**The Indian farmer: For being the roots of this nation**

**'Farmers are not getting support, recognition and appreciation'**

August 12, 2008

**M S Bhavani, who works with Vidarbha's farmers, speaks about the neglect faced by the Indian farmer.**

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More than 60 per cent of our population is rural and involved in agriculture and allied activities. They are the mainstay of our economy though the share of agriculture to the GDP has been falling.

In the development paradigm we are in, farmers are not given adequate recognition and policy support. There is a big mismatch and farmers are not getting the kind of support, recognition and appreciation that they deserve for the contribution they make.

[**India, 61: The icons that make India**](http://www.rediff.com/news/iday08.html)

From a country of famine, we became a self sufficient nation, and we are once again in a situation where we are importing foodgrains. Our food sovereignty is in doubt now. This situation has to change. We have to be in a position where we can feed our population. But what we see is our famers committing suicide.

It was in October 2005 that I first went to Vidarbha with the National Commission on Farmers team. We visited some of the families of farmers who had committed suicide. It was indeed heartrending to see young widows and children left behind. One felt anger, frustration and sadness.

Following the first visit, the M S Swaminathan Research Foundation started a unit in Wardha. There are three main aspects to the work we are doing there. One is to have a network of knowledge centres to provide need based information. Another is to give them immediate help by providing monetary support for the education of school-going children so that they continue to go to school. In most families, children drop out of school to start working in the farm.

The third is the empowerment of women farmers. Dr Swaminathan says, through women farmers, let us bring about change. Many of the women are now working as farm labour as they don't own any land. The long term plan was to provide livelihood rehabilitation and empowerment of the widows. We have started women farmers groups in villages because they don't have a platform to make themselves heard.

From early 2006, I started going there at least once a month but our field staff who are stationed there is in regular touch with them. The problem is so immense and complex that one is still not sure how much difference one can make. After all, you can do only so much and can reach out only to a limited number of families.

For the last two years, I have been working closely with around 40 families. Though they were initially very reluctant to open up, with us frequently visiting them, they started trusting. Now, they even call up from there if they have any problem. Sometimes it is quite scary because they expect you to solve all their problems. They are holding on to the hope you have given. You are worried whether you would be able to rise to their expectations.

It is only a beginning and there is a long way to go, but I find what we are doing extremely challenging and daunting.

Even now, the situation in Vidarbha is bad. What we see is the failure at the policy level and manifestation of an agrarian crisis. The crisis has become more visible in the vulnerable areas. The government machinery in terms of technical guidance, input delivery, seed availability, information etc has failed.

This year, with rains being erratic, the situation has become worse and nobody wants to be in farming there now.

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