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INFRASTRUCTURE THE BACKBONE OF AGRICULTURE

The overall income of the farmers is dependent on the infrastructural facilities available for farming operations. Unfortunately, there are critical gaps in agriculture that have decreased farm profitability. Absence of post harvest infrastructure, longer supply chains, presence of intermediaries and lack of institutional funding have contributed to lesser profit margins and sometimes even losses.

GOI's intervention through institution of 'Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF) scheme' rightfully addresses the woes of the farmers. Launched with an objective to mobilize a medium-long term debt financing facility for investment in viable projects for post-harvest management Infrastructure and community farming assets through incentives and financial support, the scheme is set to improve agriculture infrastructure in the country. So far, the AIF portal has received 19000+ applications seeking subsidized loan worth Rs 13,400 crore under the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF) scheme. Out of this, a total of 10394 projects have been sanctioned under the scheme worth loan of Rs 7677 crore which includes in principle sanction by NABARD.

It is heartening to note that many states have enthusiastically come forward in utilising this scheme. Many success stories are emanating from the states of Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Rajasthan. While most of these states are leveraging their strong cooperatives network to take the lead, Madhya Pradesh stands out with the highest non-PACS applications.

The Department of Agriculture Cooperation and Farmers Welfare (DAC&FW) has evinced their special interest and with a host of initiatives is accelerating on-ground investments. Reaching out to FPOs and livelihood organisations, along with IFFCO, HAFED, NAFED & others, the department is keenly spreading awareness about AIF. The department has been regularly conducting reviews of states to monitor progress and promote cross learnings.

Building infrastructure under AIF through partnership with farmers, farmer groups and local entrepreneurs can be the next big step for India. Agriculture Infrastructure Fund will bring together the collective power of all stakeholders in the agriculture ecosystem. It will give India the much needed impetus to create an environment conducive for seamless functioning of agricultural activities. Our farmers should no longer suffer for lack of basic facilities for storing or transporting their produce. They should no longer undergo the torment of distress selling. Farmers have played their part by producing agricultural produce abundantly. Now it is time to back them up with suitable infrastructure.

