



A REVIEW STUDY ON GOVERNMENT PLANS AND POLICIES FOR VIDARBHA AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

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ABSTRACT:

This review study systematically examines government plans and policies targeting the agricultural sector in Vidarbha, Maharashtra, from 2005 to 2025, with specific emphasis on their impact on farmers' livelihoods. The region, comprising 11 districts, has witnessed sustained policy intervention in response to chronic agrarian distress, farmer suicides, and productivity challenges. This paper maps major central and state schemes-including loan waivers, crop insurance (PMFBY), irrigation projects (Gosikhurd, PMKSY), rural employment (MGNREGA), land reforms, and disaster management-and evaluates their documented outcomes on farmer income, debt burden, agricultural productivity, and livelihood security. Employing desk-based secondary analysis of government data, CAG audits, academic research, and media reports, the study identifies critical evidence gaps and proposes a structured RTI framework to address data limitations. Findings reveal mixed outcomes: while some schemes improved access to credit and insurance, implementation challenges, delayed disbursements, and inadequate monitoring weakened impact on ground-level farmer welfare. The paper concludes with evidence-based policy recommendations for enhanced transparency, district-level impact assessment, and farmer-centric scheme redesign.

Keywords : India, Maharashtra, Vidarbha agriculture, government policies, loan waivers, crop insurance, PMFBY, Gosikhurd project, PMKSY, MGNREGA, farmer suicides, debt burden,

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Executive Summary

This comprehensive review documents two decades of government agricultural policy interventions in Vidarbha, assessing their real-world impact on farmers' livelihoods. Key policies analyzed include:

- Crop Insurance (PMFBY, earlier NAIS)
- Irrigation Projects (Gosikhurd Dam, PMKSY micro-irrigation)
- MGNREGA rural employment guarantees
- Land tenancy reforms

While policy intent has been strong—debt relief, income support, irrigation access, employment security—actual outcomes remain uneven. CAG audits highlight implementation gaps, delayed fund disbursements, and poor beneficiary targeting. Farmer income data is fragmentary, suicide rates remain elevated in crisis years, and irrigation potential created often lags behind promised capacity. District-level granularity is severely lacking across most schemes, necessitating RTI requests to access implementation data.

Research Methodology :

The Vidarbha region of Maharashtra, comprising 11 districts across Nagpur and Amravati divisions, has been at the epicenter of India's agrarian crisis for over two decades. Characterized by:

- Rain-fed cotton monoculture
- Declining soil fertility
- Erratic monsoons
- High input costs
- Volatile market prices
- Crushing debt burdens

Vidarbha's farming community has faced acute distress manifested most tragically in recurring waves of farmer suicides.

Government response—both central and state—has been multi-pronged: debt relief packages, crop insurance expansion, major irrigation infrastructure investment, rural employment

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guarantees, land reform initiatives, and disaster management systems. Yet despite substantial financial outlays and policy announcements, questions persist about actual impact on the ground.

Rational of study aims to:

Document comprehensively all major government agricultural policies and schemes affecting Vidarbha from 2005 to 2025.

Assess available evidence on their impact on farmers' livelihoods—income, debt, productivity, diversification, resilience.

Mapping critical data gaps at district, scheme, and beneficiary levels.

Propose a structured RTI framework to access non-public implementation and outcome data.

Provide evidence-based recommendations for policy redesign focused on farmer welfare.

Comparative evaluation of scheme objectives versus documented outcomes.

Evidence gap mapping to highlight missing district-level and beneficiary-level data.

Research Consequences :

. Debt Relief and Loan Waivers

- 2006 Prime Minister's Relief Package: Targeted cotton farmers with debt restructuring.

- 2008 Agricultural Debt Waiver and Debt Relief Scheme: Provided partial relief but excluded many small/marginal farmers.

- 2017 & 2020 Loan Waivers (State-led): Political announcements with uneven implementation.

Statement of problems :

Document comprehensively all major government agricultural policies and schemes affecting Vidarbha from 2005 to 2025. Assess available evidence on their impact on farmers' livelihoods—income, debt, productivity, diversification, resilience. Map critical data gaps at district, scheme, and beneficiary levels. Propose a structured RTI framework to access non-public implementation and outcome data. Provide evidence-based recommendations for policy redesign focused on farmer welfare.

