

CONCEPTUAL PAPER ON: A STUDY ON ROLE OF MSP AND TRADE POLICIES ON INCOME STABILITY OF SMALL FARMERS: EVIDENCE FROM NARSINGHPUR DISTRICT, MADHYA PRADESH

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the gap between Minimum Support Price (MSP) declaration and actual farm gate price realization, by studying the various factors that lead to distress sales for various crops. While Narsinghpur is a highly productive multi crop hub, famed for its ODOP Toor Daal, sugarcane belt and the specialized Kranti variety of Rice essential for the regional Poha industry, small farmers continue to struggle with chronic income instability." Through a synthesis of secondary literature and preliminary field interviews in Narsinghpur, Kareli, and Gadarwara, the study highlights a fundamental legal disconnect: while the Minimum Support Price (MSP) is declared for 22 crops, it remains a policy guideline for government procurement rather than a mandatory price floor for the open market. There are no legal provision compelling Mandi-registered private traders to buy at or above MSP, leaving farmers entirely reliant on the state's limited procurement window. Analysis suggests that logistical friction and quality-check failures often force distress sales at 15–20% below MSP. Furthermore, recent geopolitical shifts and trade policies, including the Iran-US conflict, have surged input costs while trade caps suppress output prices. The research argues that institutional reform and price certainty are vital for farmer stability and Atmanirbhar Bharat/self-reliant India.

Keywords: MSP, Price Realization, Narsinghpur, Distress Sales, Atmanirbhar Bharat.

INTRODUCTION:

India is fundamentally an agrarian economy, with nearly 70% of its land dedicated to agricultural activities and over half of its population depending on farming for their livelihood. However, there is a persistent irony at the heart of this sector: while India has achieved record-breaking production levels and has become a global leader in several commodities, the country has yet to achieve true "Income Self-Reliance" for its farmers. Despite the high availability of fertile land and labour, the Indian farmer remains trapped in a cycle of income instability. As **Kumar (2019)** notes in his evaluation of income distribution, while policy tools like the Minimum Support Price (MSP) protect against extreme price crashes, they often fail to reduce the growing inequality between small-scale and large-scale farm households.

The Minimum Support Price (MSP) was introduced during the Green Revolution as a "market intervention" tool to ensure that farmers are not exploited during periods of bumper harvests. Since the 2018-19 season, the government has committed to fixing MSP at 1.5 times the cost of production using the **A₂+FL formula**. For the current 2026-27 Rabi season, for instance, the Wheat MSP has been set at **₹2,585/quintal**, theoretically promising a 109% margin.

In a practical context, "Price Realization" is the actual "in-hand" cash a farmer receives at the farm-gate or Mandi after accounting for quality deductions, weighing charges, and transport costs. It is the difference between a government promise and a private trader's payment. When this realization consistently falls below the cost of production, "Income Stability"—the farmer's ability to cover household expenses, repay crop loans, and reinvest in the next season—is shattered. For a smallholder, stability is not just about high prices, but about the *certainty* that their harvest will translate into a predictable livelihood rather than a mounting debt.

However, a significant gap exists between policy and practice. Research by **Arora et al. (2023)** and **Mittal et al. (2018)** suggests that awareness of MSP is highly uneven across states. Even when awareness exists, as **Aditya et al. (2023)** points out, knowledge of the price does not translate into higher bargaining power for the farmer at the farm-gate. This is because MSP is a government procurement guideline, not a legal mandate for private traders. Consequently, only a small fraction of farmers—estimated at 6–10%—actually realize the MSP, while the vast majority are forced into "Sub-MSP" transactions or **distress sales** due to a lack of local procurement infrastructure, (**Kumar & Basantaray, 2025**).

The instability of farm income is further complicated by the government's "balancing act" between farmer profits and consumer inflation. To keep food prices affordable for India's 1.4 billion people, the state often employs trade restrictions, such as export bans on wheat and rice or lowering import duties on pulses. While these "Consumer-First" policies stabilize urban prices, they act as a "Price Ceiling" for the farmer. As **Saini and Gulati (2018)** argue, these price distortions prevent Indian farmers from benefiting from high global prices, even during major geopolitical shifts like the **Russia-Ukraine conflict** or the **2026 US-India Trade Deal**.

