

Aspirational Program

Districts

September 4, 2020

Anchored in NITI Aayog, the Aspirational Districts Programme intends to **turn development into a mass movement, facilitated by Governments at different levels: Centre, State and District**. Seen from this perspective, the architecture of this programme showcases the spirit of **cooperative federalism** in India. At the same time, this programme is also an attempt to unleash positive energy by **challenging the people of different districts to compete with each other**. This is, thus, an exercise in **competitive federalism** as well.

Aspirational Districts Program

In a mixed economy like India's, there is no guarantee that, without intervention, the growth process and results of development would be shared by all. Hence, ensuring that the fruit of rapid economic development is equitably shared emerges as a key development challenge for India. **The scourge of under-development is confined to certain pockets in this country**. Despite economic progress in the country, if these places have remained underdeveloped, it is because they suffer from a host of contributing factors. **Relatively poorer endowment of physical resources, lack of infrastructure networks, poor social capital, low standards of health, nutrition, education and skill, and above all, inhabitants demotivated due to years of poverty and deprivation** can be cited as some of these factors.

Features of the Program

- **District officials** should draw up a **Vision and Action Plan for 2018-22**, through public participation, to ensure that their district is a full-fledged partner in creating a New India by 2022.

- The scheme architecture encourages the States and District administration to give a **lead role to Champions of Change** in turning this initiative into a mass movement.
- Ensure **convergence between different government schemes** on the one hand, and on the other hand, to seek complementarity between public initiatives and the private efforts of a household (like choosing to attend a course on skill development).
- **Senior Government of India officials at the rank of Joint Secretary/ Additional Secretary have been appointed as 'Guardians'** (or 'Prabharis' in Hindi) for a district. They are from the same State cadre and are thus, already familiar with the districts in question. Their role then becomes to **act as a bridge between the Central and State Governments.**
- Setting up of Empowered Committees of Secretaries of Government of India, for **interministerial convergence**, to supervise and solve problems.
- Evidence-based decision-making is a cornerstone of the programme strategy. Across the sectors in focus, **49 key performance indicators with 81 data points** have been identified, after extensive consultation with Central Ministries and Knowledge Partners.
- The programme **relies on convergence of existing schemes for its funding.** In addition, funds and other resources made available by the private sector under Corporate Social Responsibility, and some local funds like the District Mineral Funds are to be utilised for critical gap funding.

The 115 districts were identified from 28 States, at least one from each state, in a highly transparent manner. Of these 115 districts, 35 districts have been identified by the Ministry of Home Affairs, on the basis of the density of violence. Central Ministries of Government of India have selected 55 districts on the basis of severe deficiency or sensitivity in

the district. The remaining 25 districts, spreading across 10 States, have been picked by NITI Aayog.