



CYDCMUN 2018

SOCHUM Backgrounder



Introduction Letter

Dear Delegates,

Thank you and congratulations for finalizing your delegation at CYDCMUN. My name is Nick Young, and I have the absolute pleasure of serving as your Director of the Social, Cultural, and Humanitarian Committee at CYDCMUN.

Ever since my first speech at my first conference delegating as Lebanon in WHO, I've gained passion and respect for international affairs and public speaking that has molded my character ever since. The experiences I gained and the people I met at Model UN are irreplaceable and have left me changed forever. As an eleventh grader at St. George's school, I find myself involved in the student council, service club, and Model UN club. Recreationally, my interests include playing badminton, studying linguistics, or browsing Facebook.

Evelyn Gondosiswanto is excited to be serving as your chair at CYDCMUN 2018. When she first ventured into the world of MUN, she was immediately thrown into the deep end as the delegate of South Korea in the UNSC with a group of seasoned veterans. It was a frightening but exhilarating first conference that started a long, wondrous journey of memorable experiences and surprising connections. Outside of MUN and debate, Evelyn is usually playing badminton, making resin keychains or being a science geek who loves (Ho)lsome puns! I'd like to introduce your Assistant Director Young Do. Young is a senior with nothing better to do but cry over her grades who loves bingsoo and bubble tea, but is actually surprisingly very hardworking in MUN! Feel free to email/message her if you have any questions.

As your dais, we will work to give you the most educational, memorable, and enjoyable experience we can. All of us were once delegates too: raising placards, writing resolution papers, and going to socials. All of us know and understand the fun and learning you will have, and the effort you will need to put in. I encourage you to pour your effort into the research, debate, and writing that comes with Model UN. I challenge you to learn new skills and meet new people that will stick with you for years to come. I implore you to make the most of this conference. Please feel free to contact any of us if you have any questions about the topic or Model UN in general: our doors are open.

Welcome to CYDCMUN 2018, SOCHUM. Let's make this fun.

Honourably yours,

Nick Young
SOCHUM Director | CYDCMUN 2018

Committee Description

SOCHUM, or the Social, Cultural, and Humanitarian Committee, was established in 1945 at the end of the Second World War as one of the six General Assemblies of the United Nations. Commonly referred to as the Third Committee of the General Assembly, SOCHUM concerns itself with issues pertaining to human rights and social justice. The Committee discusses a myriad of topics, including, but not limited to, “the advancement of women, the protection of children, indigenous issues, the treatment of refugees, the promotion of fundamental freedoms through the elimination of racism and racial discrimination, and the right to self-determination.” It works closely alongside the other organs of the United Nations and serves as a platform for world discussion on the aforementioned matters. SOCHUM has acted as a stabilizing force on the global scene, helping mediate and address cultural and humanitarian issues around the world for the past half-century. At CYDCMUN, we hope that this committee will bring forth fruitful discussion and unique thoughts that will challenge and enrich your idea of the world. Good luck, delegates.

Topic Overview

India is the seventh largest economy in the world. It serves as a breadbasket for Southeast Asia and exports copious amounts of agricultural goods and produce. India is the seventh largest agricultural exporter and the sixth largest net exporter. According to the FAO 2010 World Agriculture Statistics, it is the world’s largest producer of fresh fruits, vegetables, milk, spices, fibrous crops, and castor oil seed. The country has seen rapid growth in aquaculture and catch fisheries in recent years, synonymous with years of continued prosperity. Yet, agriculture is becoming less and less prominent in the Indian economy. While it represented 43% of Gross Domestic Product, or GDP, in 1970, that number dropped to 16% in 2011. As services, industry, and other sectors begin to develop and boom, agriculture starts to shrink in comparison. Despite this, 70% of Indians still depend on agriculture for their livelihoods, and 21% of the total population is employed in agriculture.