This policy environment has also created a "Monocrop Mindset." Because procurement is most reliable for cereals like Wheat and Paddy, farmers are hesitant to diversify into higher-value crops. The fear of price realization gaps in pulses or oilseeds keeps them tethered to popular cereals, further hindering the goal of a truly diversified and self-reliant agricultural sector. This frustration was clearly reflected in the nationwide farmer protests, where the primary demand was for the **Legalization of MSP**, ensuring that no trade—government or private—occurs below the floor price.

The Narsinghpur Scenario: High Productivity vs. Income Instability

To understand these macro-economic forces, one must look at the Narsinghpur district in Madhya Pradesh, specifically the fertile Kalmetahar region. Narsinghpur is a unique multi-crop hub that serves as a microcosm of the national struggle:

1. **Toor Dal (The ODOP Star):** As the "One District One Product" (ODOP), Gadawara's Toor Dal is a premium commodity. Yet, its price is highly sensitive to trade policies, such as the sudden import of cheaper pulses from Myanmar or Africa, which can crash the local Mandi price overnight (**Bhat, 2025**).
2. **The Sugarcane Capital:** As the leading producer of Sugarcane in MP, Narsinghpur's economy is tied to the **Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP)** paid by mills. This makes local prosperity dependent on the national **Ethanol Blending Policy** and the financial health of the sugar industry rather than a competitive open market.
3. **The Grain Backbones:** The massive Mandis in **Gadawara and Kareli** handle a high volume of Wheat, Maize, and the popular **Kranti Rice** variety (essential for the Poha industry). However, as **Krishnamurthy (2012)** highlights in her study of Madhya Pradesh's procurement dynamics, the efficiency of these Mandis is often disrupted by logistical bottlenecks and quality-check failures.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

A primary theme in contemporary agricultural discourse is that price awareness does not equate to price realization. The **NITI Aayog (DMEO) Evaluation Study (2016)** laid the groundwork by highlighting that while MSP is a national policy, its "efficacy" is hampered by low awareness among smallholders. This is reinforced by **Arora et al. (2023)**, whose assessment of **NSSO data** shows that the source of information—whether through official channels or local middlemen—drastically affects a farmer's selling decision.

More critically, **Aditya K.S. et al. (2023)** argue that even when farmers possess perfect knowledge of the MSP, it does not improve their bargaining power at the farm-gate. Their research suggests that without physical procurement infrastructure (like government centres in **Kareli or Gadawara**), the MSP remains a "theoretical number," and farmers remain price-takers in a private-market-dominated system.

Literature increasingly focuses on how the MSP framework inadvertently favours larger farm households. **Shatrughan Kumar (2019)** evaluates income distribution and concludes that MSP effectively protects against price volatility but fails to reduce inequality, as better-served, large-scale farmers capture the bulk of government procurement.

This leads to the persistent issue of **Distress Sales**. **Anuj Kumar and A.K. Basantaray (2025)** provide a contemporary analysis of "Sub-MSP Transactions," specifically in the wheat markets. Their empirical findings suggest that lack of infrastructure for procurement they sell their produce to private traders at rates significantly lower than the official support price.

A recurring conflict in the literature is the "Consumer-First" vs. "Producer-First" policy tension. **Mittal et al. (2018)** and the **CACP Rabi/Kharif Reports (2025-26)** highlight that while the government aims to ensure remunerative prices, trade interventions (like export bans or duty-free imports) often act as a cap on farmer income.

Shripad Bhat (2025) provides an econometric analysis of the pulse trade (relevant to the **ODOP Toor Dal** in Narsinghpur), showing that imports from Myanmar or Africa often coincide with domestic harvests, suppressing local prices. Furthermore, the early **2026 geopolitical context**—specifically the **US-India Trade Deal** and the **Iran-US conflict**—has introduced "Cost-Push Inflation." Current research suggests that while trade policies keep the *output* price low to curb urban inflation, the rising cost of *inputs* (diesel and fertilizers) drastically reduces the **Net Realized Income (NRI)** of the farmer.

