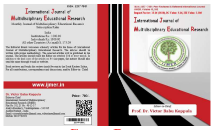
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PERSPECTIVES OF FARMERS' SUICIDES IN WARANGAL DISTRICT: A SOCIO-ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Farmer suicides have emerged as a significant socio-economic issue in India, reflecting the deep-rooted challenges faced by the agricultural community. The present study examines the causes of agrarian distress and farmers’ perceptions regarding the factors contributing to farmer suicides. The study was conducted among 120 respondent farmers selected from eight villages across four mandals. Primary data were collected through field surveys and analyzed using percentage analysis. The findings reveal that small and marginal farmers constitute the majority of the farming population. Indebtedness, crop failure, low market prices, high input costs, and irrigation problems were identified as major causes of agrarian distress. Farmers perceived debt burden and crop losses as the leading reasons behind farmer suicides, along with market uncertainty, family responsibilities, and psychological stress. The study also highlights that awareness of government welfare schemes among farmers remains limited, with many respondents having only partial knowledge of available benefits. Farmers suggested measures such as debt relief, timely crop loans, better Minimum Support Prices, effective crop insurance, and improved irrigation facilities to reduce agricultural distress. The study concludes that addressing farmer suicides requires integrated efforts focusing on financial support, risk management, market stability, and improved access to government schemes.

Keywords: Farmer suicides, Agrarian distress, Indebtedness, Crop failure, Agricultural credit, Small and marginal farmers, Government welfare schemes, Crop insurance, Market uncertainty, Rural livelihoods.

Introduction

Agriculture remains the backbone of the rural economy in India and provides livelihood opportunities to a significant proportion of the population. Despite its importance, the agricultural sector has been facing numerous challenges such as declining profitability, rising cultivation costs, indebtedness, climate uncertainties, fluctuating market prices, and inadequate institutional support. These challenges have adversely affected the socio-economic conditions of farmers, particularly small and marginal farmers. Over the years, farmers' suicides have emerged as a serious social and economic issue in several parts of India. Telangana, including Warangal district, has witnessed instances of agrarian distress resulting from financial hardships and crop failures.

Historical Perspective of Farmer Suicides in India

Farmer suicides in India have emerged as a major socio-economic concern since the late twentieth century. Although agrarian distress has deep historical roots, systematic documentation of farmer suicides began only in the 1990s. India remains largely dependent on agriculture, with nearly half of its workforce engaged in farming and related activities. Consequently, crises affecting agriculture have significant implications for rural livelihoods.

The origins of agrarian distress can be traced back to the colonial period. During the nineteenth century, British land revenue policies imposed heavy taxes on cultivators, often irrespective of crop yields or climatic conditions. Farmers frequently relied on moneylenders to meet tax obligations, resulting in widespread indebtedness. Economic hardship among cotton cultivators in western India contributed to the Deccan Riots of 1875–1877, one of the earliest organized protests against exploitative rural credit systems. In response, the colonial government introduced the Deccan Agriculturists’ Relief Act of 1879, although its implementation was limited and region-specific.

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Studies conducted during the post-independence period also highlighted the connection between agricultural conditions and suicide rates. Research in Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh during the 1960s–1990s identified factors such as crop losses, indebtedness, low productivity, and easy access to pesticides as contributors to rural suicides. However, these incidents received limited national attention at the time.

The issue gained prominence in the mid-1990s when journalists and researchers began reporting increasing numbers of farmer suicides, particularly in states such as Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Punjab, and later Telangana. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) started separately recording farmer suicide statistics in 1995, enabling systematic analysis of the problem. Between 1995 and 2014, more than 296,000 farmers died by suicide. From 2014 to 2022, an additional 100,000 deaths were reported among farmers and agricultural workers.

Several explanations have been proposed for the persistence of farmer suicides. Scholars point to rising cultivation costs, declining profitability, crop failures, inadequate irrigation, fluctuating market prices, and increasing debt burdens. Dependence on informal credit sources, delays in institutional support, and weaknesses in agricultural policies have further intensified rural distress. Social pressures, family responsibilities, and mental health challenges also contribute to the vulnerability of farmers facing economic uncertainty.

