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Tenant Farmers Study exposes their dire situation in Andhra Pradesh

Only 9.6% of tenants are receiving CCRC cards; Only 3% of landless tenants receiving Rythu Bharosa; Owner signature the biggest hurdle to receiving CCRC

Rythu Swarajya Vedika releases First Report of its extensive state-wide survey of nearly 4000 tenant farmers in 9 districts

Rythu Swarajya Vedika (RSV) released Part 1 of the report of its extensive study of tenant farmers in Andhra Pradesh, at a Roundtable meeting in Vijayawada. Key members of the Rythu Swarajya Vedika team who conducted the study took part in the meeting and shared the findings, including Vissa Kirankumar, C.Bhanuja, Gadi Balu, B. Kondal, Kanneganti Ravi and various district representatives. The report was released by Prof. D. Narasimha Reddy, eminent economist who was a member of A.P. government's Prof. Radhakrishna Commission of 2014 and Prof. Jayati Ghosh Commission of 2004. About 20 tenant farmers from various districts participated in the meeting and shared about their problems. The meeting was attended by senior leaders of various farmer organizations.

About the study: The study was conducted during the months of January and February 2022, covering 9 districts – Visakhapatnam, East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna, Guntur, Prakasam, YSR Kadapa, Anantapur and Kurnool. The study was based on door to door survey in selected villages, designed to reach every single tenant farmer in the village. The present report is based on survey of 3,855 tenant farmers in 31 gram panchayats – perhaps the largest number of direct interviews of tenant farmers conducted in the state. Each tenant farmer answered a detailed questionnaire regarding their situation and whether they have received Crop Cultivator Rights Cards (CCRC), the reasons for not receiving, what benefits were received by CCRC holders, in particular, whether they received Rythu Bharosa.

Main findings:

Part-I of the report focused on state-level analysis of the implementation of Crop Cultivator Rights Act, 2019, and the inclusion of tenant farmers in government schemes including Rythu Bharosa, Interest-free crop loans, Disaster Compensation, Crop Procurement, etc.

The main findings from the Part-I of the study report are:

1. Tenant farmers are facing a dire situation in all districts. In fact, on the same day of our survey, a tenant farmer committed suicide in Nedunuru village, Ainavilli mandal, E. Godavari district. On Feb 12, 2021, Isukupatla Satyanarayana, a tenant farmer, had suffered crop loss in the past 3 years. Particularly in Kharif 2021, he lost the entire paddy crop due to heavy rains and flooding. However, the owner was insisting that he should pay the rent of 30 bags of paddy, and this led to his committing suicide. His case illustrates the situation of majority of the tenant farmers.
2. Tenant farmers are deeply indebted with an average debt of about Rs. 2 lakhs each. They are facing the burden of large land rents from Rs.20,000 per acre to Rs.1.2 lakhs per acre in certain crops, and up to 32 bags of paddy in the coastal districts.
3. The number of tenant farmers is quite high even in districts like Anantapur, Kadapa, Visakhapatnam where the government estimates of tenancy is very low. While the agriculture

department estimates a total of 16 lakh tenant farmers in the state, the actual number is much higher, and the estimate of 24.25 lakh tenant farmers from the Radhakrishna Commission report (2015) is closer to the reality.

4. Since we studied every tenant farmer in the survey villages, only 364 out of the 3855 tenant farmers received CCRC cards, i.e. only 9.6% of the actual tenant farmers. The figure was only 8.1% in 2020 and 6.1% in 2019. In contrast, in 2019, 17.7% of the tenants received LEC cards under the earlier 2011 Act before it was repealed.

5. The biggest obstacle to receiving CCRC card is the requirement of the 2019 Act that owner signature should be obtained. Land owners are highly reluctant to place signature on the CCRC card for various reasons, and the tenants or the village officials are not in any position to convince the land owners, as envisaged by the 2019 Act.

6. Even among the tenants who received CCRC, 59% did not receive any kind of benefit. Only 3% of the CCRC holders received individual crop loans despite the Act stating the Bankers Obligation to issue crop loans to CCRC holders. Another 5% of the CCRC holders received group loans as part of Rythu Mitra Groups. Only 17% received Rythu Bharosa and only 1% received disaster compensation for crop loss.

7. Out of the 1828 landless tenants who were studied, only 210 received CCRC and only 63 received Rythu Bharosa based on CCRC. This means that despite the well publicized promise of the government to extend Rythu Bharosa to landless tenant farmers, only 3% of the landless tenants are receiving Rythu Bharosa.

8. There is a large regional variation in the implementation of CCRC Act. In one group of districts, (Group 1) comprising of East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna and Guntur, there is a high degree of awareness among the tenants about the CCRC cards and 69% reported obtaining owner's signature as the biggest hurdle. In the other group of districts (Group 2) comprising of Visakhapatnam, Prakasam, YSR Kadapa, Anantapur and Kurnool, there is high degree of lack of awareness about the CCRC cards. The local officials have conducted very little awareness campaigns about the CCRC Act. Consequently, an astonishing 66% of the tenants in this Group 2 have never heard of the CCRC card. In Anantapur district, the lack of awareness was found in 86% of participants, whereas in West Godavari district, only 9% were not aware of CCRC.

9. More than 90% of the tenant farmers reported that they suffered severe crop loss in at least one out of the past 3 years. But only 1% of the tenant farmers received any disaster compensation. This played a big role in pushing tenant farmers into debt.

The main solutions proposed by the study report based on the findings and discussions with tenants and land owners are:

A. The Crop Cultivator Rights Act, 2019 should be amended to remove the requirement of owner signature for obtaining CCRC card. The village level officials should be responsible for verification of the land lease based on Gram Sabha. The information of which tenant farmer is cultivating which land in the village is a publicly known and verifiable information.

B. The government should undertake a high visibility campaign to assure the land owners that their land rights are not under threat, and that the government is determined to ensure that all benefits of schemes reach the tenant farmers.

C. The restrictions in the Rythu Bharosa to determine eligibility of landless tenants should be modified so that more landless tenants will receive the benefit.

D. The government should work out an effective mechanism with the Banks to extend crop loans to all the tenant farmers based on CCRC. For those who do not have CCRC, group loan mechanism may be extended. The government should establish a Credit Guarantee Fund for tenant farmers to provide a financial cushion for the banking system.

E. The government should extend special benefits to tenant farmers going beyond those available to all farmers. In effect, the current situation of exclusion of tenant should be reversed.

For more information:

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