

UPSC Syllabus Topic : GS Paper 3 Agriculture – Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies.

On the PM-Kisan Scheme – Not the way forward

The Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-Kisan) scheme is a significant initiative offering direct income support to farmers in India. Key features include its unconditional nature, providing financial assistance regardless of the crops grown or the inputs utilized in farming practices. This approach avoids market distortions and encourages a diverse range of agricultural methods, from chemical-based to organic farming.

However, there are potential improvements that can be made to enhance the scheme's effectiveness:

1. **Per-Acre Basis Support:** Introducing income support on a per-acre basis, akin to schemes in states like Telangana, could ensure more equitable distribution among farmers based on their landholding.
2. **Setting Upper Limits:** Implementing upper limits on the per-acre payment could prevent larger landowners from receiving disproportionately higher benefits compared to small and marginal farmers.
3. **State Government Contributions:** States could supplement PM-Kisan benefits with additional income support, aligning with the central scheme to further assist farmers.

To finance these improvements, reallocating funds from existing market-distorting subsidies in agriculture, such as input subsidies for fertilizers and output procurement at Minimum Support Price (MSP) levels, could be a viable solution. Redirecting these savings towards the PM-Kisan scheme could significantly increase the financial aid provided to farmers.

The restructured PM-Kisan scheme, along with support from state governments and redirected subsidies, has the potential to better serve the diverse needs of Indian farmers while promoting more equitable income distribution across the agricultural sector.

UPSC Syllabus Topic : GS Paper 3 – Disasters and disaster management.

Issue of releasing post-disaster relief aid to the states – Rift over relief

The conflict between the Central and Tamil Nadu governments regarding flood relief highlights challenges in the criteria for releasing post-disaster relief aid to states.

There is no provision for declaring any natural disaster as a "national disaster." The classification of a disaster as a "calamity of rare severity" is based on specific criteria, such as the calamity's intensity, magnitude, required assistance level, and the state's capacity to manage it. The National Crisis Management Committee, led by the Cabinet Secretary, addresses major crises, while inter-ministerial teams assess damage and relief needs for severe calamities.

Suggestions for reforming disaster relief criteria include:

1. **Clear Guidelines:** Establishing clear guidelines for disaster relief and including long-term restoration works in SDRF/NDRF funding.
2. **Scheme Funds Allocation:** Allowing states to use more than the allocated 25% flexi-fund of centrally sponsored schemes for post-disaster restoration, as recommended by a parliamentary committee.
3. **Support for MSMEs:** Providing relief to micro, small, and medium enterprises, which currently aren't covered under existing norms but play significant employment roles in the state.

4. **Consultation with Vulnerable States:** Engaging cyclone-prone states like Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, West Bengal, and Gujarat in developing new disaster management norms.

Reforming these criteria could ensure better, more inclusive, and comprehensive disaster relief measures in the future.