could also on a priority basis be used for women from those districts of Vidarbha specifically sericulture and dairy needs to be given on a priority basis.

Access to social security, health, Education and schemes

Vidarbha was the first social protection scheme that should have gone to the women in the first place as part of the consultation, those women had not been able to avail wadli pensions or other social protection schemes. They mentioned the several hurdles regarding procedures, paper work, burden of proof of all the above hinder their access to these schemes.

Expenses on health of their children and families, was another recurring issue discussed by the women. Many of them spoke of the disabilities that their children had which often came due to increasing expenses or worries for the health of their children. Education of their children was an onerous concern for women from Vidarbha and Marathwada. In their testimonies they said that if not any other support, the government must provide them with support for their children’s education. That they saw as their only hope!
If you gave farm land I would work very hard to provide education to my children — woman farmer from Akola district

Situation of women farmers from suicide affected households

The suicide of the male farmer changes the social relations within the family. As widows, women are left behind for securing their children’s education, their livelihood, as well as dealing with the repayment of debt collection. Although the women are also trying to cope with the challenges of farming and crop failures and the burden of the education for the education of other children, marriages of their daughters and caring to diseases among various other things. Instances of depression, cancer, kidney troubles have been reported by women requiring medical help and counseling. The struggle becomes even more difficult as it is not only the house-hold in her name, an unproper marital family that does bear to access the relief measures offered by the government, they are not given any assistance.

To highlight these issues and concerns of women farmers from suicide affected households two consultations were recently held in Vidarbha and Marathwada regions of Maharashtra. However several important issues were not discussed in the consultations that were jointly organized by the Maharashtra State Commission for Women (MSCW) and Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch (MKAM). Several organizations from Vidarbha and Marathwada regions were invited to give inputs on various events at different locations.

Based on the two consultations organised at Nagpur (22-23 February, 2016) and Aurangabad (26-27 March 2016) the policy brief highlights the issues raised by the women farmers and proposes some concrete actions that would provide immediate relief and chart a course for a more long-term strategy to address the concerns of women farmers in the region and support prevention services.

My husband’s land is still not in my name. And the credit are in my name — woman farmer from Marathwada

Key Demands from the Consultation

Transfer of land in the name of widows

There is a need for a special category of women farmers to be created. Varsa needs to be done at the tilake level, gender resource centres should be started among several “Mrs. Vipula Rajathkar, Chairperson, MSCW”

A large number of women came forward at the consultation and narrated stories of how their marital families are dispossessing them of their rights to land. They have been told to sell their plots so that the family can deal with finances by doing share-work. Many of them emphasized the need for getting their share of the land in their name so that they could get back to farming. The government needs to take this issue on a priority basis to ensure that the legal entitlements of widows and daughters are not denied. For this the legal processes of land registration, registration of legal heir, and other legal cases need to be simplified so that their entitlements are not delayed.

A detailed compilation of cases from all the districts regarding denial of registering land titles rights to be made by organizations with the help of revenue officials and other legal experts to look into specific cases: with the Divisional Commissioner office for Nagpur, Aurangabad and Akola.

All pending registration of legal heir to be made on a priority basis and special attention to be given to the women affected families so that their livelihood is not compromised.

A Gift to this effect must be issued by the Revenue Department of Government of Maharashtra. The Gift to the women affected families in the form of a concessional interest free land registration camps at the village and complete the registration in a time bound manner.

For all cases where there are legal matters a special provision for the legal aid should be set up.

Housing

“Others from the Aurangabad division would have a majority of 4000 households on 4th April to assess the situation of benefits outreach to the affected households. Implementation of pilot stage of getting 'all the loans to any woman farmer to be easily and continuously and stillly providing to the women of the concerned area’

Dr. Bhapkar, Divisional Commissioner, Aurangabad

Pradhan-Mant-Maan Yojana (PMAY) the most promising flagship programme to ensure housing for all by 2018 to have excluded women farmers from suicide affected households of Vidarbha and Marathwada region as they were not having housing on paper as a consequence in both the consultations. In many cases women have not been able to avail of the rural schemes because land for housing has not been transferred in their name. The government should have a priority basis implement the rural scheme in the suicide affected areas.

