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# It's official: Govt relief for crop-loss is Rs 7

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BANGALORE: Guess how much compensation some farmers in Bidar received from the Karnataka government for their loss of crop last year? A paltry Rs 7!

Worse, the government gave them cheques for amounts that did not even cover the bus fare required for farmers to go and encash them at the district or taluk headquarters, a study conducted by the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bangalore, has revealed.

The study, conducted by a two-member team comprising A.R. Vasavi of the Institute's Sociology unit and P.K. Shetty, who studied the ecological dimensions of the crisis. The report, which will soon to be submitted to the government, has exposed the government's apathy in dealing with the crisis in Bidar district where several farmers committed suicide due to the loss of crops.

"When crops are lost due to unseasonal rains or outbreak of pests, farmers are left with large debts, the re-payment of which is beyond their reach. Unable to bear humiliation from the money-lenders, farmers end their lives," Ms

## WHAT NIAS WANTS

- ▶ Review agricultural policies and programmes, especially where agricultural practices are promoted without attention to ecological drawbacks.
- ▶ Regulate agri-business agencies in terms of quality of goods sold and their links of credit to sales of goods. Make registration and inspection mandatory in the cultivators' interest.
- ▶ Strengthen the institutional credit facility for farmers to prevent them from approaching private lenders who charge higher rates of interest.
- ▶ Broadbase agricultural knowledge dissemination. Literature of know-how and pesticides must be printed in the local language.

Vasavi told *The Times of India*.

In many villages, the farmers received cheques for less than Rs 10. One farmer who received a cheque for Rs 7 from the government told the study team that he had promptly posted the cheque back to Chief Minister J.H. Patel. Predictably, a majority of the farmers did not take the trouble to encash the cheques.

The study has found that the suicides resulted from a combination of crises — ecological, eco-

nomical and social — and one of the primary reasons for the distress was the improper dissemination of agricultural knowledge and practices.

On the supply of spurious seeds, which was one of the main reasons that led to the suicides, the study team found there was absolutely no supervision or regulation on pesticide dealers and agents in the villages. It was found that though the pesticide dealers and agents are required to have their agencies registered, many were operating without a valid licence.

Ms Vasavi said: "There has been no measure to verify the credibility of the companies or brands supplying unreliable products." The absence of institutional credit has resulted in the mushrooming of "financial corporations" which exploited farmers by lending loans at whopping rates of 40 to 50 per cent interest per annum.

Even in small villages, there are shops and houses that have boards stating they are financing institutions and most cultivators who are unable to procure loans from cooperatives or banks depend on these agencies for both agricultural and non-agricultural monetary requirements, the study said.