



RCI-UBA-GRI



POLICY BRIEF

“Unnat Bharat Abhiyan: Advancing Community Engagement in Higher Education towards SDGs 2030 and Viksit Bharat @ 2047”

Dr.K.Ravichandran

Overview

Regional Coordinating Institute, UBA, GRI, Gandhigram, Tamil Nadu Organised National Conference (Online) on 11.11.2025. The conference showcased UBA's role in connecting higher education with rural development to drive progress towards SDGs and Viksit Bharat @2047. Experts stressed collaborative innovation and community partnerships as essential for building self-reliant, inclusive rural communities.

Background and Rationale

Unnat Bharat Abhiyan (UBA), the flagship initiative of the Ministry of Education, Government of India, aims to bring transformational change in rural development by harnessing the knowledge and resources of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). It envisions HEIs as catalysts for sustainable community development through research, innovation, and participatory engagement.

The Gandhigram Rural Institute (GRI), rooted in the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi, has always emphasized education that blends knowledge with social responsibility and productive work. Its mission of integrating learning with community life strongly aligns with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which underscores experiential learning, social outreach, and holistic education.

The conference celebrated the achievements of UBA, explored its contributions to NEP 2020, and deliberated on strategies to strengthen the community engagement role of HEIs in India's development landscape.

Executive summary:

- Rural transformation becomes powerful when one strong idea is pursued with focus, local ownership, innovation, and digital empowerment.
- Sustainable rural development thrives when communities actively co-create solutions through participatory innovation, shared ownership, and collaboration with institutions
- Also sustainable rural transformation thrives when grassroots entrepreneurs-especially women, SHGs, and start-ups-are empowered with technology, finance, and market access to build resilient
- Transformative rural development thrives when Panchayats and HEIs collaborate, uniting grassroots democracy with research to drive evidence-based planning and self-reliant villages under UBA
- Aligned with NEP 2020, SDGs 2030, and Viksit Bharat @2047, UBA positions higher education as a catalyst for rural innovation, experiential learning, and community empowerment, shaping socially responsible graduates who drive self-reliant development
- A self-reliant and inclusive Viksit Bharat @2047 requires integrating Gandhian ethics and village-centric development into modern education and initiatives like UBA, fostering value-driven and socially responsible nation builders

Conference Methodology

The conference was conducted entirely in online mode to enable wide participation from across the country.

- **Format:** The programme included an inaugural session, six expert-led thematic sessions, and a consolidation and reflection session at the end of the day.
- **Speakers:** Selected experts from rural development, higher education, and public policy delivered about 30-minute online lectures on the designated themes.
- **Participation:** The conference was made open to UBA Coordinators, academicians, researchers, Panchayat representatives, NGOs, and students.
- **Consolidation Session:** The concluding session focused on synthesizing key insights from all thematic discussions and drafting a brief Consolidated Note that captures recommendations, best practices, and future directions for strengthening UBA and community engagement.
- **Access:** The conference proceedings were streamed live through social media to ensure maximum outreach and visibility.

Purpose of the Conference

The primary purpose of the Online National Conference is to celebrate the Foundation Day of UBA by highlighting its remarkable contributions in bridging higher education and community development. The conference seeks to provide a reflective platform to review UBA's achievements and to deliberate on how HEIs can play a transformative role in promoting participatory development, social innovation, and rural empowerment. It aims to unearth the key factors that influence or condition effective community engagement by HEIs and to explore the evolving role of UBA as a national framework connecting academia with rural realities. The deliberations were to emphasize how UBA can collaborate with Gram Panchayats, leverage Government schemes, and promote innovation-driven livelihoods in rural areas. In alignment with the NEP 2020, the conference also focused on how community engagement can be systematically integrated into academic, research, and governance structures of HEIs, thereby redefining education as an instrument of social transformation and inclusive growth.