Access to credit

Women spoke of several challenges they faced to receive the ex-gratia amount of One lakh that is meant for family members of suicide farmers. The first hurdle was how to be considered as eligible as a beneficiary as per the criteria for farmer suicide. The next hurdle was to get the ex-gratia payment which often was not in the name but in the name of some male member of the family. Women narrated their experiences related to getting the 35,000 cash amount, much of which often went towards paying bribes to local level officials. Women also felt that the present amount of one lakh is inadequate keeping the delays in the try to avail this. And so Ambakad has through a permission and order in 2015 increased the amount to 50,000 and additionally it has increased the amount from 50,000 to 150,000. Maharashtra can follow on the lines of MP.

One of the important concern raised by women was regarding the implementation of the benefits announced by the government, they are unable to contact the suicide affected households so that their names are not on the list for loan waivers. With old lenders still against the family for paying the dues, the new lenders are not able to provide any relief.

The government needs to take this issue on a priority basis so that the suicide affected families are benefitted. Two important concern discussed in both the consultations was the denial of bank credit. Women who want to rebuild their lives after the colossal tragedy in many cases have to struggle to get the new loans from banks.

One important concern discussed in both the consultations was the denial of bank credit. Women who want to rebuild their lives after the colossal tragedy in many cases have to struggle to get the new loans from banks.

One important concern discussed in both the consultations was the denial of bank credit. Women who want to rebuild their lives after the colossal tragedy in many cases have to struggle to get the new loans from banks.

The government needs to take this issue on a priority basis so that the suicide affected families are benefitted. Two important concern discussed in both the consultations was the denial of bank credit. Women who want to rebuild their lives after the colossal tragedy in many cases have to struggle to get the new loans from banks.

One important concern discussed in both the consultations was the denial of bank credit. Women who want to rebuild their lives after the colossal tragedy in many cases have to struggle to get the new loans from banks.

The government needs to take this issue on a priority basis so that the suicide affected families are benefitted. Two important concern discussed in both the consultations was the denial of bank credit. Women who want to rebuild their lives after the colossal tragedy in many cases have to struggle to get the new loans from banks.

Access to Social Security, Health and Education schemes

Women in particular, have been facing unusual challenges for more than two years in accessing various schemes. They have been excluded from various schemes despite the specific categories. Some of the schemes which are targeted towards women farmers are:

• New category of women from suicide household be created for accessing bank credit on a priority basis.

• Crop loans to be extended to women from these families.

• Divisional Commissioner any district should include this category and allocate budgets for their welfare.

• MIRUM (emphasis) and other lifecycle focused programmes should bring out their special case study with reference to the suicide affected district as a part of implementation of various programmes for women farmers from suicide affected households.

• MIRUM and MKAM should actually support these women with their own limited schemes inwards which schemes women can invest in agriculture.

• Various NAMO schemes could also be prioritized on a priority basis for women from these families. Each state government of Vidarbha specifically and curiously does not need to be given on a priority basis.

Access to Social Security, Health and Education schemes

Women in particular, have been facing unusual challenges for more than two years in accessing various schemes. They have been excluded from various schemes despite the specific categories. Some of the schemes which are targeted towards women farmers are:

• New category of women from suicide household be created for accessing bank credit on a priority basis.

• Crop loans to be extended to women from these families.

• Divisional Commissioner any district should include this category and allocate budgets for their welfare.

• MIRUM (emphasis) and other lifecycle focused programmes should bring out their special case study with reference to the suicide affected district as a part of implementation of various programmes for women farmers from suicide affected households.