Despite government interventions such as loan waivers, crop insurance schemes, minimum support prices, and rural welfare programs, farmer suicides remain a significant challenge. According to NCRB data, 11,290 individuals associated with the farming sector died by suicide in 2022, including both cultivators and agricultural labourers. The continuing occurrence of these deaths highlights the need for comprehensive reforms addressing economic, institutional, and social dimensions of agrarian distress.

Warangal district is predominantly agrarian, with a large number of households depending directly or indirectly on agriculture. Farmers in the district cultivate crops such as paddy, cotton, maize, and chilli, which are highly vulnerable to climatic fluctuations and market risks. Increasing dependence on credit, rising input costs, and uncertain returns have intensified economic stress among farming households. Understanding the perceptions of farmers regarding the causes, consequences, and preventive measures of suicides is important for developing effective policy interventions. The present study attempts to examine farmers' perspectives on the factors contributing to suicides, the socio-economic conditions of farming households, and possible measures to reduce agrarian distress in Warangal district.

Review of literature

Several studies have examined the phenomenon of farmers' suicides in India. Mishra (2008) observed that indebtedness and crop failures were major determinants of suicides among farmers in agrarian regions. Deshpande (2010) highlighted the role of institutional credit shortages and dependence on private moneylenders in aggravating rural distress. Reddy and Mishra (2011) found that fluctuations in agricultural prices and increasing production costs significantly affected farmers' income security. Nagaraj (2012) emphasized that socio-economic vulnerabilities such as small landholdings, lack of irrigation facilities, and poor access to markets contributed to psychological stress among farmers. According to Sainath (2014), commercialization of agriculture and declining public investment in the agricultural sector increased the risks faced by farming households. Kumar and Gupta (2017) reported that mental health issues associated with economic insecurity were often neglected in policy discussions on farmers' suicides.

Recent studies have stressed the need for comprehensive support systems including crop insurance, income stabilization measures, debt relief, and counseling services. Although numerous studies have examined farmers' suicides at the national and state levels, district-level analyses focusing on farmers' perceptions remain limited. Therefore, the present study seeks to bridge this gap by examining the perspectives of farmers in Warangal district.

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Research Problem

Farmers' suicides continue to be a major concern in rural India despite various governmental interventions aimed at improving agricultural sustainability and farmer welfare. Warangal district has experienced recurring agrarian distress due to indebtedness, crop losses, market instability, and climatic uncertainties. While official statistics provide information on the incidence of suicides, limited research has focused on understanding farmers' perceptions regarding the underlying causes and possible preventive measures. Therefore, there is a need to examine the socio-economic factors influencing farmers' distress and assess farmers' views on policies and support systems. This study addresses this gap by analyzing the perspectives of farmers in Warangal district.

Objectives:

1. To examine farmers' perceptions regarding the socio-economic factors contributing to farmers' suicides in Warangal district.
2. To identify measures and policy interventions suggested by farmers for reducing agrarian distress and preventing suicides.

Methodology:

The study is based on primary data collected from farmers in Warangal district through a structured interview schedule. A sample of 120 farmers may be selected using simple random sampling from selected villages. Information relating to socio-economic characteristics, indebtedness, crop losses, institutional support, and perceptions regarding farmers' suicides may be collected through field surveys. Descriptive statistical tools such as frequency, percentage, and simple averages are used to analyze the data. The findings are presented through tables and interpreted to understand the major causes of agrarian distress and possible solutions from the farmers' perspective.

The present study is based on primary data collected from farmers in Warangal district of Telangana. A multistage sampling technique was adopted for selecting the respondents. In the first stage, Warangal district was purposively selected due to its agrarian importance and the prevalence of issues related to farmers' distress. In the second stage, selected mandals were chosen based on the concentration of agricultural activities. In the third stage, villages were selected randomly from the chosen mandals namely Parvathagiri, Geesukonda, Narsampet and Sangem in Warangal district. Finally, farmers were selected through simple random sampling from the identified villages such as Annaram and Enugallu in Parvathagiri mandal, Gorrekunta and Kommala in Geesukonda mandal, Maheswaram and Lankepalli in Nearsampet and in Sangem mandal Mondrai and Sangem villages. In each village equal 15 sample respondent farmers were selected.

