

Farmer Fragility in India

A Design Research Project

Design Research Project at Pensaar Design

Role: Design Researcher as part of a 4-member team.

Involved in all aspects - research design, conducting, synthesis, reporting and client presentation.

Location: Karnataka & Telangana, India

Duration: 1 week

2019

Brief

How might we better understand what contributes to farmer fragility and the exodus out of farming?

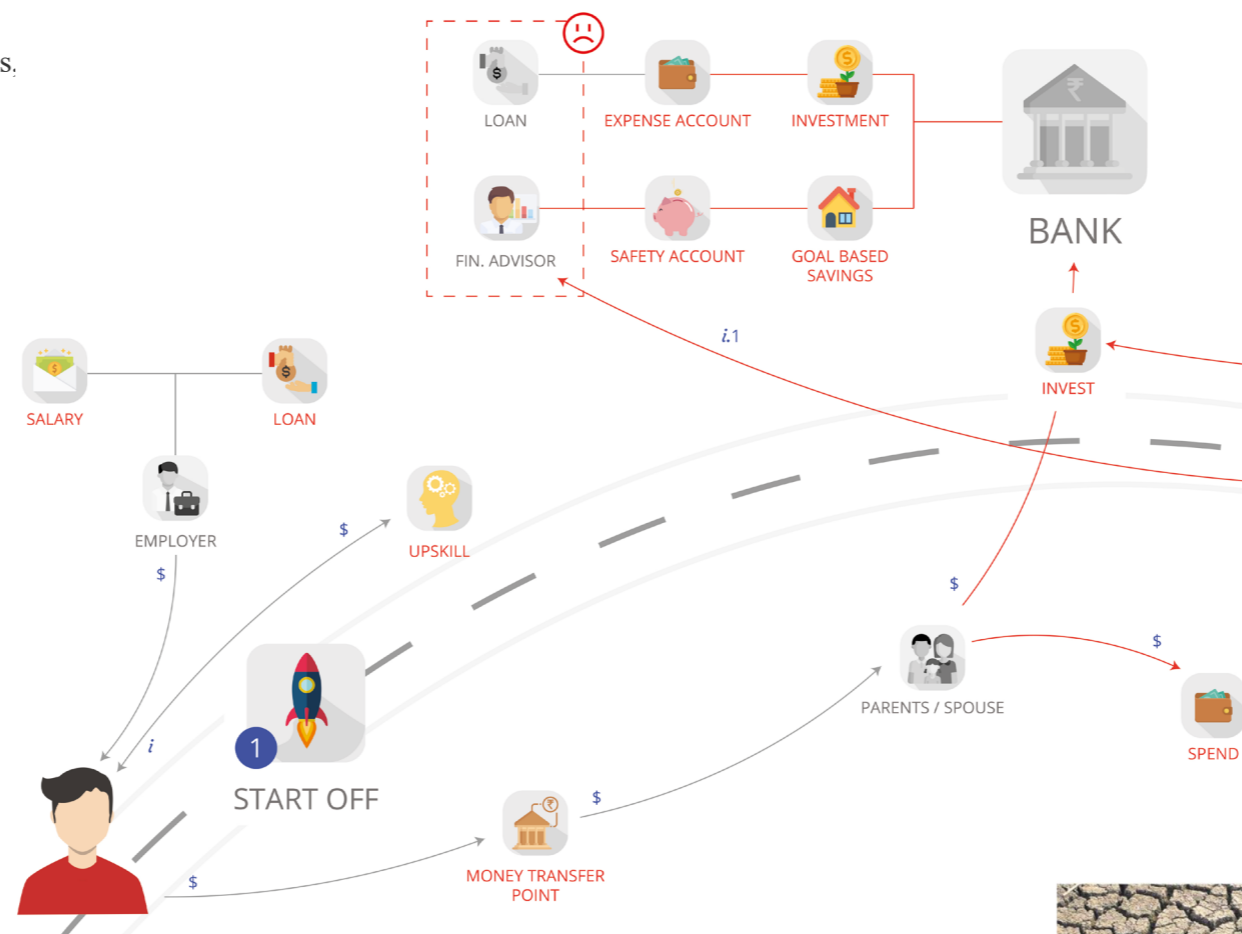
Primary Research Approach + Methods

As this was a short project and a complex topic with several moving parts, our objective was to identify broad themes. We conducted research with small, medium and large-scale farmers and members of his ecosystem in two towns in the state of Karnataka and Telangana.

Observational Research

1:1 in-depth interviews with farmers and members of his ecosystem

We designed hands-on visual tools to cover breadth quickly. Since there was a language barrier, our tools had to be bi-lingual, visual and easy to handle on the farm. I played a crucial role in designing these tools and iterating on them when we spoke to farmers and gathered feedback on usability, accuracy of translations and whether the tools served their purpose,



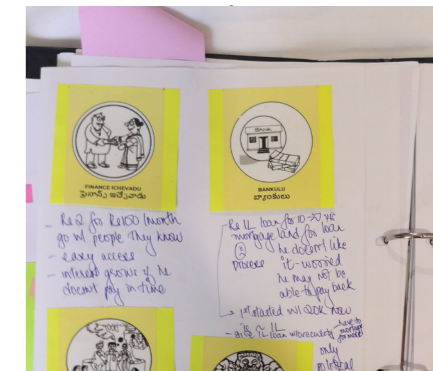
'Ecosystem Tool' to identify the key players (resource providers, allies, opponents) & environmental factors (norms, culture, processes)



'Situation Cards' - To understand mindsets and coping mechanisms to dire situations such as drought.



'Attitude Cards' to understand their relationship between different stakeholders in their ecosystem.



Reasons for Farmer Fragility & the Exodus out of Farming



Cycle of debt

Farming had become a gamble with the heavy dependence on environmental factors such as rainfall, pest attacks, soil quality and more. Only a few overcame this dire situation, resulting in an insurmountable and never-ending cycle of debt.

Lack of visibility on returns

Farmers were unable to forecast their earnings and plan their expenses in accordance. This was because they had limited visibility into how much they would earn from their crops.

Spreading their risk

Owing to the unpredictability of returns from agriculture, farmers were looking for other ways to supplement their income either on their own or with the help of close family members. This intent to diversify is one of the critical reasons for their departure from farming.



A new farmer mindset

Through our research, we found a new breed of farmer. This pocket of farmers had identified certain crops that require less time, labour investment and come with a fixed price assurance right from the get-go.

Farmers were able to plan finances and start to break out of their cycle of debt with visibility into the earnings that they were likely to have at the end of the crop's lifecycle.

This seemingly small change in the way of doing business had created a significant difference in the mindset of the farmer community over time.

Developing crop strains that require reduced labour and time investment significantly reduce the farmer's dependencies and help him operate more independently.

Also, regulation in favour of price transparency can help farmers plan their finances better, allowing them to break free of their cycle of debt eventually.



Mindset by choice or by circumstance?

From speculating on what crop might have the highest demand to watching and waiting to get the best prices for his produce, the farmer's mindset has been that of a gambler. **However, is this mindset a matter of choice or circumstance?**