This 70% have seen conditions degrade since the Green Revolution. As debt, climate change, and socio-economic issues continue to haunt India, farmers are often left without a way out. Farmer suicides account for 11.2% of all suicides in India. In 2014, 5,560 farmers took their lives. In 2004, 18,241 met the same fate. Between these two years, rates have fluctuated between 1.4 and 1.8 per 100,000 people. Experts have identified numerous key factors for these tragedies, each of which have had a profound impact on farmers and India. Identifying these issues and then working towards a solution should be a primary goal for the Indian government and for SOCHUM.

Timeline

1875 - 1877 - Deccan Riots break out in response to high land taxes, frequent famines, colonial protection of usury, and unreasonable high-interest rates for farmers.

1879 - British Imperialist government enacts the Deccan Agriculturists' Relief Act, selectively limiting interest rates to curb usury.

1919 - India becomes a net food importer.

1943 - The Great Bengal Famine occurs, killing 1.5-3 million Indians.

1947 - India declares independence from Britain.

1963 - Norman Borlaug visits India, and shortly after brings a shipment of wheat varieties to India.

1965 - 1966 - Severe droughts lead to agricultural policy reform.

1966 - Borlaug's seeds become widespread, covering 504,000 hectares.

1967 - Indian grain production rises steadily following this point.

1966 - 1993 - Intensive inquiry into farmer suicide rates begins.

2000s - International attention and Indian government support are given to farmers in need.

2004 - Highest farmer suicide count is recorded at 18,241 deaths.

Historical Analysis

Agriculture in India dates back 2500 years, at a time where documentation was limited and unreliable. This section will detail the most relevant sections to this topic, beginning with the Industrial Revolution.

Industrial Revolution

The Industrial Revolution, spanning the 1760s to the 1840s, brought forth unprecedented technological advances that led to incredible improvements in productivity. This stimulated the growth of cities, the development of a more modern economy, and the institution of labour through factories. As well, these technological increases made farmer much more productive, allowing them to till more land, plant more

crop, and irrigate more fields with higher efficiency using machines. In particular, the horse-drawn seed press, developed in Great Britain, made labour much less labour intensive. This brought forth a boom in agriculture, among other sectors, especially in England, where agricultural output increased by 3.5 times. More livestock and more crop yield were observed, allowing countries to sustain greater populations. Most importantly, since farming was much more productive, developed nations no longer needed to employ large populations in agriculture, freeing up the labour force for other endeavours, leading to the diversification of economies and the beginning of the modern era. Many, although not all, of these benefits extended to India.

Bengal Famine

By 1942, Bengal was as dependent on rice as Ireland was on potatoes before the great potato famine. Furthermore, despite 90% of fertile land being used to grow rice, Bengal still needed to import astronomic amounts of grain to feed its people. Average harvests barely provided for the Bengalese people. The World Wars made this situation incredibly critical. When Japanese forces cut off trade routes by occupying Burma (modern-day Myanmar), Bengal was left without grain. As well, a cyclone coupled with brown spot - a disease that destroys rice crop - decimated the region's rice crop. Bengal was left with no food. This led to incredibly high rice prices and the beginning of the Bengal Famine. This famine left 2.1 million dead. Most notable was the government's sluggish movements in addressing the issue. Relief efforts were pointedly insufficient and did little to prevent death and suffering. However, the famine drew attention to the region's complete reliance on imports and homogenous crop, as well as their susceptibility to disease.

Green Revolution

Norman Borlaug is arguably one of the most influential agronomists in history. His work cross-breeding wheat led to the development of a High Yielding Variety (HYV) of seeds. Alongside improvements in fertilizer and irrigation techniques, this new seed ushered in a new era of agriculture in India - the Green Revolution. HYV seeds yielded scores more grain than did their predecessors. Farmers rushed to import them and begin planting. As a result, India and Bengal were able to become self-sufficient in food grains by 1974. By 1991, HYV seeds had spread across Southeast Asia, nearly quadrupling yields.

