Lockdown: Centre, States Helped Agricultural Sector, But A Lot Yet To Be Done To Ensure Growth

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The disruptions on rural livelihoods and food supplies from COVID-19 lockdown have worried all stakeholders in the Indian agriculture sector. The Indian government has announced a massive relief package of Rs 1.7 lakh crore to cover those hit the hardest -- farmers, rural workforce, women and other vulnerable groups. The package promises free cereal and pulse grains for three months through the Public Distribution System (PDS) and cash transfers to vulnerable people, mainly in rural areas.

The government has promised an additional 15 kg food grains per person for 800 million people, thanks to about 60 million tonnes of grain buffer stock in the country. The government has also exempted the movement of agriculture commodities; farm labourers and harvesting and other machinery from the shutdown restrictions. With state governments also pitching in, the first step to averting a major hunger crisis has been taken.

While these measures will begin to help, the impact witnessed by farm sector and other vulnerable groups require more intervention. Halting of farm operations like harvesting, owing to homeward exodus of the workforce and scarce availability of transportation for ferrying the produce, besides restricted market access and the need for social distancing, have contributed to the distress. In this scenario, harvesting of rabi crops, especially in northwest India and regular harvesting of smallholders’ produce of fruit and vegetables across all states has become a big challenge. The crisis has had contrasting impacts on producers and consumers. Read More..