1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Unnat Bharat Abhiyan is a Central Sector flagship scheme of the Ministry of Education, Government of India, designed to connect Higher Education Institutions with rural communities to address developmental challenges through knowledge transfer, technological interventions, and participatory engagement. Conceived in 2014 as a pilot with 132 villages and scaled up in 2018, the scheme has now evolved into a nationwide programme for sustainable rural transformation. The scheme was implemented by Indian Institute of Technology Delhi as the National Coordinating Institute (NCI) keeping in loop institutional support galvanized with 50 Regional Coordinating Institutes (RCIs), 15 Subject Expert Groups (SEGs), and thousands of Participating Institutions (PIs).

The UBA scheme was evaluated, keeping in view six pre-designed study objectives. These included: (1) to study the relevance, efficiency and achievement of the scheme in terms of bringing about transitional changes in rural development; (2) to identify the intensity of association between knowledge institutions and rural realities; (3) to examine the institutional capacity in HEIs in research and training relevant to needs of rural India; (4) to identify innovative technologies in devising implementation of government schemes in rural settings; (5) to study the schemes' assistance in leveraging knowledge base of institutions and; (6) to suggest/ recommend for the continuation/discontinuation/ restructuring of UBA scheme.

In order to get the responsive feedback on the objective of the study, a descriptive methodology was employed in the positivist frame. It included a mixed-methods approach. A balance blend of Quantitative and qualitative data sets were collected and collated .The tools consisted structured questionnaires administered to students, faculty, and institutional heads. Qualitative tools included focus group discussions in networked villages, in-depth interviews with stakeholders, workshops, and field observations. Secondary data on scheme design, fund allocations, budgets, and performance indicators was analyzed. Field visits were undertaken in 10 States/UT: (1) Arunachal Pradesh, (2) Assam, (3) Bihar, (4) Haryana, (5) Goa, (6) Gujarat, (7) Jammu & Kashmir, (8) Maharashtra, (9) Tamil Nadu, and (10) Uttar Pradesh.

The major findings of the study are as under:

(i) The scheme's coverage has expanded substantially since its inception, engaging approximately 4,486 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across 35 States and UTs, covering around 21,200-21,300 villages in 603 districts. More than 5 lakh students and

30,000 faculty members have participated in rural immersion and problem-solving activities. However, participation remains uneven, with some institutions active only on paper and a number of districts still uncovered. The three-tier governance structure comprising the National Coordinating Institute (NCI), Regional Coordinating Institutes (RCIs), and Participating Institutions (PIs) is functional, but the Subject Expert Groups (SEGs)-15 in total-remain underutilized, and several RCIs require capacity strengthening to provide consistent support.

(ii) Academic integration has been a notable success. The University Grants Commission has introduced a two-credit course on social responsibility and community engagement, while the All India Council for Technical Education has launched rural internships under UBA. Seven master trainers have been identified for faculty capacity building, and a UBA-supported MOOC has engaged nearly 13,000-14,000 students. At the same time, field reports indicate that non-technical institutions remain under-mobilized, limiting UBA's potential for cross-disciplinary problem-solving in areas such as social sciences, management, and governance. Students and faculty have contributed to hygiene and sanitation awareness, women's empowerment, renewable energy adoption, and digital literacy, yet many respondents reported only superficial engagement due to inadequate incentives, lack of structured credit recognition, and limited time for field immersion.

(iii) On the technological front, UBA has facilitated more than 543 interventions and piloted over 200 eco-friendly solutions in areas such as water management, sanitation, renewable energy, and basic amenities. Examples include solar-based water purification units, improved sanitation models, and livelihood-enhancing technologies. Yet the thematic focus remains skewed, with renewable energy and sanitation interventions dominating, while sustainable agriculture and livelihood promotion-two of the scheme's core pillars-are less emphasized. Field survey responses confirm this trend: about 44 percent of participants reported introducing technological solutions, while 56 percent did not, highlighting a gap between academic planning and village-level deployment.

(iv) Financially, UBA has demonstrated efficiency in resource use. Expenditure efficiency has been high, with each crore rupee of spending engaging approximately 170 institutions. However, concerns persist over delays in fund release, shortfalls in the seed

money allocated to PIs (₹50,000, widely regarded as insufficient), and dependence on external sources such as CSR funds.

(v) In terms of outcomes, the majority of surveyed students (over 90 percent) reported that UBA enhanced their understanding of rural realities, 71 percent noted career-relevant skill development, and 76 percent affirmed that UBA helped bridge the gap between classroom knowledge and field practice. Faculty members likewise reported that UBA improved their capacity for participatory teaching. States with large rural populations, such as Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, reported higher contributions to student skills, critical thinking, and community problem-solving, while smaller states like Goa reported concentrated, significant impacts in select villages. Despite these gains, stakeholder responses also revealed gaps in ownership and sustainability, with many villages experiencing only one-off interventions and limited continuity.

(vi) Convergence with other schemes and institutions is visible in collaborations with CSIR labs, ICAR-KVKs, and Panchayati Raj Institutions, but remains ad hoc rather than systematic. Village stakeholders expressed appreciation for UBA's interventions but emphasized the need for continuity, deeper engagement, and more regular interaction with HEIs. Students and faculty likewise called for stronger incentives, including credit recognition, awards, and structured financial support for fieldwork.

(vii) UBA has established a robust framework for linking academia with rural development, created a pipeline of tested innovations, and mainstreamed community engagement into higher education. Its successes lie in breadth of outreach, cost efficiency, and curricular integration, while its shortcomings lie in uneven depth, weak incentives, slow fund flows, and fragile monitoring mechanisms. The evaluation underscores that UBA is a programme of high relevance and strong potential, but its transformative impact depends on reforms that expand coverage, strengthen institutional incentives, improve monitoring systems, and enhance convergence with State and local governance.