• MIRUM and MKAM should actually support these women with their own limited schemes inwards which schemes women can invest in agriculture.

• Various NAMO schemes could also be prioritized on a priority basis for women from these families. Each state government of Vidarbha specifically and curiously does not need to be given on a priority basis.

Access to Social Security, Health and Education schemes

Women in particular, have been facing unusual challenges for more than two years in accessing various schemes. They have been excluded from various schemes despite the specific categories. Some of the schemes which are targeted towards women farmers are:

• New category of women from suicide household be created for accessing bank credit on a priority basis.

• Crop loans to be extended to women from these families.

• Divisional Commissioner any district should include this category and allocate budgets for their welfare.

• MIRUM (emphasis) and other lifecycle focused programmes should bring out their special case study with reference to the suicide affected district as a part of implementation of various programmes for women farmers from suicide affected households.

• MIRUM and MKAM should actually support these women with their own limited schemes inwards which schemes women can invest in agriculture.

• Various NAMO schemes could also be prioritized on a priority basis for women from these families. Each state government of Vidarbha specifically and curiously does not need to be given on a priority basis.
If we have farmland, you would work very hard to provide education to children.

- woman farmer from Akola district

If we have land, you have power.

- woman farmer from Osmanabad district

Situation of women farmers from suicide affected households

The suicide of the male farmer changes the social relations within the family. As widows, women are left behind, for their children, the elderly, as well as dealing with the repayment of debt collection. Additional women are also taking care of children and crop failures, and the burden of the education for the education of children, marriage of their daughters and caring, to diseases among various other things. Instead of depression, cancer, kidney troubles have been reported by women requiring medical help and counseling. The struggle becomes even more difficult as it is in most cases the non-widow in her name, an unequalitarian marital system that denies her access to the relief measures offered by the government, instead of the provision.

To highlight these issues and concerns of women farmers from suicide affected households two consultations were recently held in Marathwada and regions of Western Maharashtra. However several complaints had been registered in these consultations that were jointly organized by the Maharashtra State Commission for Women (MSCW) and Maharashtra Lok-Satta Samiti (MLSS). Several organizations from Vidarbha and Marathwada have also expressed their views and opinions by participating in these events.

Based on the two consultations organized at Nagpur (22-23 June 2016) and Aurangabad (26-27 March 2018) the policy brief highlights the issues raised by the women farmers and proposes some concrete actions that would provide immediate relief and chart a course for a more long-term strategy to address the concerns of women farmers in the region and support prevention of suicides.

Key Demands from the Consultation

Transfer of land in the name of widows

There is need for a specific category of women farmers to be created. Varna needs to be done at the taluka level, gender resource centres should be started among several “This supports for these women.”

- Ms. Vijeeta Rathor, Chairperson, MSCW

A large number of women came forward at the consultation and narrated stories of how their marital farms are disputed and their land are not shared. They have been told to settle on their own between the two male descendents for the sake of doing yojana work. Many of them emphasized the need for getting their share of the land in their name so that they could get back to farming. The government needs to take this issue on a priority basis to ensure that the legal entitlements of widows and daughters are not denied. For this: –

A detailed compilation of cases from all the districts regarding denial of registering land titles rights to be made by organizations with the help of revenue officials and land revenue officials in the field. An executive social worker has been invited from the Department of Women and Child Development.

A GI to this effect must be issued by the Revenue Department of Government of Maharashtra. The GI will be issued only after the concerned revenue official has been given an opportunity to file a serious representation against the land registration camps at the village and complete the registration in a time bound manner.

For all cases where there are legal matters a special provision for the legal aid should be set up.

Housing

“Others from the Aurangabad division would receive a remuneration of 5000 households on 4th April to assess the situation of benefits outreach to the affected households. Implementation of gharul policy will be easy and the government will provide the people of the affected households.”