The literature also explores the psychological impact of price instability. Because procurement is most stable for Wheat and Paddy, farmers exhibit a "Monocrop Mindset," fearing the volatility associated with diversifying into higher-value crops. This risk aversion is a significant barrier to the **Atmanirbhar Bharat** (Self-Reliance) mission. As noted in the **PIB (2026) reports**, until price realization is guaranteed across a broader crop basket, farmers in high-fertility regions like **Narsinghpur** will continue to stick to popular cereals, even if they have the potential to lead in pulses and oilseeds.

IDENTIFICATION OF RESEARCH GAPS

While contemporary agricultural literature extensively discusses the macro-economic benefits of the Minimum Support Price (MSP), a significant "Realization Gap" remains under-researched at the micro-level. Existing studies often treat "Distress Sales" as a binary outcome of poor procurement, failing to account for the behavioural and logistical friction that dictates a farmer's decision-making in the Mandis of Narsinghpur, Kareli, and Gadarwara. There is a critical lack of research into the "Digital Divide" within the e-Uparjan registration process, where physical access to a portal does not guarantee functional accessibility for those with limited digital literacy.

Furthermore, the academic discourse often equates the "Official MSP" with "Farmer Income," overlooking the hidden cost-leakages, such as transport logistics to Gadarwara, loading fees, and unofficial commissions in case of this study—that create a vast disparity between the declared price and the actual cash-in-hand. There is also a notable "Sectoral Imbalance" in research; while the procurement of grains like Wheat is well-documented, the efficiency of "Mandi-to-Money" transitions for ODOP crops like Toor Dal or regional specialties like Kranti Rice remains unexplored.

Finally, most frameworks fail to map the "Velocity of Impact" regarding global trade shocks. There is an urgent need to understand how high-level trade deals (like the Feb 2026 US-India Deal) or geopolitical conflicts (the Iran-US crisis) translate into immediate price volatility at the local Mandi level, often within a 48-hour window. By addressing these gaps, this study moves from a theoretical critique of MSP to a grounded evaluation of how trade policies and localized barriers prevent the Narsinghpur farmer from achieving true financial self-reliance.

OBJECTIVES:

The primary aim of this research is to examine the structural and systemic barriers preventing farmers in the Narsinghpur district from realizing the full benefits of the Minimum Support Price (MSP). While the ultimate goal is to conduct a comprehensive Empirical Study, the current lack of localized research on Narsinghpur necessitates this Conceptual Analysis. By synthesizing existing literature and policy frameworks, this study seeks to develop a robust theoretical foundation that will refine the variables and methodologies for future field-based empirical investigations.

To achieve this goal, the following specific objectives have been identified:

1. To Evaluate the level of MSP awareness among farmers and the sources of the communication used for information dissemination.
2. To Identify the structural and systemic factors that contribute to sub-optimal price realization and distress selling.
3. To Analyze why some crops are easier to sell than others.
4. To Assess the volatility of local market prices in response to immediate global geopolitical shifts and international trade agreements.

FINDINGS:

1. The Information Lag and the "Digital Surcharge"

The first and most pervasive barrier to price realization in Narsinghpur is the systemic failure of information timing and the high cost of digital access. This research identifies two distinct "Friction Points" that prevent the smallholder from even entering the formal procurement system:

A. The Sowing-to-Announcement Lag

While the CACP (2025-26) reports theoretically provide a price floor to guide farmers, there is a significant "Time-Lag" in reality. In the blocks of **Kareli and Narsinghpur**, farmers must finalize their seed purchases and sowing decisions months before the official MSP is publicized at the village level.

Informal Reliance: Because official gazettes reach the grassroots late, small farmers rely almost exclusively on informal networks. They look to **"Big Farmers" (Patels)** or neighbours for cues. If a large-scale farmer switches from Wheat to Gram, the small farmer follows suit, often without knowing the actual price protection they are entitled to. This mirrors the findings of **Aditya et al. (2023)**, who note that "information asymmetry" turns the small farmer into a follower rather than a strategic decision-maker.