Massive gains were to be had from this revolution. Farmers were lifted out of poverty, the economy was hitting record highs, and food prices remained low, yet agricultural income remained stable. As well, all of the extra food was produced without using much more land. The seeds increased the productivity of Indian soil. However, there were drawbacks to this development. There was a noted increase in the use of pesticides (tripling between 1960 and 2000), the use of fertilizer, and harmful algal blooms. As well, profits often flowed to landowners, not farmers, creating new social issues. While Borlaug's work has saved millions of hectares of land and millions of lives, it has come with its share of consequences.

Current Situation - Causes

Farmers account for a disproportionate number of suicides worldwide. In America, male agriculture workers constitute a much higher percentage of national suicide rates. This problem extends to India which may be one of the largest agricultural industries in the world, but not without its share of problems. Farmers in India face a number of financial, professional, and personal issues that may manifest themselves in suicide rates. In this section, the Indian agricultural industry will be analyzed at large as well as each of these causes of the epidemic.

Debt and Loss

Farmers often resort to receiving loans from private lenders instead of the government due to how much more convenience the process takes. However, private lenders in India charge astronomically large interest rates for the loans that farmers are forced to take by higher input costs. These large interest rates create a self-perpetuating cycle. Farmers are forced to take out loans but are unable to pay them back due to low income. Private lenders see this as potential to lose and must raise their rates to cover their losses. Due to this rise, paying back the loans moves even further out of the farmer's capabilities, thus perpetuating the cycle. Interest rates in India have risen to the point of usury, exacerbating the financial situations of many farmers. The leading motivation for farmer suicide is financial. Debt is one of the major factors in this problem. When a farmer takes his life, his family is granted a small subsidy which can be used to cover part of the loan. Debt can be attributed to both predatory lenders as well as problems in the economy itself.

Agriculture in India

Throughout the past few decades, agriculture has shrunk in India. Farming took up 43% of India's GDP in 1970, but only 16% in 2011, due to rapid growth in services, industry, and other sectors between 2000-2010. This indicates a shift in the Indian economy that the country must account for. The current agricultural sector in India is incredibly inefficient. Poor road systems, ineffective irrigation techniques, outdated farming practices, insufficient storage facilities, and unfair retail systems leave farmers with little productivity and lots of waste. A farmer in India receives 10% to 23% of their product's total value in income. The rest is lost to middlemen and inefficiencies in the supply chain. Farmers in developed countries receive 64% to 81% of this total income. Low productivity rates are to blame for this inequality. Crop yields are already low, but problems in storage and transport lead to even lower incomes. Further harming productivity is the inconsistency in harvest brought forth by poor infrastructure and reliance on the monsoon season. In 2010, only 35% of arable land was reliably irrigated - the rest relied on monsoons and flood for moisture. As weather patterns change, this type of reliance is dangerous. The

structural problems in India's agriculture sector lead to lower incomes for farmers, adding to their host of problems.

Input Costs and Produce Price

Genetic engineering and technological advances in the past few decades have led to new methods of maximizing harvests and reducing costs. For example, genetically modified seeds with shorter growing seasons and chemical fertilizers are now widely used. However, although these methods were created with good intentions, they have caused a few negative effects for Indian farmers. The cost of inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, pesticides and more have increased dramatically since the Green Revolution. While these new commodities are advertised as being more productive, issues in the structure of the Indian agriculture sector wastes these benefits. Farmers then buy more expensive seeds and resources only to harvest and sell no more extra grain. On the other end, To make an income for themselves, farmers must be able to compete against others from all around the world to produce larger quantities of quality crops. These other farmers are often highly subsidized or subject to little inefficiency, allowing them to drop the price of grain to remain competitive. While farmers in developed countries receive 64-81% of their produce prices to make income, Indian farmers only receive a measly 10-23% with the rest accounting for crop losses, inefficiencies and middlemen. The low price of produce has wreaked havoc on Indian farmers trying to make a living, and combined with rising input costs, has created a debt trap for these farmers to fall into.

Climate Change

Ongoing trends in climate change have led to many crop failures and poor harvests. Droughts, floods, and fluctuations in heat are becoming more frequent and extreme as climate change progresses. Furthermore, topsoil is becoming increasingly infertile as more and more chemical fertilizers are used. As the crops are vulnerable to all sorts of inconsistencies with the climate, climate change proves to be a leading cause of crop failures. Inability to address climate change will lead to devastating impacts on the world economy and the world order.

