

Aspirational Model: Inspiration for the world: RSTV - Big Picture

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Context:

The United Nations Development Programme has lauded India's Aspirational Districts Programme, which resulted in sectoral growth and improvement in governance and administration. UNDP described it as a successful model of local area development that should serve as a best practice for several other countries.

Background:

- [The United Nations Development Programme](#) is a global network for development that advocates change and connects countries to knowledge, experience, and resources to help people build a better life for themselves.
- **Aspirational Districts Programme**
 - It is a social welfare measure that aims to transform the 115 least developed districts, constituting 20% of the population in the country by means of:
 - **Collaboration** – a collective effort by centre and states to reach targets.
 - **Cooperation** – impactful partnerships between government, markets, and civil society with a nodal Central prabhari officer. (team-work and stakeholder-based approach).
 - **Competition** among districts via Delta rankings.
 - Sectors included: Health & Nutrition, Education, Agriculture & Water Resources, Financial Inclusion & Skill Development, and Basic Infrastructure.
 - Instead of naming the program with any backward tag, a positive aspirational nomenclature has been given to instill a sense of optimism and hope.
 - It works upon the bottom-top governance model where district administration is given authority to find local solutions to local problems.
 - Peer learning and sharing of best practices.
- Delta rankings – The aspirational districts are assessed and ranked on the basis of data from the Champions of Change Dashboard (competitive federalism).

Read more on the [Aspirational Districts Programme](#) in the link.

Significance of the Aspirational District Programme (as highlighted by UNDP)

- It could be used as an analogous template for development in any other region of the world.

- In this program, the third tier of governance has been made an important stakeholder in the developmental process.
- Previously neglected districts are on the path of growth and development.
- It has strengthened the administrative and technical capacity of the state.
- It is aligned with the – ‘Leave no one behind principle’ of the [SDGs](#).
- It focuses on specific lagging targets and sectors and mends the root cause of problems.

Role of ADP in mitigating the impact of Covid-19:

- **Surakshit Dada-Dadi, Nana-Nani Abhiyaan** is a collaborative outreach effort between NITI Aayog, Piramal Foundation, and 25 Aspirational Districts to ensure the well-being of 2.9 million Senior Citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic. It provided a platform for volunteers to work for the benefit of the elderly.
- Niti Aayog in partnership with **Omnicuris**, a Bangalore-based digital platform, launched the largest training program on COVID-19 by top experts to empower Doctors of 112 Districts for a ‘Corona Mukh Bharat’.
- NITI Aayog, in partnership with Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), Centre for Social and Behavioural Change (CSBC), Ashoka University, and the Ministries of Health and WCD, launched a behaviour change campaign called ‘**Navigating the New Normal**’.
 - The campaign has two parts. The first is a web portal, <http://www.covidthenewnormal.com/>, containing resources informed by behavioural science and the use of nudge and social norms theory, related to Covid-safe behavioural norms during the ongoing unlock phase, and the second is a media campaign focused on the wearing of masks.

Challenges:

- The excessive focus on competition may lead to a race to the bottom.
- There have been allegations of misreporting of data.
- These districts lie in places (remote areas, [LWE](#) areas) that are considered punishment postings by bureaucrats.
- No sunset clause for the aspirational tag is problematic because it dilutes the urgency of solutions.
- Lack of skill among the ground-level workers.

Way forward:

- As the program progresses, new parameters and sectors could be added in the dashboard such as gender status, environmental stock, etc. for broad-based holistic development.
- There needs to be additional sensitization and training of the bureaucrats who are to work in these regions. Appointment in aspirational districts should be seen as an opportunity to serve and not as punishment postings.
- There needs to be a rolling list of 112 districts where additions and removals should be made as per the progress.

- Regular third-party audits by NGOs and civil societies should be made mandatory to record progress at the ground level.
- Continuous handholding should be provided by the NITI aayog in terms of capacity building and suggesting meaningful solutions.