B. The "MP Online" Surcharge and Digital Exploitation

While the **MP e-Uparjan portal** is a flagship digital initiative, its implementation in the villages of **Gadarwara** has birthed a new form of rural exploitation.

- a. **Mismanagement at Government Centres:** Technically, registration at government-run centres is free. However, frequent server crashes, lack of high-speed internet, and poor training of operators create massive queues and "technical errors."
- b. **The Paid "Seva":** To avoid missing strict registration deadlines (which are often narrow), farmers are forced to go to private MP Online Kiosks or cyber cafes. Field observations show that while the service is advertised as a "Free Seva," these private shops charge anywhere from ₹50 to ₹150 per registration as a "service fee."
- c. **The Deadline Trap:** For a small farmer with limited mobility, a single "Server Down" message at a government centre means a lost day of labour. Many choose to pay the private surcharge just to secure a slot. If they miss the deadline due to these technical hurdles, they are automatically disqualified from the MSP system, leaving them with no choice but to sell to local traders at whatever price is offered.

2. Panic leading to Distress: Monsoon Panic and the "Trader-Only" Rule

Distress selling in Narsinghpur is not an accident; it is the result of a "Pincer Effect" where natural disasters meet a rigid, unregulated market. The research indicates that even with high MSP declarations, the actual price realization remains a "Buyer's Choice" rather than a "Farmer's Right."

A. The 2026 "Monsoon Panic" and Storage Scarcity

The current harvest window has been hit by a severe "Western Disturbance," bringing unseasonal rains and hailstorms across the Maha Kaushal region. For smallholders in Narsinghpur, this is a catastrophe because they lack access to advanced, climate-controlled warehousing.

- a. **The Perishability Trap:** Wheat and Gram that are ready for harvest are highly sensitive to moisture. Without private or state-subsidized storage to keep the crops dry, the farmer faces a "Now or Never" situation. They must liquidate their stock immediately—often while it is still damp—to avoid total rot.
- b. **Warehouse Exclusion:** While large warehouses exist in **Gadarwara**, they are often pre-booked by big traders or are too expensive for a smallholder to rent. This confirms the logic of **Kumar & Basantaray (2025)**: because the farmer *cannot wait*, they lose all bargaining power.

B. The "Registered Trader" Monopoly and Price Cartels

A critical legal loophole in the Mandi system facilitates low-price procurement. By law, only **Mandi-registered traders** are authorized to buy from farmers.

- a. **The Non-Mandatory MSP:** Since the MSP is merely a "government declaration" and not a "legally enforceable floor price" for private trade, these registered traders often form informal cartels. In **Kareli Mandi**, it is common to see traders offering a uniform price that is **₹300 to ₹500 below the MSP**.
- b. **Speculative Pressure:** Traders exploit the farmer's lack of "Advanced Market Knowledge." They spread rumors of a further price crash due to global imports (like the **2026 Maize/Ethanol imports**), scaring farmers into selling their produce at "rejection rates" just to secure some cash for the next sowing season.

C. The "Quality Check" Friction and Rejection Rates

The final blow to price realization occurs at the procurement centre itself. The **e-Uparjan** process requires a strict quality check, primarily based on moisture content.

- a. **The Rejection Weapon:** Due to the unseasonal March 2026 rains, a large percentage of small-farm produce fails the moisture test. Instead of offering "Drying Facilities," the centres simply reject the lot.
- b. **Gate-Side Exploitation:** Private traders wait right outside the procurement gates. When a farmer's trolley is rejected by the government for "poor quality," these traders offer a "spot-cash" deal at a deep discount. The farmer, burdened by the cost of transporting the trolley back to the village (fuel prices have surged due to the Iran-US conflict), has no choice but to accept the trader's low-ball offer.

3. Crop Disparity: The "Smooth" Cereals vs. The "Rigged" Factories (Objective 3)

A central finding of this research is the "Two-Tier Market System" existing within Narsinghpur. Field observations indicate that the "Mandi-to-Money" transition is not uniform; it is highly dependent on whether a crop is part of the government's core procurement basket or left to the volatility of private corporate demand.