The collected data were classified, tabulated, and analyzed using simple statistical tools such as frequencies, percentages, and descriptive analysis to draw meaningful conclusions regarding the perspectives of farmers on suicides in Warangal district.

Table – 1 Village and Mandal wise Distribution of the Respondent Farmers

Mandal	Villages Selected	Sample Farmers	Percent
Parvathagiri	Annaram – 15 Enugallu – 15	30	25.0
Geesugonda	Gorrekunta – 15 Kommala– 15	30	25.0
Narsampet	Maheswaram – 15 Lankepalli – 15	30	25.0

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Sangem	Mondrai – 15 and Sangem – 15	30	25.0
Total	**8**	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field Study

Table 1 shows the distribution of 120 respondent farmers selected from eight villages across four mandals. The sampling design reflects an equal representation from each mandal, with 30 farmers drawn from two villages in every mandal. Specifically, Parvathagiri mandal includes Annaram and Enugallu, Geesugonda comprises Gorrekunta and Kommala, Narsampet covers Maheswaram and Lankepalli, while Sangem includes Mondrai and Sangem villages. Each mandal contributes 25 percent of the total sample, ensuring a balanced distribution of respondents across the study area. Likewise, an equal number of 15 farmers were selected from each village, minimizing the possibility of overrepresentation of any particular locality. This proportional allocation enhances the comparability of responses among the selected mandals and villages. The uniform sampling framework strengthens the reliability of the study by providing equal weight to all geographical units. Such a distribution is particularly useful for examining variations in farming practices, socio-economic conditions, and agricultural challenges across different locations without introducing sampling bias. Overall, the table indicates a well-structured and systematic sampling approach that facilitates a comprehensive assessment of farmers' perspectives in the selected mandals.

Table 2: Land category-wise Distribution of the Respondent Farmers

Category	Respondents	Percent
Marginal Farmers (<2.5 acre)	38	31.7
Small Farmers (<2.5 – 5.0 acres)	52	43.3
Medium Farmers (5 – 10 acres)	22	18.3
Large Farmers (>10 acres)	8	6.7
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field Study

Table 2 illustrates the distribution of respondent farmers according to the size of landholdings. The data reveal that small farmers constitute the largest segment of the sample, accounting for 52 respondents or 43.3 percent of the total. This indicates that farming in the study area is predominantly characterized by relatively small landholdings.

Marginal farmers form the second-largest group, with 38 respondents representing 31.7 percent of the sample. Together, marginal and small farmers account for 75.0 percent of all respondents, highlighting the dominance of resource-constrained cultivators in the agricultural structure of the region. These categories generally face greater challenges related to limited production capacity, access to credit, and income stability. Medium farmers comprise 22 respondents, representing 18.3 percent of the sample. Their presence suggests a moderate proportion of farmers with comparatively larger operational holdings and greater production potential. In contrast, large farmers constitute only 8 respondents, accounting for 6.7 percent of the total, indicating that extensive land ownership is relatively uncommon in the study area. Overall, the distribution demonstrates a predominance of small-scale farming, reflecting the fragmented nature of agricultural landholdings. This pattern has important implications for agricultural productivity, investment capacity, and the economic well-being of farming households in the region.

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Table 3: Crop-wise Distribution of the Respondent Farmers

Name of the Crop	Respondents	Percent
Cotton	38	31.7
Paddy	52	43.3
Maize	22	18.3
More than one	35	29.2
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field Study

Table 3 presents the distribution of respondent farmers according to the major crops cultivated in the study area. The findings indicate that paddy is the most widely grown crop, with 52 respondents accounting for 43.3 percent of the total sample. This suggests that paddy cultivation continues to play a dominant role in the agricultural economy of the region due to its importance as a staple food crop and its suitability to local agro-climatic conditions.