Objectives of study :

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1. **Document comprehensively** all major government agricultural policies and schemes affecting Vidarbha from 2005 to 2025
2. **Assess available evidence** on their impact on farmers' livelihoods-income, debt, productivity, diversification, resilience
3. **Map critical data gaps** at district, scheme, and beneficiary levels
4. **Propose a structured RTI framework** to access non-public implementation and outcome data
5. **Provide evidence-based recommendations** for policy redesign focused on farmer welfare

Scope of the Study & Limitations :

1. **Scope:** The study focuses on Maharashtra, with special emphasis on Vidarbha Maharashtra. Government interventions in Vidarbha's agricultural sector over two decades reveal a paradox: strong policy intent but weak implementation. While loan waivers, crop insurance, and irrigation projects provided temporary relief, structural challenges debt cycles, climate vulnerability, and market volatility—remain unresolved. A farmer-centric, transparent, and adaptive policy framework is essential to transform Vidarbha's agrarian landscape and secure livelihoods sustainably.

2.Limitations :

- No primary field research or farmer interviews (beyond project scope)
- District-level granular data largely inaccessible without RTI
- Beneficiary-level outcome data not publicly available for most schemes
- Long-term impact studies (5+ years post-intervention) rare
- Scheme-level expenditure vs. allocation data incomplete

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This is a desk-based, secondary data review employing systematic search protocols, multi-source triangulation, and transparent gap identification.

Data Sources & Analysis:

Primary Government Sources:

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- Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare (scheme guidelines, annual reports)
- Maharashtra Government portals (Directorate of Agriculture, Water Resources Department)
- CAG performance audit reports
- NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau) farmer suicide data
- PMFBY portal (crop insurance enrolment and claims)
- MGNREGA portal (employment generation data)
- NITI Aayog Aspirational Districts dashboards

Secondary Sources:

- Peer-reviewed journals (Economic & Political Weekly, Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics)
- Research institutions (ICRISAT, NABARD, IGIDR)
- Think tanks (NCAER, PRS India, Centre for Policy Research)
- Credible media (The Hindu, Indian Express, Down to Earth)

Review Of Study

Agrarian Crisis in Vidarbha: Previous Research

Academic literature on Vidarbha agriculture is dominated by studies on farmer suicides. Mishra (2006), Behere et al. (2007, 2011), and Dongre et al. (2011) documented the psychological, economic, and social dimensions of the crisis, linking suicides to debt, crop failure, family stress, and inadequate institutional support. These studies established that Vidarbha's suicide rates significantly exceed national averages, with cotton farmers disproportionately affected.

Economic analyses by Deshpande and Arora (2010) and TISS (2005) highlighted structural factors: dependency on rain-fed cotton, lack of crop diversification, volatile global cotton prices, rising input costs (seeds, pesticides, fertilizers), and exploitative credit markets dominated by private moneylenders charging usurious rates.

Government Policy Evaluations:

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The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) conducted performance audits of the 2006 Prime Minister's Relief Package, finding significant implementation shortcomings: delayed fund release, poor targeting of actual distressed farmers, inadequate coordination between central and state agencies, and absence of outcome monitoring (CAG, 2008). The report concluded that despite Rs 3,750 crore allocation, tangible impact on farmer distress was limited.

NABARD's periodic assessments of agricultural credit and insurance schemes noted high enrolment in PMFBY (Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana) post-2016, but also documented claim settlement delays, disputes over loss assessment, and farmer dissatisfaction with payout adequacy.

ICRISAT's Village Dynamics in South Asia (VDSA) longitudinal studies provided rare household-level income data for select Vidarbha villages, revealing income volatility, chronic indebtedness, and limited gains from government schemes due to exclusion errors and bureaucratic barriers.

Irrigation and Productivity Studies

Research on Gosikhurd irrigation project by Kulkarni et al. (2015) and government reviews documented persistent delays, cost overruns (from Rs 372 crore to Rs 25,972 crore), and incomplete canal systems. While designed to irrigate 2.5 lakh hectares, actual command area development lags significantly.

Micro-irrigation studies (Narayanamoorthy, 2010; Palanisami et al., 2011) showed yield gains of 20-40% for cotton under drip irrigation, yet adoption remains below 15% in Vidarbha due to high upfront costs, lack of technical support, and fragmented landholdings.

Gaps in Existing Literature

Most studies are either sector-specific (irrigation or insurance) or focus on crisis periods (2005-2008 suicide peak). Comprehensive, longitudinal assessments covering multiple schemes and their cumulative impact on farmer livelihoods are rare. District-level data is almost entirely absent from published research. Implementation tracking, beneficiary-level outcomes, and long-term welfare impacts remain under-researched due to data access barriers.

Methodology

Research Design



This is a desk-based, secondary data review employing systematic search protocols, multi-source triangulation, and transparent gap identification.