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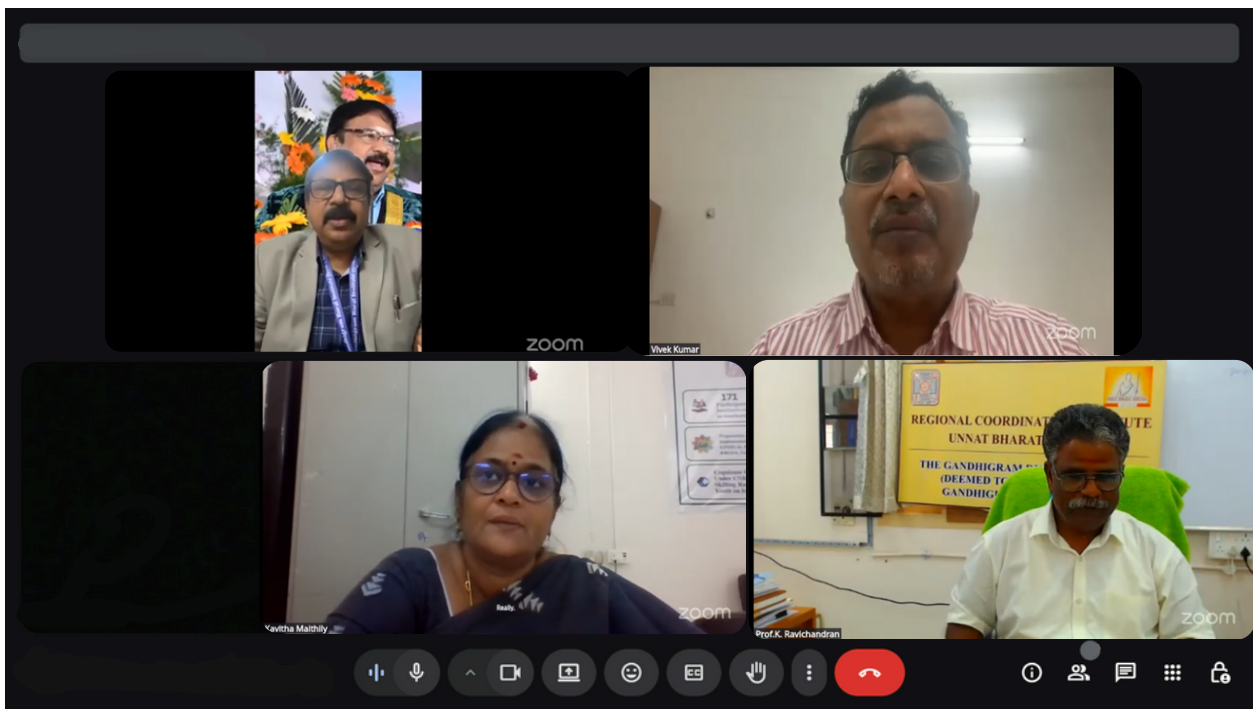
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Report on the Conference

The Gandhigram Rural Institute (DTBU), serving as a Regional Coordinating Institute under the UBA, organized a National Conference to commemorate the Foundation Day of UBA. The event brought together distinguished academicians, policymakers, researchers, and practitioners from across India to deliberate on advancing rural transformation, community engagement, and sustainable development through higher education.

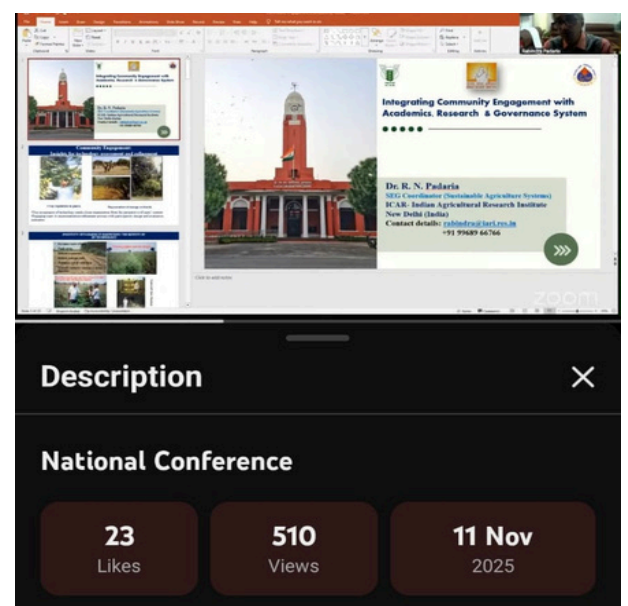
The programme aimed to highlight best practices, foster institutional collaboration, and reaffirm the vision of UBA in aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 and the national mission of Viksit Bharat @2047.

Dr. K. Ravichandran, Regional Coordinator, UBA, GRI, delivered the welcome address during the inaugural session of the conference. He highlighted the significant achievements of UBA in promoting community engagement and rural transformation through its six identified thrust areas. He appreciated the valuable contributions of all Participating Institutions (PIs), Regional Coordinating Institutions (RCIs), and Subject Expert Groups (SEGs) in advancing the objectives of the programme.