Normalization

Despite all of these extraneous causes, suicide remains a social problem with roots in mental health. As more farmers commit suicide to absolve themselves of their financial and personal issues, this method of coping becomes more normalized. This explains why, in the past, farmer frustration was high, but suicide rates were incredibly low. As the trend began, more people caught on. Furthermore, this epidemic puts family members and close friends of suicide victims at risk of mental health issues. It is important to recognize that, although this problem has economic motivators, it is, at its root, a social problem. Treating as such is something governments have failed to do in the past.

Past UN and International Involvement

This issue has been noticed and investigated by the Government of India. In response, a relief package program was implemented in 2006 to relieve the problem. The National Farmer Commission and former Prime Minister have visited the suicide-prone areas and promised 110 billion Rs (2.4B USD) in relief for farmers. This promise was fulfilled through the deployment of 100,000 Rs (1,500 USD) towards families of farmers. The investigation of the issue also revealed 31 high-risk areas throughout the nation. The package was providing the funds for the purpose of debt relief, improving the supply of institutional credit, and for the farmers to have more access to better irrigation and farming support services to grow their income. Furthermore, the farmers were given other income opportunities ranging from horticulture, livestock, dairy and fisheries.

It is noticeable that the government has attempted continuously and aimed to relieve the ongoing crisis by providing debt relief or waivers. In 2008, a Bill was passed to regulate the farmer's loans. The Money Lending act has to regulate private debt as well as setting a maximum interest rate in attempts for this debt cycle to initiate.

Aside from the 2006 program, in 2008 an Agricultural debt waiver and debt relief scheme was granted by relieving the debt of 652 B Rs(10 B USD) of 36 million farmers. Additionally, in 2013 a diversify income sources package was also launched by having a specific livestock sector and fisheries package to diversify the income sources towards the farmers. The act of relieving debt was also focused on particular regions, such as within Maharashtra. The Maharashtra relief package was implemented in 2010, making it illegal for non-licensed moneylenders to seek loan repayment. The program consisted of Village Farmer Self Help Groups to give out government regulated loans, low rate Crop Insurance programs that are half-financed by the government, as well as marriage funding in order to minimize the cost of marriage; as marriage is a culturally significant event and was also known as a cause of suicide among farmers for not being able to support the funds. Ultimately, it is evident that government intervention is prominent in attempts to relieve the crisis by focusing on debt and loans.

However, the effectiveness of these constant debt waivers and relief is questionable. It is arguable that these programs focus too much on the credit and loan, rather than income, productivity and farmer prosperity. Hence, it is notable that paying back the loans aids and supports the money lending companies rather than the farmers for sustainable long-term success, therefore postponing the recurring problem. Although the act of debt relief aides the farmer suicide crisis, this is only temporary. As it is evident that the farmers lack reliable income sources, their productivity and efficiency of agriculture should be more focused on. Indian agriculture suffers from weak productivity that is derived from the need for higher crop yields, irrigation and infrastructure. Another factor that should be taken into

consideration is the market itself; as the market is distorted due to the controlled prices and the laws that stifle investment. Ultimately, instead of focusing on credit in isolation, approaching such a variety of other factors is highly emphasized.

Possible Solutions

In order to craft a solution, both international and national actors will need to be considered. Look into the root causes of the issue and analyze what can best be done to address them. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list of solutions - we hope that and encourage you to propose innovative solutions of your own. This is meant to give you a benchmark from which to gauge your own ideas and responses.

Debt Alleviation

A large cause of farmer distress is financial. Inability to pay back debts has plagued these people for many years. Coupled with inconsistent harvests and high-interest rates, many farmers become entrapped in a financial cage. The Indian government took very massive strides to reduce the amount of debt that farmers owed, especially in Maharashtra, in 2006, 2008, and 2010. These three “relief packages” featured debt relief through the waiving of millions in debt, better farming support services, and new income opportunities. By providing for farmers, the Indian government was able to help many out of their financial hole. However, this solution was only temporary. Critics have admonished these relief packages for their ineffectuality, and the fact that they fail to recognize and address the underlying issue of farmer distress. Despite this, it is a strong and effective way to cushion the blow of debt.