Cotton is the second most important crop, cultivated by 38 respondents, representing 31.7 percent of the sample. The substantial share of cotton farmers reflects the significance of commercial crop production and its contribution to farm income. Maize cultivation is reported by 22 respondents, accounting for 18.3 percent, indicating its role as an alternative crop in the farming system.

In addition, 35 respondents (29.2 percent) reported cultivating more than one crop. This highlights the practice of crop diversification, which enables farmers to reduce production risks, improve income stability, and make better use of available resources. Diversified farming also helps farmers cope with market fluctuations and climatic uncertainties.

Overall, the table reveals a predominance of paddy cultivation, followed by cotton and maize, while a considerable proportion of farmers adopt multiple cropping patterns. This reflects a mixed agricultural system aimed at balancing food security, income generation, and risk management.

Table 4: Sources of Agricultural Credit among Sample Farmers

Source	Respondents	Percent
Cooperative Banks	30	25.0
Commercial Banks	28	23.3
Moneylenders	42	35.0
Relatives/Friends	20	16.7
More than one	24	20.0
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field Study

Table 4 presents the distribution of respondent farmers according to their sources of agricultural credit. Access to credit is an essential component of agricultural production, enabling farmers to meet expenses related to seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, irrigation, labour, and other cultivation activities.

The data indicate that moneylenders are the most important source of agricultural credit, with 42 respondents accounting for 35.0 percent depending on them for financial assistance. The predominance of moneylenders suggests that many farmers continue to rely on informal credit sources, primarily because of the ease of access, minimal documentation

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requirements, and immediate availability of funds. However, such borrowing often involves higher interest rates, which may increase the financial burden on farmers.

Cooperative banks serve as the second-largest source of credit, utilized by 30 respondents equals to 25.0 percent. These institutions play a significant role in providing affordable agricultural loans and supporting rural development. Commercial banks account for 28 respondents (23.3 percent), indicating a substantial level of participation in formal banking channels. The availability of institutional credit through banks helps farmers access funds at relatively lower interest rates and under regulated lending conditions.

A smaller proportion of respondents, 20 farmers are with 16.7 percent, obtain financial assistance from relatives and friends. This source is often preferred during emergencies or when formal and informal institutions are unable to meet immediate credit needs. Additionally, 24 respondents (20.0 percent) reported utilizing more than one source of credit. This reflects the tendency of farmers to combine institutional and non-institutional borrowing to satisfy their financial requirements during different stages of agricultural operations.

Overall, the findings reveal that while formal financial institutions such as cooperative and commercial banks contribute significantly to agricultural financing, dependence on moneylenders remains considerable. This highlights the need to strengthen institutional credit delivery mechanisms, simplify loan procedures, and improve access to timely and affordable credit in order to reduce reliance on high-cost informal lending sources and enhance the financial security of farming households.

Table 5: Major Causes of Agrarian Distress as Perceived by Farmers

Cause	Respondents	Percent
Indebtedness	36	30.0
Crop Failure	28	23.3
Low Market Prices	24	20.0
High Input Costs	20	16.7
Irrigation Problems	12	10.0
More than one	76	63.3
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field Study

Table 5 highlights the major factors contributing to agrarian distress as perceived by the respondent farmers. The findings reveal that agricultural distress is influenced by multiple interrelated economic and environmental challenges rather than a single factor.

Among the individual causes, indebtedness emerges as the most significant concern, reported by 36 respondents (30.0 percent). The burden of outstanding loans and difficulties in repayment place considerable financial pressure on farming households, particularly during periods of low agricultural returns. Crop failure is identified as the second major cause, with 28 respondents (23.3 percent) citing it as a source of distress. Uncertain weather conditions, pest attacks, and disease outbreaks often result in reduced yields and income losses.

Low market prices were reported by 24 respondents (20.0 percent), indicating the challenges farmers face in securing remunerative returns for their produce. Price fluctuations and inadequate market support frequently reduce profitability even when production levels are satisfactory. High input costs, including expenditures on seeds, fertilizers,

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pesticides, labour, and irrigation, were identified by 20 respondents (16.7 percent). Rising cultivation expenses can significantly erode farm income and increase dependence on borrowed funds.