He also acknowledged the continuous support from IIT Delhi and UGC, which has been instrumental in strengthening the collaborative framework of UBA nationwide. Dr. K. Ravichandran expressed strong confidence that the deliberations and technical sessions of the conference would provide meaningful insights and reaffirm UBA's mission of fostering sustainable rural development and participatory growth.

Link to Watch Video:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=3tdPDZqL3PE



Inaugural Address

Dr. N. Panchanatham, Vice-Chancellor, The Gandhigram Rural Institute (DTBU), delivered the inaugural address, appreciating the efforts of UBA–RCI and the PIs in advancing rural development and community transformation. He praised the leadership of Dr. K. Ravichandran for effectively coordinating UBA initiatives that promote social responsibility and inclusive growth.

He acknowledged the guidance of Prof. Vivek Kumar, SEG Coordinator, UBA, IIT Delhi, and emphasized the crucial role of higher education institutions in achieving the SDGs. He encouraged continued collaboration among UBA institutions to empower villages, bridge development gaps, and build a self-reliant and inclusive India.

Link to Watch Video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=0UscN6pp3ZU



Keynote Address



Dr. Vivek Kumar, UBA Co-Coordinator & SEG Coordinator, NCI, IIT Delhi, delivered the keynote address, presenting how UBA connects the strengths of higher education with the needs of villages. He highlighted the active role of faculty, students, and institutions in rural development through research, mentorship, and technology-driven initiatives in key areas such as organic farming, water management, renewable energy, basic amenities, artisanship, and livelihoods.

He also emphasized the contributions of SEG, Tech4Seva, and national collaborations in creating sustainable, community-focused solutions. He concluded that when academic knowledge aligns with community needs, rural progress becomes inevitable.

Link to Watch Video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=971B04LlvbE

Technical Session I

In the first technical session, Dr. R. Ramesh, Regional Coordinator, UBA, NIRD&PR, Hyderabad, spoke on “Leveraging Government Schemes for Creating Smart Villages under UBA.” He highlighted Smart Villages as evolving, inspirational models, citing the Millet Model Village at Attapadi, Kerala, where millet cultivation boosted nutrition, livelihoods, cultural roots, and climate resilience.

He also described the Bharat Net Programme as the digital backbone of Smart Villages, noting Tamil Nadu’s strong progress with nearly 10,000 Gram Panchayats connected. By integrating Bharat Net with Jan Dhan Yojana and CSCs, villages are becoming digitally empowered ecosystems. He envisioned every village digitally strong by 2047, echoing the nation’s dream of Viksit Bharat @2047.

Link to Watch Video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=GD519lu5B24



Technical Session II



The second session, led by Dr. Rabindra Nath Pandaria, Joint Director, ICAR, New Delhi, focused on “Integrating Community for Sustainable Rural Development.” Drawing on decades of experience, he emphasized that community engagement and participatory innovation are the cornerstones of sustainable rural transformation. He stressed that technological advancements must be locally relevant and socially accepted to be effective.

He also advocated for joint experimentation and co-creation of knowledge between farmers, researchers, and institutions. He underlined that empowering local communities leads to resilient rural systems, perfectly aligning with UBA’s vision.

Link to Watch Video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=khOK8X9p-0

Technical Session III

The third session, led by Dr. Seema Sharma, Professor, IIT Delhi, was on “Promoting Innovation and Entrepreneurship as Drivers for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods under the UBA Framework.” She emphasized that inclusive and equitable growth depends on strengthening local innovation ecosystems and nurturing grassroots entrepreneurship. She advocated empowering self-help groups, women entrepreneurs, and rural start-ups through access to affordable technology, financial inclusion, and market linkages. Dr. Seema Sharma also highlighted the potential of digital and e-commerce platforms in connecting rural producers with larger markets, ensuring fair value and competitiveness. She reiterated that innovation lies not only in technology but in creating opportunities and building self-reliant communities.

Link to Watch Video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=QKEee8VmJzY



Technical Session IV



The fourth session was delivered by Dr. G. Palanidurai, Professor (Retd.), The Gandhigram Rural Institute, on “Strengthening Panchayat–HEIs Partnerships through UBA.” He underscored that genuine rural transformation begins at the grassroots, where Panchayats and community organizations play a decisive role. He urged HEIs to collaborate with Panchayats by providing research support, capacity building, data management, and community awareness.

Dr. G. Palanidurai encouraged institutions to move beyond classroom instruction and engage directly with rural communities through participatory learning and field-based initiatives, strengthening democratic practices and self-reliance.