A. The "Smooth" Path: Wheat, Chana, and Masoor

For traditional staples, the Madhya Pradesh government has established a relatively robust "Cereal-Centric" infrastructure.

a. **Frequency of Purchase:** Unlike many other states, the MP government procures Wheat, Chana (Gram), and Masoor very frequently. This provides a "Safety Net" that ensures a somewhat fair price realization for the farmer.

b. **The Kranti Rice Advantage:** A unique local success story is the Kranti Rice variety. Being a non-scented, high-yield staple essential for the regional Poha industry, it finds a ready market in local Mandis. Smallholders can sell it directly in Narsinghpur and Gadarwara without heavy intervention from high-end corporate middlemen. In contrast, farmers who attempt to diversify into premium "Scented" or "Centied" rice varieties face a much more "Rigged" system.

c. **The Pipariya Mandi Belt:** For high-end varieties destined for global companies like Daawat or India Gate, the Pipariya Mandi serves as the primary procurement hub. However, the government rarely intervenes in the procurement of these specific varieties.

d. **Corporate Dominance:** This allows large private players to dictate the price. Small farmers find themselves unable to reach these high-value markets directly. Instead, they are forced to sell to local aggregators at significantly lower prices, who then sell to the big brands at a massive markup. This creates a "Price Realization Gap" where the farmer grows a "Premium" product but receives a "Staple" price.

C. The Maize Crisis and Export Failures

Despite its potential, **Maize** procurement in Narsinghpur remains highly inconsistent.

a. **Private Player Reliance:** Unlike Wheat, Maize is usually purchased by private players for industrial use (starch and ethanol). When government procurement centres for Maize fail to open on time, farmers are pushed into the open market where prices are highly unstable.

b. **The Missing Link:** This research shows that while Narsinghpur has the fertile soil to be a Maize leader, the lack of government-backed "Minimum Price Enforcement" for industrial crops means that any shift in global trade—like the **2026 US-India Trade Deal**—destroys the local farmer's margin almost instantly.

D. The Sugarcane "Credit-Trap": 2018 Legacy and Factory Power

The most "Rigged" sector remains **Sugarcane**, the backbone of Narsinghpur's economy.

a. **The 2018 Andolan Legacy:** Despite the historic 2018 protests, the power dynamic between sugar mills and farmers remains skewed. While the state government "decides" a price in meetings with factory owners, it is rarely a "Command."

b. **Compulsion Gap:** There is no legal compulsion on factories to pay the government-suggested rate on time. Mills often delay payments by 6–12 months, effectively using the farmer's money as an interest-free loan. This forces farmers into a "Credit Cycle" where they take high-interest private loans just to survive until the sugar mill releases their dues.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND SUGGESTIONS:

Based on the barriers identified in the Narsinghpur, Kareli, and Gadarwara Mandis, this study proposes a "**Triple-A Strategic Framework** (Awareness, Aggregation, and Accessibility). This model seeks to bridge the gap between "Price Declaration" and "Price Realization" through structural and behavioural shifts at the grassroots level.

1. Pillar One: Awareness (Proactive Information Systems)

The current "Information Lag" forces smallholders to be reactive. To transition to a proactive model, the following is suggested:

a. **Decentralized "Kisan Mitra" Literacy Drive:** To eliminate the "Digital Surcharge" paid at private MP Online shops, the district should deploy trained village-level volunteers (Kisan Mitras). These volunteers

would facilitate door-to-step registration on the **e-Uparjan portal**, ensuring no farmer misses deadlines due to technical or literacy barriers.

- b. **Pre-Sowing Advisory Centres:** Block-level "Crop Choice Clinics" should be established to communicate MSP trends and global trade shifts (like the **2026 US-India Trade Deal**) *before* the sowing season. This prevents the "Monocrop Mindset" and allows farmers to make data-driven decisions rather than simply following local trends.

2. Pillar Two: Aggregation (The IRMA Collective Model)

Applying the "Collective Strength" principles taught by **IRMA**, the study recommends the aggressive promotion of **Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)** to counter trader monopolies.