Data Sources

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- Maharashtra Government portals (Directorate of Agriculture, Water Resources Department)
- CAG performance audit reports
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Secondary Sources:

- Peer-reviewed journals (Economic & Political Weekly, Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics)
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Government Agricultural Policies in Vidarbha (2005-2025): Comprehensive Mapping

1. Crop Insurance Schemes

National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (NAIS) / Modified NAIS

Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) - 2016 onwards



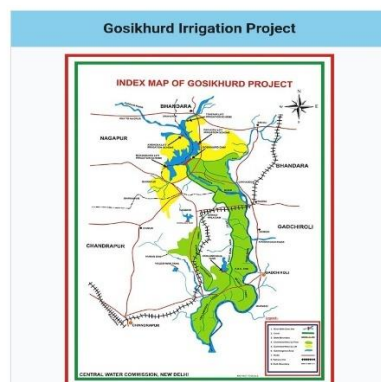
- **Impact on Livelihoods:**

- Provides partial compensation for crop loss
- Financial cushion during drought years (2015-16, 2018-19)
- Does not address underlying productivity or income issues

2. Irrigation Infrastructure Development

Gosikhurd National Irrigation Project

1984 (pre-study period, but major work 2005-2025)



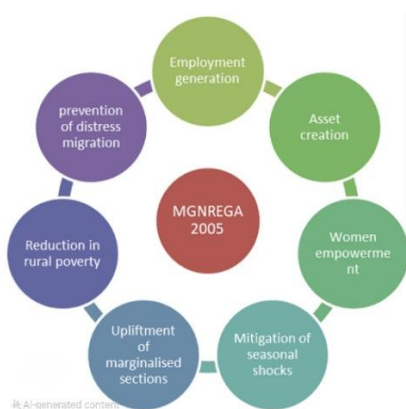
- **Challenges:**

- Persistent delays (railway crossing, land disputes, fund allocation)
- Cost overruns (70x original estimate)
- Incomplete canal network limiting farmer access

- **Impact on Farmers:**

- Where operational: shift from rain-fed to irrigated crops possible
- Increased rabi season cultivation
- Productivity gains documented in command areas but data incomplete

3. Rural Employment and Livelihood Security



Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)

- Launched nationally: 2005; Extended to Vidarbha: 2006
- Guarantee: 100 days of wage employment per rural household **Implementation in Vidarbha** All 11 districts covered Major works: Water conservation, rural roads, land development ,Peak demand during agricultural lean season (May-October)
- **Impact on Farmer Livelihoods:**
 - Provides income support during crop failure/drought
 - Asset creation (farm ponds, bunds) enhances agricultural productivity
 - Reduces distress migration
 - Empowers women (30%+ participation)

4.Land and Tenancy Reforms



Maharashtra Tenancy and Agricultural Lands (Vidarbha Region) Act, 1958 Governs tenant farmer rights in 6 Vidarbha districts Provides for tenant-to-owner conversion (Class II to Class I land) **2018 Ordinance: Tenant Farmer Land Rights** Announcement: 2018

Impact on Farmers:

- Legal ownership improves credit access
- Security of tenure encourages long-term investment in land
- Emotional and social dignity for formerly landless farmers

Policy Recommendations: Evidence-Based and Farmer-Centric

1. Immediate Data Transparency and RTI Execution
2. Establish Farmer Welfare Monitoring Dashboard
3. Accelerate Irrigation Infrastructure Completion
4. Reform Crop Insurance for Faster, More Adequate Settlements
5. Strengthen MGNREGA Implementation
6. Expand and Support Tenancy Reforms

CONCLUSION

Two decades of government intervention in Vidarbha agriculture reveal a paradox: substantial policy attention and financial outlays coexist with persistent farmer distress. While schemes like MGNREGA, PMFBY, and irrigation projects have provided some relief,

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fundamental challenges remain-chronic indebtedness, productivity stagnation, inadequate market access, and continued farmer suicides.

This review identifies critical evidence gaps-particularly district-level implementation data and long-term outcome measures-that prevent accurate assessment of policy effectiveness. The RTI framework proposed here offers a pathway to transparency and accountability.

For policies to meaningfully improve farmers' livelihoods, several shifts are essential:

1. **From crisis relief to structural transformation:** Move beyond loan waivers and short-term packages to long-term investments in irrigation, diversification, and market infrastructure.
2. **From fragmented schemes to integrated support:** Create unified farmer welfare systems linking credit, insurance, extension, and markets.
3. **From opaque implementation to transparent monitoring:** Establish public dashboards, independent evaluations, and farmer participation in scheme design.
4. **From state-centric to farmer-centric design:** Prioritize farmer voices, needs, and feedback in policy formulation and implementation.

Vidarbha's farmers deserve more than perpetual crisis management. They require-and the evidence demands-a comprehensive, evidence-based policy framework that delivers sustained livelihood security, dignity, and prosperity.

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