- Dr. Bhapkar, Divisional Commissioner, Aurangabad

Pradhan-Mant-Aarai Vujhe (PMAV) the most prominent flagship programme to ensure housing for all by 2019 has excluded women farmers from suicide affected households of Vidarbha and Marathwada. Many women households are finding this housing come up as a major issue in the both consultations. In many cases women have not been able to avail of the gharul scheme because land has not been transferred in their name. The government should have a priority basis implementation of the gharul scheme in the suicide affected areas.

Access to credit

Women spoke of several challenges they faced to receive the ex-gratia amount of ₹1 lakh that is meant for family members of suicide farmers. It is being proposed to consider as eligible as a beneficiary so as per the criteria for suicide farmers. The next hurdle was to get the ex-gratia payment which often was not in their name but in the name of some male member of the family. Women narrated their experiences related to getting the ₹13,500 cash amount, much of which often went towards paying bribes to local level officials. Women also felt that the present amount of one lakh is inadequate whereas the delay in trying to avail this amount. Asa Pradhan has through an order in 2015 increased the amount to ₹3,00,000 and additionally it has increased the interest rate from 10% to 15% to 30%, but Maharashtra government could follow on the lines of AP.

The other important concern raised by women was regarding the implementation of bank credit. Women of the suicide affected households said that their names are not on the list for loan waivers. With old loans still against the families and the suicide farmers the new loans from banks.

One important concern discussed in both the consultations was the denial of bank credit. Women who want to rebuild their lives after the colossal tragedy in many cases have been denied bank credits. These women have not been availing of the money that the year prior was seen as a hindrance in addition to being landless. They are thus turning to agriculture towards the districts of the suicide affected areas and are many times more vulnerable. Women thus end up being wage labourers under extreme adversity conditions. Women also spoke at length about procedural bottlenecks and problems in getting loans for households of farmers from suicide affected areas in the various schemes or any kind of aid should be made easier for women to access. The demands made by the women were:

New category of women from suicide household could be created for accessing bank credit on a priority basis.

• Crop loans to be extended to women from these families.

• Women from rural Marathwada should be included in the list of priority districts should be included in the category and allocate budgets for their welfare.

• Mission Maitri and other focused livelihood programmes should bring out their score card with reference to the suicide affected districts in the implementation of various programmes for women farmers from suicide affected households.

• Both MIM and MAM should actively support these women with their medical conditions so that new schemes with women can invest in agriculture.

• Various MAMO schemes could also on a priority basis be women from these households.

My father in law leaves me out of the house, no land in my name, still my daughter is disabled and have all the loans to pay”

- woman farmer from Ahmednagar district

Key Demand from the Consultation

Access to Social Security, Health and Education schemes

Women widows is the first social protection scheme that should have gone to the suicide affected households but part of the consultation was that it had not been able to avail widows pensions or other social protection schemes. They mentioned the several hurdles regarding procedures, paper work, burden of proof that delays their access to the schemes.

Expenses on health of their children, and families, was another recurring issue discussed by the women. Many of them spoke of the disabilities that children had which needed proper treatment and increase expenditure on the same.

Education of their children was an overriding concern for women from Vidarbha and Marathwada. In their testimonies they said if not any other support, the government must have to them of support for their children’s education. That they said was their only hope!
We can’t give up even though the fate has turned against us.
We have to build our life again. – woman farmer from Vidarbha

Key concerns of women farmers from suicide-affected households of Maharashtra

Maharashtra has consistently reported the highest number of farm suicides in the country (NCRB data compiled from 1995-2016). Of the total farm suicides in India, 20% are in Maharashtra. Vidarbha and Marathwada are the two most affected regions of the state. The 14 districts spread across these two regions have been officially declared as suicide affected districts. The first reporting of farmer suicides came in from Vidarbha in 1995, largely a cotton growing region. However, since 1995 the numbers have grown and farm suicides are no longer restricted to the cotton growing districts of Vidarbha alone but have spread to Marathwada as well.

