Achieving Samrudhi: Odisha's new agriculture policy focuses on crop diversification, market linkages & use of technology

The first agriculture policy in Odisha was formulated in 1996, which conferred the status of industry to agriculture. Subsequent versions of agriculture policies were released in 2008 and 2013 with an even greater impetus on input management and focus on allied sectors, respectively. Odisha is predominantly a rural and an agrarian economy. In January, the Naveen Patnaik-led Odisha government released its Agriculture policy, 2020, which focuses on profitability for farmers. Odisha's agricultural GDP has nearly doubled in real terms between 2002 and 2016. It has clocked an average annual growth rate of about 4.5%, compared to an all-India average of 3.1%. The average income of an Odisha farmer grew at a CAGR of 8.4%, compared to the all- India average of 3.7%. Farmer incomes in Odisha grew the fastest in the country, even faster than the growth in agricultural GDP, indicating an orientation towards improving farmer income. However, there have been challenges. To accelerate the growth trend set by previous policies, the state government launched its new State Agricultural Policy (SAP) 2020-SAMRUDHI—focused on the social and economic well-being of farmers, sharecroppers and landless agriculture households. It aims to actualise the untapped potential of agriculture, while ensuring growth process is environmentally, economically and technologically inclusive. SAMRUDHI is based on an 8-pillar strategy focused on simultaneous reforms. The policy lays emphasis on diversification, market linkages and use of technology. The policy also identifies and suggests mechanisms to orient governance reforms towards farmer-centricity, which is in alignment with the flagship programmes-5T and MoSarkar.

The policy recommends the creation of agriculture production clusters. It paves the way for the creation of an agro-ecological map, which will help in identify an ideal cropping pattern. The policy also suggests that these clusters should be linked to the market aggressively by removing all the existing barriers. Innovative market reforms like the electronic National Agriculture Market (eNAM) portal, Gramin Agricultural Markets (GrAM), creation of market information system for disseminating current and forecasted prices have been laid down in SAMRUDHI. Special focus has been given to the adoption of model acts like the Model

Contract Farming Act, etc, with suitable changes necessary for the implementation in Odisha. The policy also emphasises development of warehousing and quality testing infrastructure for better marketing of the crops. Through data analysis, it was found that livestock and fisheries have contributed the most to the growth of farmer incomes. SAMRUDHI provides recommendations for developing these. It includes elements like protection of animals from diseases, artificial insemination, conservation of indigenous species and encouraging the private sector to create value chains. For fisheries, the focus is on the promotion of inland fisheries and digitisation of Odisha's assets like ponds and lakes. The imprints of technology are increasing in agriculture with major advancements in data science (machine learning, artificial intelligence etc.), remote sensing, geographic information system (GIS), etc. The agriculture policy pushes for widespread usage and adoption of new-age technology to increase the quality of farming and farm products. The process followed for the creation of SAMRUDHI has been participative with the involvement of various government departments, policy experts, NGOs working within Odisha and outside it. To create the policy, relevant data for the last 15 years was analysed and specific opportunity areas for policy interventions were identified. This policy is a time-bound, action-oriented document which clearly lists outcome targets the state should achieve over the next five years. As such, Odisha has publicly declared the targets the government should achieve within a specific time frame.