Irrigation-related problems were mentioned by 12 respondents (10.0 percent), reflecting concerns about inadequate water availability and unreliable irrigation facilities. Water scarcity can adversely affect crop productivity and increase production risks.

Notably, 76 respondents (63.3 percent) reported experiencing more than one cause of distress simultaneously. This finding underscores the complex and multidimensional nature of agrarian problems, where financial, production, market, and resource-related constraints often interact and reinforce one another.

Overall, the table indicates that indebtedness, crop failure, and unfavorable market conditions are the principal drivers of agrarian distress in the study area. The high proportion of farmers reporting multiple causes suggests the need for integrated policy measures that address credit access, crop security, price stabilization, cost management, and irrigation development to improve the economic resilience of farming households.

Table 6: Farmers' Perceptions on Reasons for Farmers' Suicides

Reason	Respondents	Percent
Debt Burden	40	33.3
Crop Losses	30	25.0
Family Responsibilities	18	15.0
Market Uncertainty	20	16.7
Psychological Stress	12	10.0
Many Reasons	53	44.2
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field Study

Table 6 presents the perceptions of respondent farmers regarding the major reasons contributing to farmers' suicides. The findings indicate that farmer suicides are viewed as the outcome of a combination of economic, social, and psychological pressures rather than a single isolated factor.

Among the individual reasons, debt burden is perceived as the most significant cause, reported by 40 respondents (33.3 percent). The inability to repay agricultural loans, coupled with mounting financial obligations, often creates severe economic stress for farming households. Crop losses rank as the second most important reason, with 30 respondents (25.0 percent) identifying them as a major factor. Crop failures resulting from adverse weather conditions, pest attacks, and production risks can lead to substantial income losses and deepen indebtedness.

Market uncertainty is cited by 20 respondents (16.7 percent), reflecting concerns over fluctuating prices, unstable demand, and unpredictable returns from agricultural produce. Family responsibilities are reported by 18 respondents (15.0 percent), indicating that social obligations such as household expenses, children's education, healthcare costs, and marriage-related expenditures add to the financial strain experienced by farmers.

Psychological stress is identified by 12 respondents (10.0 percent) as a contributing factor. Continuous exposure to financial difficulties, production uncertainties, and social pressures can negatively affect mental well-being and increase emotional distress among farmers.

A notable finding is that 53 respondents (44.2 percent) attributed farmer suicides to multiple reasons. This highlights the complex nature of the issue, where economic hardship, crop failures, family obligations, market-related challenges, and

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psychological factors often interact simultaneously. The prevalence of multiple responses suggests that farmer suicides cannot be understood through a single-cause explanation.

Overall, the table demonstrates that debt burden and crop losses are perceived as the primary reasons for farmer suicides, while social and psychological factors also play an important role. The findings emphasize the need for comprehensive interventions that address financial security, risk management, market stability, social support, and mental health services to reduce vulnerability among farming communities.

Table 7: Awareness of Government Welfare Schemes

Awareness Level	Respondents	Percent
Fully Aware	32	26.7
Partially Aware	58	48.3
Not Aware	30	25.0
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field Study

Table 7 depicts the level of awareness among respondent farmers regarding various government welfare schemes intended to support the agricultural sector. Awareness of such schemes is crucial because it determines the extent to which farmers can access benefits related to credit, crop insurance, input subsidies, income support, and other developmental programs.

The data reveal that a majority of respondents possess only partial awareness of government welfare schemes. Out of the total sample, 58 farmers (48.3 percent) reported being partially aware of the available programs. This indicates that while many farmers have some knowledge of welfare initiatives, they may lack complete information regarding eligibility criteria, application procedures, benefits, and implementation mechanisms. Such gaps in knowledge can limit effective utilization of these schemes.