We are still keeping our gates closed and our doors locked. We do not want to talk to anyone. We have lost our will to live, we are not interested in anything anymore. – woman farmer from Marathwada

Women keep dying, but service people get 7th pay commission. – woman farmer from Wardha district

The official asked for sexual favour in exchange of ‘helping with my case’. – woman farmer from Wardha district

My brother-in-law raped me for a year after my husband’s death – woman farmer from Marathwada

Access to agricultural and irrigation schemes and livelihood opportunities

Linkages with markets are also important. Women cotton farmers are unable to reach the markets, depending on the men of the household who then do not allow them to access to the hard earned money. Cotton collection too should be on the lines of sugarcane in the farm level.

It was seen that tribals too are resorting to suicides and this was evident in Yawatmal district. Under the IFDP women were trying to sell of schemes meant on a priority basis for suicide affected households. However, there was denial for the same. Issues of violence and sexual harassment

While the consultation did not go for this out as a thematic every woman who spoke in both the consultations spoke various forms of harassment they faced both at the hands of their family members as well as government officials and money lenders or even police. Women were asked for sexual favour in return for services given by lower level government officials. Women also reported the violence meted out to them by their own family members and one woman also reported repeated rape for over a year near her brother-in-law after her husband committed suicide.

The government needs to provide protection to these women who are subject to sexual harassment and violence. A proposed gender resource centre at every taluka level should receive such complaints and act on them. A helpline for women farmers can also support women in distress.

Both these consultations highlighted the key concerns of the women farmers from suicide affected households. While the larger policy thrust has to be towards making agriculture a sustainable and viable proposition through robust state support, recognizing the role of women farmers in agriculture and providing them support in a critical issue that needs to be taken on board. Immediate relief and rehabilitation of the women farmers from suicide affected households should become the priority agenda for the government. A detailed database of women farmers from the 14 suicide affected districts should be made for better policy and programmatic outreach. Such a data base would also help in tracking and monitoring the implementation of schemes and services.

Following the two consultations, certain steps have been taken by the government towards helping some of the demands of the consultations. In Wardha district, there is an effort to initiate Kisan Mitra Helpline. However budgetary provisions for the same are required to make the idea a workable one. In Marathwada, as promised by Devendra Chavan a survey of suicide affected households was conducted. The next step would be to provide these women, access to various schemes based on the surveys.

- Various schemes such as Sanjay Gandhi National Yogya, widow pension schemes, shramikdweep jyotra need to be given to the women of these households on a priority basis.
- New category of ‘women from suicide households’ be created for accessing health services on a priority basis. Health services be made available free of cost.
- Proper implementation of rural health schemes/initiatives like the Prerna Prakalp for support on mental health is required.
- Fees for education of children from these households should be waived and hostel facilities should be organized for them.
- Opportunities for jobs for the young members of these households too to be explored.
We can't give up even though the fate has turned against us. We have to build our life again” – woman farmer from Vidarbha

Various schemes such as Sanjay Gandhi National Park, women pension schemes, sharawad pojaya need to be given to the women of these households on a priority basis.

New category of ‘women from suicide affected households’ be created for accessing health services on a priority basis. Health services be made available free of cost. Inclusion in the arrangements is needed.

Proper implementation of rural health schemes/initiatives like the Prerna Prakalp for mental health is required.

Flexible education of children from these households should be waived and hostel facilities should be organized for them.

Opportunities for jobs for the young members of these households too to be explored.

Access to agricultural and irrigation schemes and livelihood opportunities

Lack of landownership has forced most of the women from these households to exit out of farming and either become labourers or look for other ways and means of employment which renders them vulnerable. Women said that they are in need of work and have not found any easy way to find anything in their village. It is important that livelihood schemes around farming be extended on a priority basis to these women. Agricultural schemes provide for a sustainable livelihood basis. This should on a priority basis be given to women from suicide affected households and other single women. An outcome budget statement for the same needs to be issued for these areas specifically.