Link to Watch Video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=UvMYjhukxNg

Technical Session V

Dr. Saket Bihari connected the vision of UBA with the objectives of the National Education Policy (NEP 2020) and national development agendas such as SDGs 2030 and Viksit Bharat @2047. He emphasized that UBA serves as a bridge between HEIs and rural communities, fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and digital governance through experiential learning. He also highlighted the importance of capacity building, institutional coordination, and robust administrative mechanisms for effective implementation of UBA initiatives. Dr. Saket Bihari commended GRI's exemplary role as an RCI for linking academia with rural realities and advancing the mission of community-based transformation.

Link to Watch Video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=f7B8q-URXhw



Technical Session VI



Dr. T. Ravichandran presented on “Reinterpreting Mahatma Gandhi’s Philosophy in the Context of Modern India’s Journey Towards 2047.” He reflected on the timeless relevance of Gandhian thought in shaping an equitable and sustainable India. He reiterated Gandhi’s belief that “the future of India lies in its villages”. He connected the Constructive Programme with UBA’s objectives of linking higher education with rural life. Dr. T. Ravichandran urged policymakers and educators to integrate Gandhian ethics into modern education systems, ensuring that moral and community-centered principles guide India’s journey towards Viksit Bharat @2047.

Link to Watch Video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=E9a8F31Jx1s

Synthesis of Celebration and Way Forward

The concluding session was delivered by Mr. Ashish Chauhan, Project Manager, UBA, NCI-IIT Delhi, on “Synthesis of Celebration and Way Forward.” He emphasized that rural transformation requires collaborative, multi-stakeholder efforts integrating research, policy, and community participation. Highlighting UBA’s expansion to over 4600 PIs, 15 SEGs, and 13 national partners, he encouraged leveraging Government schemes, fostering grassroots innovation, and enhancing participatory democracy through engagement with PRIs. He reaffirmed that UBA’s mission—to achieve sustainable and inclusive rural development—remains a cornerstone for realizing the national vision of Viksit Bharat @2047.

Conclusion

The National Conference served as a dynamic platform for knowledge sharing, institutional collaboration, and community engagement. The discussions reaffirmed that Unnat Bharat Abhiyan is not merely a programme but a nation-building movement dedicated to sustainable, self-reliant, and inclusive rural development. The insights and commitments emerging from the sessions have set a roadmap for future academic and field-based initiatives, reinforcing UBA’s pivotal role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 and realizing the vision of Viksit Bharat @2047.

Programme Schedule

Time	Programme	Resource Persons
11.00 am	Technical Session -1 Leveraging Government Schemes for creating Smart Villages under the UBA	Dr.R.Ramesh Associate Professor & Head Centre for Rural Infrastructure / Regional Coordinator, UBA NIRD&PR, Hyderabad
11.45 am	Technical Session -2 Integrating Community Engagement with Academic, Research, and Governance Systems of HEIs	Dr. Rabindra Nath Padaria Joint Director (Extension) ICAR - Indian Agricultural Research Institute, Delhi
1.30 pm	Technical Session - 3 Fostering Innovation and Entrepreneurship for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods through UBA	Dr.Seema Sharma Professor, Department of Management Studies, IIT, Delhi
2.00 pm	Technical Session -4 Strengthening Panchayat-HEIs Partnerships through UBA	Dr.G.Palanidurai Professor (Retd) Department of Political Science & Development Administration GRI (DTBU), Gandhigram, Tamil Nadu
2.30 pm	Technical Session - 5 UBA and NEP 2020 — Designing Strategies for the Future – SDG 2030 / Viksit Bharat @ 2047	Dr. Saket Bihari Associate Professor, Development Studies, Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi
3.00 pm	Technical Session - 6 Reinterpreting Mahatma Gandhi @2047: Ideology, Ethics, and Education for a Developed India and UBA	Dr.T.Ravichandran Assistant Professor (Retd) GRI (DTBU), Gandhigram, Tamil Nadu
3.30 pm	Synthesis of Celebration and Way Forward	Mr.Ashish Chauhan, Project Manager, UBA, NCI, IIT Delhi

GRI - RCI

Since March 6, 2019, GRI serves as the **Regional Coordinating Institute (RCI)** for UBA in Southern Tamil Nadu. In this role, GRI guides 179 PIs in integrating rural realities into academic curricula and facilitates development interventions in over 895 villages.

GRI - SEG on RL

UBA-SEG for Rural Livelihoods supports and uplifts livelihood projects across UBA network villages throughout India.

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