A total of 32 respondents (26.7 percent) stated that they were fully aware of government welfare measures. This group is likely to have better access to information through agricultural extension services, local institutions, media sources, or farmer networks. Greater awareness enables farmers to make informed decisions and benefit from government assistance more effectively.

On the other hand, 30 respondents (25.0 percent) reported having no awareness of welfare schemes. This represents a significant proportion of the sample and suggests the existence of information barriers within the farming community. Factors such as low literacy levels, inadequate extension services, limited access to communication channels, and geographical constraints may contribute to this lack of awareness.

Overall, the findings indicate that although government welfare programs are available, complete awareness among farmers remains limited. The predominance of partial awareness highlights the need for stronger information dissemination efforts through extension agencies, farmer training programs, village-level campaigns, and digital platforms. Improving awareness can enhance participation in welfare schemes and contribute to the socio-economic well-being of farming households.

Table 8: Major Suggestions for Preventing Farmers' Suicides

Suggestion	Respondents	Percent
Debt Waiver	34	28.3
Timely Crop Loans	28	23.3
Better MSP	24	20.0

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Crop Insurance	18	15.0
Irrigation Facilities	16	13.4
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field Study

Table 8 presents the major suggestions offered by respondent farmers for preventing farmers' suicides and improving the overall economic security of farming households. The responses highlight the importance of financial assistance, institutional support, and agricultural risk management in addressing agrarian distress.

Among the various suggestions, debt waiver emerged as the most preferred measure, with 34 respondents (28.3 percent) supporting it. This indicates that a significant proportion of farmers view the burden of outstanding loans as a major factor contributing to financial stress. Debt relief is perceived as a means of providing immediate support to farmers struggling with repayment obligations.

Timely availability of crop loans was suggested by 28 respondents (23.3 percent). Access to adequate and affordable institutional credit at the right time is essential for meeting cultivation expenses and reducing dependence on informal lending sources. Farmers believe that timely credit can help them manage production activities more effectively and avoid excessive indebtedness.

Better Minimum Support Prices (MSP) were recommended by 24 respondents (20.0 percent). Farmers consider remunerative prices for agricultural produce crucial for ensuring stable incomes and protecting them from market fluctuations. Improved price support mechanisms can enhance profitability and encourage sustainable farming practices.

Crop insurance was suggested by 18 respondents (15.0 percent), reflecting the need for protection against risks arising from crop failures due to adverse weather conditions, pests, and natural calamities. Effective insurance coverage can reduce financial losses and provide security during periods of uncertainty. Improved irrigation facilities were identified by 16 respondents (13.4 percent). Reliable water resources are essential for increasing agricultural productivity and minimizing the risks associated with rainfall variability.

Overall, the findings indicate that farmers prioritize measures aimed at reducing debt burdens, ensuring access to institutional credit, securing fair prices, and minimizing production risks. These suggestions emphasize the need for comprehensive policy interventions that strengthen financial support systems, improve agricultural infrastructure, and enhance income stability to effectively address the causes of farmers' suicides.

Conclusion:

The study reveals that small and marginal farmers constitute the majority of respondents, indicating the dominance of small-scale agriculture in the study area. Paddy was the major cultivated crop, followed by cotton and maize, with many farmers adopting crop diversification practices.

The findings show that moneylenders remain an important source of agricultural credit, highlighting farmers' continued dependence on informal lending systems. Indebtedness emerged as the major cause of agrarian distress, followed by crop failures, low market prices, high input costs, and irrigation-related problems.

Farmers perceived debt burden and crop losses as the primary reasons behind farmer suicides, while family responsibilities, market uncertainty, and psychological stress were also identified as contributing factors. A large number of respondents reported experiencing multiple causes of distress simultaneously.

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The study also found that awareness of government welfare schemes among farmers was inadequate, with most respondents having only partial knowledge of available programs. Farmers suggested debt relief, timely crop loans, better Minimum Support Prices, crop insurance, and improved irrigation facilities as important measures to reduce agrarian distress and prevent farmer suicides. Overall, the findings indicate that farmer suicides are linked to a combination of financial, agricultural, and social challenges requiring comprehensive solutions.

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