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Born into a family with a rich legacy in the food processing business, Sandeep Sabharwal realized that the warehousing facilities across India lacked essential ancillary services, such as storage, preservation, and assaying, which were critical for efficient post-harvest management. He later uncovered a stark reality that India incurred annual losses of over 10% of its agro produce, amounting to approximately Rs 60,000 crore. As a result, he formed SLCM in 2009 to address this challenge.

Paving the Way for a Robust Agri-Based Economy in India

A well-rounded approach to building rural infrastructure can not only modernize the agricultural sector but also empower rural communities, writes Sandeep Sabharwal

India's economic landscape has been undergoing remarkable growth and transformation. The Economic Survey for 2022-23 predicts a 7% growth for the Indian economy, though international agencies predict a growth rate of around 6.3 to 6.5%. It's important to recognize that the nation's development is rooted in its diverse sectors. Agriculture, a sector that employs over 50% of the population and contributes around 15% to the GDP, plays a pivotal role in India's economic fabric. However, to harness the full potential of this sector, it is imperative to adopt an integrated approach.

Acknowledging the importance of the agriculture sector in making India a superpower or developed nation by 2047, the Union Government has accorded top priority to the sector and

several significant measures and reforms have been undertaken. However, as India faces unique challenges due to its diversity and demographics, solutions also need to be unique and sustainable with an integrated approach. For example, the most challenging task ahead is to show resilience against climate change as its adverse impact on agriculture is well known. An integrated approach combined with new technologies would certainly make the agriculture sector more resilient and there would be nobody to beat India in its rapid path to progress. So far, technologies have proved the mettle to take on all challenges head-on.

