



# USOF Scheme for Aspirational Districts in 5 states

## Why in News

Recently, the Union Cabinet has approved the **Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) scheme for provisioning of 4G-based mobile services in uncovered villages of aspirational districts across five states** — Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, and Odisha.

- **NITI Aayog's Aspirational Districts programme** aims to quickly and effectively transform 112 most under-developed districts across the country.

## Key Points

### ▪ About:

- It envisages to provide 4G based mobile services in the 7,287 uncovered villages of 44 Aspirational Districts across five States. It would be funded by the Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF).
- It will enhance digital connectivity useful for self-reliance, facilitate learning, dissemination of information and knowledge, skill upgradation and development, disaster management, e-Governance initiatives, establishment of enterprises & e-commerce facilities, etc.
- It seeks to fulfill the vision of Digital India promoting domestic manufacturing and fulfilling the objectives of Atmanirbhar Bharat etc.

### ▪ Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF):

#### ◦ About:

- USOF ensures that there is **universal non-discriminatory access to quality ICT** (Information and Communications Technology) **services** at economically efficient prices **to people in rural and remote areas.**
- It was **created under the Ministry of Communications in 2002.**
- It is **a non-lapsable fund**, i.e., the unspent amount under a targeted financial year does not lapse and is accrued for next years' spending.
- All credits to this fund require parliamentary approval and it has statutory support under **Indian Telegraph (Amendment) Act, 2003.**

#### ◦ Objectives:

- **Economic:** Network extension & stimulate uptake of the ICT services
- **Social:** Mainstreaming the underserved & un-served areas/groups by bridging the Access Gap.
- **Political:** to enable citizens exercise their political rights in an informed way and
- **Constitutional:** Equitable distribution of the fruits of the telecom/digital revolution and fair allocation of national resources (pooled USO levy) via targeted subsidies.

#### ◦ Significance:

- The rural areas get the Village Public Telephones (VPTs), Rural Community Phones (RCPs), Rural Household Telephones (RDELs), and mobile infrastructure.

- With access to affordable telecom services in remote and rural areas it **can help stemming urban migration and ensure generating employment opportunities in the rural areas.**
- The increased awareness of ICT services in the rural areas and growing participation of the rural people **will help promote facilities related to health, education etc.**
- It can ensure the **growth of Rural Business Process Outsourcing (BPOs-Rural) and Rural Knowledge Process Outsourcing (KPOs-Rural.)**
- USOF is also perceived as the right tool **to extend the benefits of the government schemes** aimed at the social development of the rural population.

### Related Schemes

- [BharatNet Project](#)
- [National Broadband Mission](#)
- [Submarine Cable Connectivity to Andaman and Nicobar Islands](#)
- [National Optical Fibre Network](#)
- [Digital India](#)
- [National Digital Communications Policy, 2018](#)

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