Lending Regulation

To address the unreasonably high interest rates, governments may want to either regulate loans and rates or facilitate them themselves. Through regulation, governments could set a cap interest rate, prohibiting any lender from lending at any rate higher than a certain percentage per annum. This would help break the cycle mentioned previously by granting farmers the breathing room to pay back their debts. Alternatively, governments could look to instate their own credit loan programs, which was done by India in the Maharashtra relief package of 2010. Instead of holding a third party firm accountable, the government would incur the loss of the loan, charging more reasonable rates than other firms may have. This may be an effective way of stopping predatory lending practices.

Addressing Income

The root problem in the suicide crisis is the fact that farmers are not making enough to cover their costs. Problems in productivity lead to farmers that lose large portions of potential profits to middlemen, waste, and ineffective practices. By addressing these inefficiencies, farmers can boost their profits and

support themselves more easily. As well, a large portion of these farmer's income is incredibly dependent on weather. For instance, 79.5% of Indian farmland relies on flooding during monsoon season in order to be fertile. By utilizing floodgates, this land could be more reliably used. Better infrastructure to support farming practices will help farmers survive.

Furthermore, farmers' produce very often spoils or is wasted before it can be sold. Huge amounts of food never even reach the marketplace. By improving storage and transport systems, produce is more likely to reach the marketplace and turn a profit, leading farmers to earn more income. There are many reasons as to why farmers' incomes are low - greatly due to problems in the agricultural sector. Addressing these causes to improve income levels will alleviate the financial issues that burden these farmers.

Economic Restructuring

Farmer struggles may be an indication of a changing economy. As other Indian industries and sectors grow, there is a shift in the aggregate demand for labour in certain markets. Indian agriculture has shrunk. It may be time to shift to other sectors. Equipping these farmers for a new life will be a challenging prospect, but it boils down to better education systems and more career support. Many farmers wish to move to urban centres and quit farming - statistics have proven that 76% of farmers are ready to quit, and 2,035 move to other sectors per day. However, this path is not easy. By improving education and support systems, India can help farmers adjust to new ways of life. As well, it may lead to a restructuring of the Indian economy that could lead to enormous growth and profits. With one of the largest workforces in the world, India has an amazing potential to grow. Utilizing its factors and resources effectively will help this change take place.

Climate Change

As weather patterns continue to become more intense and more unpredictable, agriculture becomes an increasingly volatile industry. The effects of inconsistent monsoon seasons and rainfall are no new concept to many farmers - droughts leading to parched fields and widespread crop failure. Fixing or adjusting to climate change will address one of the root problems that will plague the world's agricultural centres in the near future. Reducing emissions, developing better energy sources, and promoting energy efficiency should be on the top of every agenda. As well, reducing waste in supply chains - especially in the agricultural sector - will, by extension, reduce carbon emissions. Reducing emissions will help alleviate climate change, which will make agriculture a much more secure industry.

Mental Health Support

At the end of the day, suicide is a mental health epidemic and should be treated as such. Improving mental health systems and support groups in India has yet to happen. One huge barrier to consider is the rural location of many farmers. Creating a system through which these farmers can access mental health

counselling will help them through more tumultuous financial or personal times. By reducing mental health problems in farmers, they may be able to deal with their problems in a healthier manner. Ensuring that these people are being cared for and being provided for is at the top of SOCHUM's agenda.

Discussion Questions

- What are the systemic causes of suicide in Indian farmers?
- How do debt relief programs compare with income assistance?
- What sorts of actions can the UN take?
- What has been done in the past, and why has or hasn't it worked?
- How does climate change factor into this problem?
- How can we reduce food waste and boost productivity?
- How do we better regulate loans and alleviate debt pressures on farmers?
- Why are farmers struggling?

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