

# The Thorny Path: Problems Faced By Small Farmers in India

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## ABSTRACT

**This paper examines the roles and challenges of small holding agriculture in India. It covers trends in agricultural growth, cultivation patterns, participation of small holding agriculture, productivity performance of small holders, linking small holders with markets including value chains, role of small holders in enhancing food security and employment generation, differential policies and institutional support for small holders and, challenges and future options for small holding agriculture including information needs. It also provides lessons from the experience of India on small holding agriculture for other countries.**

**Keywords: Small and marginal farmers, food security, livelihoods, value chains, institutions**

## INTRODUCTION

Smallholder farmers, the backbone of Indian agriculture, face many challenges that threaten their livelihoods and hinder the growth of the sector. Understanding these issues is critical to creating solutions that ensure a sustainable and equitable agricultural landscape. This essay examines the main problems faced by smallholder farmers in India, highlighting their causes and possible steps forward. Agriculture plays a central role in the Indian economy. Although it currently accounts for about one-sixth of the gross domestic product (GDP), it employs 56 percent of India's workforce. The forward and backward linkages of agricultural growth also increase the income of the non-agricultural sector. The growth of some commercial crops has significant potential to promote agricultural exports and accelerate the development of agro-industry. Thus, agriculture not only contributes to the overall growth of the economy but also reduces poverty by providing employment and food security to the majority of the country's population and is thus the most inclusive growth sector in the Indian economy. The 12<sup>th</sup> five-year plan document also says that agricultural development is an important part of a faster and more inclusive approach based on sustainable growth. The 4,444 small farmers, the backbone of Indian agriculture, face many challenges that threaten their livelihoods and hinder the growth of the sector. Understanding these issues is critical to creating solutions that ensure a

sustainable and equitable agricultural landscape. This essay explores the main problems faced by smallholder farmers in India, highlighting their causes and possible steps forward.

Small farmers, constituting over 80% of India's agricultural workforce, are the backbone of the nation's food security. Yet, their journey is fraught with challenges, pushing them towards vulnerability and impacting the overall agricultural landscape. Let's delve into the major problems plaguing their existence:

- 1. Land Constraints and Fragmentation:** The average landholding of a small farmer is minuscule, often fragmented, hindering economies of scale and efficient resource utilization. This limits adoption of modern technologies and mechanization, perpetuating traditional, less productive practices. The National Commission on Enterprises for Unorganized Sector contended that there is compelling evidence to support the idea that the prospects for the impoverished are significantly improved by the relatively effective execution of even a small package of land reforms. Regarding small and marginal farmers, their land ownership and cultivation is a barrier to resource acquisition. Tenancy security is crucial for small-holding farmers as a result. The intricacy of land relations is immense, and it has greatly added to the difficulties that real growers face. Tenants, tribal cultivators, and unregistered cultivators all have trouble obtaining institutional financing and other resources that are only accessible to farmers who own land titles.
- 2. Water Woes:** Erratic rainfall, depleting groundwater resources, and inadequate irrigation infrastructure create a constant struggle for water. Unequal access to water sources further disadvantages small farmers, impacting crop yields and income. The most important input in agriculture is water. Improving water management and irrigation are essential for improving living conditions in rural regions. Industrialization, drinking water, and urbanization all have to compete with agriculture

for water resources. As previously said, small-scale farmers rely more on ground water than large-scale farmers who have more access to canal water. In several parts of India, the groundwater table is falling. In the future, marginal and small farmers will deal with additional water-related issues. Water management will thus be essential for these farms.

3. **Financial Instability:** Access to formal credit channels is limited, forcing farmers towards exploitative moneylenders with high interest rates, leading to debt traps and pushing them into distress. Fluctuating market prices and lack of bargaining power leave them vulnerable to exploitation by middlemen, hindering fair returns.
4. **Inadequate Market Access:** Poor infrastructure, lack of market information, and dominance of middlemen lead to inefficient marketing systems. This results in post-harvest losses, low prices for produce, and limited access to profitable markets, reducing overall income.
5. **Technological Gap:** Limited awareness and access to advanced technologies and best practices hinder productivity and income. Knowledge dissemination through extension services often falls short, leaving small farmers grappling with traditional methods in a dynamic agricultural landscape. Indian diets have become more varied, moving away from grains and toward high-quality items like dairy and meat products, as well as fruits and vegetables. The rapid urbanization of the country, rising per capita income, more participation of women in urban occupations, and the effects of globalization have all contributed to the growth of the middle class and the diversity of India's cuisine. The growing middle class's interest in high-value items is seen in the rising demand for high-value processed goods. In India, the market for non-foodgrain products is expanding. In India, there is still a significant spending elasticity for non-cereal food products. In comparison to grains, it is three times higher in rural regions and more than 10 times higher in urban areas.
6. **Climate Change:** Erratic weather patterns, rising temperatures, and extreme events like floods and droughts pose a significant threat to crop yields and livelihoods. Adaptation strategies and access to climate-resilient seeds and technologies are crucial, yet often remain out of reach for small

