

AIR Spotlight - Development Works in Aspirational Districts

AIR Spotlight is an insightful program featured daily on the All India Radio Newsonair. In this program, many eminent panellists discuss issues of importance which can be quite helpful in the [IAS exam](#) preparation. In this article, the discussion is on Development Works in Aspirational Districts.

Context:

India is currently one of the world's leading economies. The quality of life of many of its citizens does not match this growth story. The district is the basic geographic administrative unit in India, the development of which leads to a better future for India. This article gives a brief about Development Works in Aspirational Districts.

Aspirational Districts Program

- It was launched in 2018 to improve the socioeconomic status of 112 emerging aspirational districts in 28 states.
- 1. The selected districts showed the least progress in certain development parameters such as health, nutrition, education, agriculture, and water resources, etc.
- 2. These counties represent more than 20% of the country's population and comprise more than 8,600 gram panchayats.
- It is coordinated by the [Niti Aayog](#) with the support of central ministries and state governments.
- The three central principles of the program are:
 1. Convergence of the central and state systems, which brings together the horizontal and vertical levels of government.
 2. Cooperation between citizens and officials of central and state governments, and also district teams. This will allow for effective partnerships between the government, civil society and the market.
 3. Competition between districts, driven by the spirit of mass movement.
- Every district is ranked on 49 performance indicators identified on 5 key themes. This includes:
 1. Health and nutrition (30% weight)
 2. Education (30% weight)
 3. Agriculture and water resources (20% weight)
 4. Financial inclusion and skills development (10%)
 5. Basic infrastructure (10%)
- The Aspirational Delta Ranking Districts combine a creative use of data with practical management.
- The program ranks districts based on monthly improvement through the Champions of Change panel (an online panel).
- The government is committed to raising the standard of living of its citizens and ensuring inclusive growth for all – “Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas aur Sabka Vishwas”. To realize its potential, this program has a strong focus on enhancing people's ability to fully participate in the emerging economy.

Districts are encouraged to catch up with the best district within their state first and then strive to become one of the best in the country by competing and learning from others in the spirit of competitive and cooperative federalism.

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

UNDP Report Lauds Aspirational Districts Program

- In an independent evaluation report released, the [United Nations Development Program \(UNDP\)](#) India praised the Aspiration District Program (ADP) as “a very successful model of local area development” that “should serve as the best practice for several other countries where they are regional.” Differences in the level of development persist for many reasons.
- The program can point the way toward achieving [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#). It is a very successful model of local area development and is based on the principle of “leaving no one behind” – the core of the SDGs.
- Real-time monitoring of the Champions of Change panel and a monthly ranking of the best-performing districts make the program competitive.
- It motivates districts to strive to perform better than emerging districts that do better in many areas. This demonstrates its effectiveness in assuring balanced regional development.
- The program got good political support, as envisioned by Prime Minister Modi himself. This has led to further development and growth in emerging districts over the past three years.
- Even in districts affected by [left-wing extremism](#), the initiative managed to achieve good outcomes.
- The program promotes cooperation and coordination between the government, civil society, and the private sector. This resulted in a multi-stakeholder approach to planning and executing the projects that produced the best results.

Aspirational Districts Program – Associated Challenges:

- It is affected by the problem of budget deficit. This leads to a lack of human resources and a dearth of technical capacities at the district and block levels.
- It is implemented by various ministries, resulting in a lack of coordination.
- Most districts focused their efforts on health and nutrition, education, agriculture, and water resources. They put less emphasis on skills development and financial inclusion.
- Although the program is very inclusive, it does not capture key variables such as environment and gender.

Way forward:

- The first UNDP evaluation of the Aspiration Districts Program (ADP) recommended a realignment of sectors under the program. The report asked for topics like environment and gender to be added.
- The weighting of the skills development and financial inclusion sectors needs to be increased so that governments pay more attention to them.
- Building the internal capacity of each district to produce reliable and actionable data and promote a culture of data use can be a priority for ADP.

Read more Gist of AIR Spotlight [here](#).