MNREGS works should be implemented in these districts on a priority basis and job cards should be given to the women survivors.

Under the para-panchayat farming scheme women should be supported in organic farming and seed and other inputs for the same need to be given to them.

For farming to become a viable activity it is important that irrigation facility is provided. Women should be given access to schemes for wells and solar-electricity pumps.

Delaying festivities and other allied activities should be supported through the different schemes that are currently available with the Agriculture department.

Linkages with markets are also important. Women cotton farmers are unable to reach the markets, depending on the men of the household who then do not allow them to access the hard earned money. Cotton collection too should be on the lines of sugarcane at the farm level.

It was seen that trafficks too are resorting to suicides and this was evident in Yavatmal district. Under the IFDP women were trying to avail of schemes meant on a priority basis for suicide affected households. However, there was denial for the same.

Issues of violence and sexual harassment

Although the consultation did not go out this was a common issue women who spoke in both the consultations spoke various forms of harassment they faced both at the hands of their family members as well as government officials and money lenders or even MPs. Women were asked for sexual favours in return for services given by lower level government officials. Women also reported the violence meted out to them by their own family members and one woman also reported repeated rape for over a year near by her brother in law after her husband committed suicide.

The government needs to provide protection to these women who are subject to sexual harassment and violence. A proposed gender resource centre at every taluka level should receive such complaints and act on them. A helpline for women farmers can also support women in distress.

Both these consultations highlighted the key concerns of the women farmers from suicide affected households. While the larger policy thrust has to be towards making agriculture a sustainable and viable proposition through robust state support, recognizing the role of women farmers in agriculture and providing them support in a critical issue that needs to be taken on board. Immediate relief and rehabilitation of the women farmers from suicide affected households should become the priority agenda for the government. A detailed database of women farmers from the 14 suicide affected districts should be made for better policy and programmatic outreach. Such a data base would also help in tracking and monitoring the implementation of schemes and services.

Following the two consultations, certain steps have been taken by the government towards filling some of the demands of the consultations. In Wardha district, there is an effort to initiate Kisan Mitra Helplines. However budgetary provisions for the same are required to make the idea a workable one. In Marathwada, as promised by Chief Minister a survey of suicide affected households was conducted. The next step would be to provide these women, access to various schemes based on the surveys.

Maharashtra Women State Commission
http://www.wos.org

Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch (MKAM)
http://mkam.in/

Contact:
MKAM\nWardha\nC/o: SOPPECOM, 16, Kalp, Somwarwadi Road, Pushe, Pune-411008
Phone: 020 25868543, 25013168 | Email: mkam@mahilageet@gmail.com

Maharashtra has consistently reported the highest number of farm suicides in the country (NCRB data compiled from 1995–2016). Of the total farm suicides in India, 20% are in Maharashtra. Vidarbha and Marathwada are the two most affected regions of the state. The 14 districts spread across these two regions have been officially declared as suicide affected districts. The first reporting of farmer suicides came in from Vidarbha in 1995, largely a cotton growing region. However, since 1995 the numbers have grown and farm suicides are no longer restricted to the cotton growing districts of Vidarbha alone but have spread to Marathwada as well.

Key concerns of women farmers from suicide affected households of Maharashtra

Farmers keep dying, but service people get 7th pay commission" – woman farmer from Wardha district

“My brother-in-law raped me for a year after my husband’s death” – woman farmer from Marathwada

The official asked for sexual favour in exchange of helping with my case” – woman farmer from Wardha district

We haven’t lost our life again – woman farmer from Vidarbha

Official data of National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), shows 72,656 farm suicides have taken place in Maharashatra between 1995 and 2016, 80% of them being male. This has meant that 63,312 women have been suddenly left behind to fend for themselves, and manage the home and the farm with fewer resources and a lot of stigma.