farmers. For millions of people, notably the impoverished in India, agriculture, food security, and rural livelihoods are severely threatened by climate change. Small-holding farmers will be more negatively impacted. Farmers, fishermen, and those who depend on forests for their livelihoods—people who are already vulnerable and food insecure—are projected to suffer from the effects of climate change. Rural populations confront an immediate and rising danger of higher crop failure, animal losses, and decreased availability of marine, aquaculture, and forest goods. This risk is especially great for people living in already vulnerable areas. They would be detrimental to the livelihoods of small farmers in particular and to the security of food.

7. **Lack of Social Security:** Inadequate healthcare, limited insurance coverage, and social safety nets leave small farmers exposed to risks and uncertainties. Accidental injuries, crop failures, and health issues can plunge them into deeper financial distress.
8. **Youth Disengagement:** With limited income potential and arduous working conditions, agriculture struggles to attract the younger generation. This leads to an aging farmer population and potential long-term decline in agricultural productivity and sustainability.

**Addressing these challenges requires a multi-pronged approach:**

- **Land consolidation and improved irrigation infrastructure:** Enabling access to larger land parcels and ensuring efficient water management are crucial for enhancing productivity.
- **Financial inclusion and fair market access:** Expanding access to credit through microfinance and ensuring fair market linkages through farmer producer organizations are essential for financial stability.
- **Promoting technology adoption and knowledge dissemination:** Providing timely access to relevant information, training, and modern technologies can empower farmers to make informed decisions and improve yields.
- **Climate-resilient agriculture and social security:** Investing in climate-smart practices, providing insurance coverage, and expanding social safety nets will equip farmers to face future challenges.
- **Encouraging youth participation:** Making agriculture more attractive through income generation opportunities, skill development

programs, and modern infrastructure can incentivize youth engagement.

By addressing these issues effectively, we can pave the way for a more sustainable and equitable agricultural ecosystem, empowering small farmers and ensuring food security for the nation. This demands collective action from policymakers, researchers, extension workers, and civil society to create an environment where the backbone of Indian agriculture can thrive.

## CONCLUSIONS

The critical issues plaguing Indian agriculture today are the lack of knowledge and infrastructure, especially in rural areas. Problems with irrigation infrastructure, market infrastructure and transport infrastructure add significant costs to farmers' operations. Another problem is the lack of delivery mechanisms. There are several systems for agricultural development. We do not have effective delivery mechanisms that will result in effective relief in terms of productivity gains or cost reductions or price realization at the state level. In addition, insufficient government support exacerbates these problems. So corporate farming could be a solution. For India's agriculture sector, but it needs deep thinking and innovative better policies so that neither companies nor farmers are left behind. The role of national and state governments also needs to be clearly defined as being a joint entity creates a lot of confusion. Respected experts should study from this perspective and governments should take preventive measures. Indian agriculture sector actually requires very innovative ideas to uplift this sector. Even without mechanization, farming is difficult and a dead end. As a result, most of the children of farmers gave up farming and took up other occupations. Farmers get more money by selling their land to builders, malls and factories. This has increased pressure on farmland, requiring productivity-enhancing techniques so that dwindling farmland can feed India's billions and people in the future. Despite being one of the largest producers of agricultural products, India has very low farm productivity, averaging only 33 percent of the world's best farms. It must be increased so that farmers can be paid more for the same land with less work.

Small and marginal farmers make up the majority of the Indian farmer population, and they typically deal with the aforementioned agricultural difficulties. Farmers deal with a variety of issues in agriculture, both natural and man-made, such as soil erosion, biodiversity loss, climate change, depletion of water resources, and shortages of labor, money, and other inputs. These issues are typically caused by a lack of knowledge, a slow uptake of new technology, a lack of funding, or a disconnect between farmers and government agencies. Although there is no perfect solution for these issues, they may be somewhat

alleviated by using sustainable resource management techniques, smart farming methods, and building bridges between rural farmers, the government, and financial institutions.

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