



Aspirational Districts' Programme

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This article is based on "A NEW KIND OF GOVERNMENT" that was published in The Indian Express on 31/10/2019. It talks about significance and issues related to Aspirational Districts' Programme.

India is amongst the leading economies of the world and envisages to become \$5 trillion by 2024-25. However, presently the quality of life of many of its citizens is not consistent with this growth story, this is reflected in UNDP's 2018 Human Development Index wherein India is ranked 130.

Living standards in India are affected by significant inter-state and inter-district variations. In order to remove this heterogeneity, the government has launched in January 2018, the 'Transformation of Aspirational Districts' programme (ADP).

- Aspirational Districts are those districts in India, that are affected by poor socio-economic indicators.
- These are aspirational in the context, that improvement in these districts can lead to the overall improvement in human development in India.
- The 115 districts were identified from 28 states, at least one from each state.
- At the Government of India level, the programme is anchored by NITI Aayog. In addition, individual Ministries have assumed responsibility to drive the progress of districts.
- The objective of the program is to monitor the real-time progress of aspirational districts.
- ADP is based on 49 indicators from the 5 identified thematic areas, which focuses closely on improving people's **Health & Nutrition, Education, Agriculture & Water Resources, Financial Inclusion & Skill Development, and Basic Infrastructure**.
- With States as the main drivers, ADP seeks to focus on the strength of each district, identify low-hanging fruits for immediate improvement, measure progress, and **rank districts**.

- The broad contours of the programme are:
 - **Convergence** (of Central & State Schemes) which brings together the horizontal and vertical tiers of the government.
 - **Collaboration** (of Central, State level 'Prabhari' Officers & District Collectors) which enables impactful partnerships between government, market and civil society.
 - **Competition** among districts driven by a spirit of the mass movement, it fosters accountability on district governments.
- The Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP) is one of the largest experiments on **outcomes-focused governance** in the world.

Impact of ADP

- **Decentralization of Development:** ADP focuses on outcomes, that enables local experimentation based on a firm appreciation of ground realities.
- **Inclusive approach:** The delta ranking of the Aspirational Districts combines the innovative use of data with pragmatic administration, keeping the district at the locus of inclusive development.
 - Through ADP government seeks to uplift those districts which have shown relatively lesser progress in achieving key social outcomes.
- **Improved Implementation:** Spurred by competition based on outcomes, local governments target their efforts and improve programme implementation and design.
 - For Example, Health outcomes in ADP saw an increase in registering pregnant women into the health system, institutional delivery of babies and anti-diarrheal treatment, etc.

Challenges Associated with ADP

- ADP is affected by the issue pertaining to **insufficient budgetary resources**.
- ADP is implemented by **multiple ministries which leads to a lack of coordination**.
- Data High-quality administrative data is critical to improving programme implementation and design at the local level.
- The **Delta ranking itself is largely focused on assessing quantity** (that is, coverage of access) rather than quality.
 - On-time delivery of textbooks in schools are part of the ranking index, However, textbook delivery may or may not be a problem in districts.
 - Also, the quality of education in India is in a dismal condition, as highlighted by the ASER report.

Way Forward

- A **more simplified ranking index** is needed with few but carefully chosen output and outcome measures which can more clearly signal national development targets.
- **Financial autonomy** to local governments should be provided.
- **Independent surveys** can be used to validate administrative data, this will help improve data quality.
- Building each **district's internal capacity** to produce reliable and actionable data, and promoting a culture of data use, can be made a priority for the ADP.

Initial evidence suggests that the ADP has already contributed towards improving the lakhs of lives. Therefore, it is critical to carefully document and learn from the ADP's experiences.

Drishti Mains Question:

Aspirational Districts' Programme seeks to remove heterogeneity in social-economic indicators reflected in prevalent inequality in districts of India. Discuss.