Empowering Agri-Tech Startups

The establishment of an Agriculture Accelerator Fund to support agritech

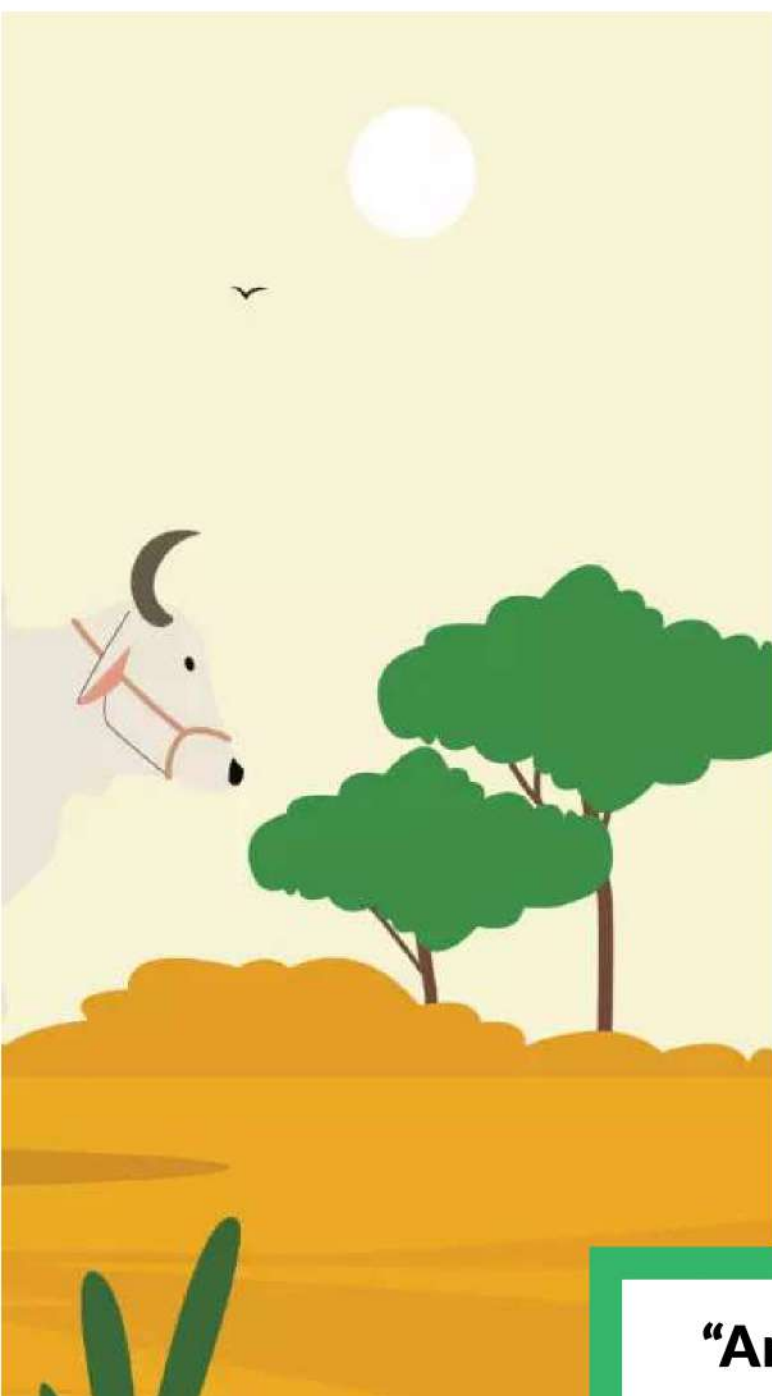


startups in rural areas is a reflection of an integrated approach towards the sector and a commendable step. By fostering innovation in this sector, the fund offers new and transformative solutions to the challenges faced by Indian farmers. With increasing access to funds, young entrepreneurs can contribute to enhancing productivity,

market linkages, and price realization.

Investment in Digital Infrastructure

India is all set to computerize 63,000 primary agricultural credit societies with a significant investment. The move underscores our commitment to making agricultural processes more



digitized value chain would lead the sector to the next level of advancement. Ensuring that rural areas have access to the digital world is essential. This includes not only internet connectivity but also digital literacy programs for farmers. It can provide valuable information on crop planning, market trends, and financial services.

Focus on the Supply and Input Side

There is a need to place a substantial focus on strengthening the supply and input side of the agricultural value chain. Increased availability of credit, facilitation of better-quality inputs through the Clean Plant Program, and investment in digital infrastructure will boost farm-level productivity. The emphasis on crop diversification, sustainability, and nutrition, particularly through millet cultivation, is a necessary move. Promoting diverse crops, like millet, can enhance sustainability and nutrition. It's

efficient. This move will enable farmers to access farm inputs and credit more easily, further empowering the sector. Additionally, the digital public infrastructure must be a key component of an integrated approach as an entirely

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important to support farmers in adopting these crops by providing them with the necessary knowledge and resources. Promoting cooperatives and producer collectives is essential for enabling farmers to receive better prices for their produce.

Building Infrastructure

Infrastructure development in rural

areas is a crucial component of the growth and modernization of the agricultural sector.

Investing in rural infrastructure, such as roads, electricity, and telecommunications, doesn't only benefit agriculture but has a ripple effect across multiple sectors. It facilitates the transportation of goods, and access to markets, and improves overall living standards in rural areas.

The Way Forward

Finally, women's empowerment and cohesive public-private partnership would make the approach truly complete and integrated. Recognizing and empowering women in agriculture is an effective way to boost productivity and promote gender equality. This can be achieved through skill development programs, access to credit, and

ownership of land and other productive resources. Furthermore, encouraging private sector participation in agriculture is crucial. It can lead to investments in technology, research, and value-added services.

As always, the execution on the ground will be the true test of purpose-designed initiatives. If implemented effectively, several policy reforms could

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pave the way for a flourishing agri-based economy in India, bringing economic growth to rural areas and enhancing the well-being

of its citizens. A well-rounded approach to building rural infrastructure can not only modernize the agricultural sector but also empower rural communities, promote gender equality, and foster private-sector innovation. By fostering innovation, digitization, and private sector involvement, and by prioritizing the supply and input side of the value chain, India can take a significant leap toward strengthening its agricultural sector and fulfilling its aspirations to become a global superpower. India sincerely and efficiently needs to harness its agri-centric potential and continue its journey towards a developed economy with inclusive growth. ■