

PARLIAMENT QUESTION: RURAL AGRI-TECH STARTUPS AND WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

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The Department of Science and Technology (DST), through National Initiative for Developing and Harnessing Innovations - Promoting and Accelerating Young and Aspiring Innovators and Startups (NIDHI-PRAYAS) programme provides national-level support to early-stage innovators, including those working on agri-tech solutions for rural districts. It aims to convert innovative ideas into working prototypes, promote rural technology adoption, and create pathways for commercialization through a network of PRAYAS Centres (PCs) hosted in Technology Business Incubators across India, including rural and semi-urban locations.

The nature of support provided are given below:

- **Prototype Development Funding:** Up to ₹10 lakh per innovator for developing prototypes from ideas. **Incubation Infrastructure:** Access to laboratories, testing facilities, and domain-specific resources at PRAYAS Centres. **TRL Advancement:** Support for advancing innovations through Technology Readiness Level (TRL) scale, and help iterative prototyping, testing, and validation. **IP Facilitation:** Advisory and assistance in protecting intellectual property. **Business Plan Support:** Strategic guidance in preparing business plans, market entry roadmaps, and commercialization strategies.

The Startup India initiative of the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), aims to build a strong ecosystem for nurturing innovation and encouraging investments in startups, including those in the agri-tech sector.

Flagship schemes include:

- **Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS)** – providing equity funding support through SEBI-registered Alternative Investment Funds;
- **Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS)** – supporting proof-of-concept, prototype development, product trials, market entry, and commercialisation;
- **Credit Guarantee Scheme for Startups (CGSS)** – enabling collateral-free loans to startups.

In addition, periodic programmes such as the States' Startup Ranking, National Startup Awards, Innovation Week, and district outreach initiatives promote grassroots innovation and strengthen state-level ecosystems.

Under the NIDHI-PRAYAS scheme, innovators, entrepreneurs and startups, including women entrepreneurs and rural startups are provided hand holding support in terms of technical mentoring, business mentoring, prototyping support, funding support, market access, etc. The NIDHI PRAYAS program is managed by startupincubators which have been established in academic institutes across the country, including the state of Uttar Pradesh. DST has also supported Women Entrepreneurship Development Programme (WEDP) to motivate and encourage potential women with Science and Technology background, to understand and opt entrepreneurship. Under 'Strengthening Upscaling and Nurturing Innovations for Livelihood' (SUNIL) programme of DST for promotion of rural innovation and entrepreneurship, support is provided for creation of social enterprises for small farmers, traditional artisans, and workers in the unorganized sector.

The Startup India initiative of the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) implements several targeted measures to support women-led startups and promote inclusive entrepreneurship. Provisions have been made for higher management fee eligibility for Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs) led by or focused on women under the Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS). Through DPIIT, Reduced Annual Guarantee Fee (AGF) for women entrepreneurs has been provided under the Credit Guarantee Scheme for Startups (CGSS). Also, DPIIT has recognized and awarded women-led startups through the National Startup

Awards (NSA).

The establishment of startup incubator is a dynamic and continuous process. The Department has so far supported 48 Inclusive Technology Business Incubator (i-TBI) in different academic institutes at national level. The state of Uttar Pradesh has emerged as one of the active states in this effort, with seven i-TBIs already supported, thereby ensuring outreach in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities. The Etawah district is envisaged to be covered through this inclusive approach, as nearby Kanpur district already hosts well-established incubation facilities, including the Centre of Excellence at IIT Kanpur and the inclusive Technology Business Incubator at Pranveer Singh Institute of Technology (PSIT), Kanpur which collectively cater to innovation and startup requirements of the region.

This information was given by Dr. Jitendra Singh, Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Science and Technology, Earth Sciences, MoS PMO, MoS Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions, Department of Atomic Energy and Department of Space, in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha today.

NKR/PSM

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