- a. **Shared Infrastructure as a Defence:** By forming FPOs of 300–500 members, smallholders in Narsinghpur can collectively invest in drying machines and moisture-testing kits. This ensures that crops are "Mandi-Ready" before transport, effectively eliminating the risk of "**Quality Check Rejections**" at the government centres.
- b. **Bypassing the Cartel:** FPOs should be empowered to obtain their own trading licenses. This allows them to bypass the "Registered Trader" monopoly in the Mandi and sell directly to large-scale buyers like **Daawat** or **Ethanol processing plants**, capturing the margins currently lost to middlemen.

3. Pillar Three: Accessibility (Infrastructure as a Service - IaaS)

To reduce the "Hidden Costs" of transport and fuel—which have surged due to the **2026 Iran-US conflict**—the focus must shift from "Farmer-to-Mandi" to "Mandi-to-Farm."

- a. **Mobile Procurement Units (MPUs):** The state should deploy mobile testing and weighing vans that visit village clusters on a scheduled basis. This reduces the logistical burden on smallholders and prevents the "Panic Selling" that occurs when farmers cannot afford the high fuel costs of a long trolley trip to Gadwarwa.

Comparative Case Studies & Global Models

To justify these recommendations, this study looks at successful models that have solved similar agricultural frictions:

Model/Case Study	Core Strategy	Application for Narsinghpur
Odisha Millet Mission	Using Women's SHGs for local cleaning and primary processing.	SHGs in Narsinghpur can process the ODOP Toor Dal locally, allowing farmers to sell "Value-Added" pulses instead of raw grain.
ITC e-Choupal (MP)	Rural internet kiosks providing real-time global market data.	Expanding " Choupal Saagars " in Gadwarwa can eliminate "Information Asymmetry" regarding global price shocks.
Amul (The IRMA Model)	Cooperative ownership of the entire value chain (Processing to Sale).	Sugarcane farmers should be encouraged to form Cooperative Mills , turning them from "Suppliers" into "Owners" to avoid the factory payment crisis.
The "Kisan-Rail" Concept	Dedicated logistics for perishable and high-value crops.	Establishing a specialized transport link for Kranti Rice and Scented varieties to reach the Pipariya belt and beyond without middlemen.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this research project highlight that for the farmers of **Narsinghpur, Kareli, and Gadarwara**, the challenge of agriculture is no longer just about "Production," but about "Price Realization." While India has achieved record-breaking harvests in 2025-26, the individual smallholder remains the most vulnerable link in the global supply chain. This study concludes that the **Minimum Support Price (MSP)**, while a vital safety net on paper, is frequently undermined by a "Triple-Friction" of digital barriers, logistical costs, and unregulated trader cartels.

The research reveals a stark "Two-Tier Market" in the district. While staples like **Wheat and Kranti Rice** benefit from frequent government procurement, high-value crops like the **ODOP Gadarwara Toor Dal** and **Scented Rice varieties** are left to the mercy of private corporate players and global trade shocks. The **February 2026 US-India Trade Deal** and the surging input costs triggered by the **Iran-US conflict** have created a "Pincer Effect"—where the farmer pays international prices for diesel and fertilizer but receives suppressed local prices for their produce.

To bridge this gap, this study proposes a transition from "Passive Policy" to "Active Institutional Support." By adopting the **"Triple-A" Model (Awareness, Aggregation, and Accessibility)**, Narsinghpur can transform its agrarian economy. The formation of **Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)**—built on the principles of collective strength taught by **IRMA**—is the most sustainable solution to break the monopoly of registered traders and factory-led credit traps in the **Sugarcane sector**.

Ultimately, achieving **Atmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India)** requires a "Farmer-First" trade policy. We must move beyond the "Consumer-First" mindset that suppresses rural incomes to keep urban inflation low. If the Narsinghpur farmer is empowered with digital literacy, local processing units (like the **Odisha Millet Model**), and direct market linkages, they will no longer be forced into "Distress Sales." True agricultural success will be measured not by the tons of grain in government warehouses, but by the net cash in the farmer's pocket and their ability to thrive in a volatile global market.

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