The evaluation concludes that Unnat Bharat Abhiyan is a highly relevant and effective programme, uniquely combining academic objectives with grassroots rural development. It has created a strong foundation for participatory governance, social responsibility, and sustainable innovation. **Continuation of the scheme beyond FY 2025-26 is strongly recommended**, with reforms focused on expanding its improved outreach to districts, GPs, Institutions' coverage,

increasing seed funding to PIs, RCIs and ZCs with introduction to PMU, enhancement of seed money to Rs.40000 per village, Rs. 5 lakhs for technological innovation and Rs. 2 lakhs for customization of existing technologies are prominently figured out. Academic credits to faculty involve and best performing RCIs, PIs are also to be acknowledged and awarded. With these improvements, UBA has the potential to act as a catalyst in grounded understanding on the one hand and rural development on the other. UBA also emerges as a beacon to enlighten the rural mass with improved wisdom contributing to aspirational vision of *Viksit Bharat @ 2047*.

Recommendations

The UBA, a central sector and flagship scheme of the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Govt. of India is one of its kind and deserves appreciation for bringing HEIs closer to the village communities where students and faculty enrich their wisdom by learning village life and practices. The scheme also enables PIs to network with the villages and apply the intervention to improve the socio-economic status of village dwellers. As such, **the UBA scheme is recommended to be continued** with following mandatory suggestions:

a) There is a need to set up a dedicated Project Management Unit (PMU) under the aegis of the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Government of India. The NCI as the nodal agency stands replaced by a PMU to be setup under the aegis of the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Government of India.
b) The seed money disbursed and remitted to PIs is insufficient and the same should be increased, keeping in view the inflation and changes in Market Price Index (MPI). The money presently disbursed is Rs. 10,000 per village that needs to be scaled up to Rs. 40,000 per village. The threshold of the networked village be kept flexibly open so that bandwidth of the scheme stands amplified.
c) The existing technology innovation grant of Rs. 1,00,000 is to be revised to the tune of Rs. 5,00,000 Lakhs in order to appreciate the scientific temperament and apt financial assistance. The customization of existing technology budget heads of Rs. 50,000 stands revised to Rs. 2,00,000.
d) The PMU should be allocated 2.5 % annually subject to financial outlay of Rs 500 crores for the scheme. In case the outlay is less than Rs 500 crores, an annual allocation of Rs 2

crores may be provided to the PMU including knowledge resources for conducting UBA activities across the country.

e) To expand the outreach of the scheme, dedicated advertising agency should be judiciously selected for at least a year to disseminate awareness about UBA. Media channels should be carefully selected, ensuring they have widespread coverage in the target area. Conferencing with Vice Chancellors/ Registrar/Principals/Principal Secretary of States/UTs may be commenced by the Ministry in coordination with PMU. The PMU may assess the impact of advertising, if required the duration of advertisement may be increased.

f) In order to ensure a robust networking villages, the PIs must be in touch with Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)

g) In view of the six classified zones by NSSO, a university or college or an educational institution may be declared as Zonal Centre (ZC) to take special empanelment drive for the PIs. The declared ZCs should be provided with sufficient manpower by the Ministry for which a separate head under the expenditure on the scheme be provisioned. The expenditure may be admissible as per the radius of ZCs. In the next level of top down, RCI may be placed against each State/UT. However, for smaller States/UTs in a region, two or three States/UTs should be clubbed under one RCI. To foster scholarship through studies in the rural India, the PMU may set-up an expert committee in consultation with the Ministry to take a final decision on whether the study/ies to be conducted. A focused area of study may be worked out by the PMU whether the study is to be conducted. There should not be any intermediary except for forwarding authority as coordinator UBA of PIs with regard to study proposals. Each project after completion has to be assessed by an area expert to be decided by the PMU in consultation with the Ministry. If the project studies are not in line with requirements and objectives, the assignee of the study has to refund the entire money with 2.5% penalty.

h) The Monitoring of the scheme implementation has to be overseen by the ZCs (Zonal Centres). ZC could entrust RCIs or do the monitoring work of the scheme implementation itself. The delta change in the activities must be updated on the website for which the log-in and password would be generated by the PMU and assigned to RCIs and ZCs.

i) For the fund sanctioned to PIs, RCIs and ZCs should be routed directly to their SA accounts. The expenditure incurred must be audited and sent to the PMU and the PMU should send for the perusal of the Ministry along with ATR thereto.

j) To make the scheme attractive to the teachers and students, credit scores ought to be granted to them. The UGC/ AICTE/ other regulating agencies should be directed to issue notification for granting credits to those faculty involved in UBA activities.

k) There should be provision of infusing competition amongst PIs and RCIs, the best performing PIs and RCIs should be awarded. It should be selected at the State level first. and later they would compete at National level, and the best performing PI and RCI should be acknowledged and awarded.

l) Dedicated SOPs should be designed for the functioning of (1) PMU (2) ZCs (3) RCIs (3) PIs. The SOPs must spell out the job roles and functions legibly and clearly.

m) A real-time status update on number of PIs, villages networked and fund disbursed and utilized should be managed by a dedicated team of PMU. Regular monthly meetings of the Department of Higher Education with ZCs, PIs, RCIs and State/UT functionaries should be held to review the implementation progress. The frequency of meetings should be periodically assessed and adjusted.

n) The existing NCI has to transfer knowledge base, assets and technical know-how to the constituted PMU under the aegis of Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Government of India. However, all these items are expected to be secured and kept safely until the smooth transfer of the items to the PMU.