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The Big Picture: Aspirational Model: Inspiration for the World

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Why in News

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** has lauded India's **Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP)**, saying that it should serve as a “best practice” for other countries where regional disparities in development status persist for many reasons.

An independent appraisal report by the UNDP described it as a very successful model of local area development which has resulted in sectoral growth and improvements in governance and administration.

Key Points

- **UNDP Appraisal Report:** The report was presented by UNDP India Resident Representative to NITI Aayog.
The UN development body has lauded Indian government's effort that made a difference in the lives of 21% of the country's population.
- **ADP Principal:** As per the UNDP, ADP is a successful model of local area development aligned to the principle of “**leave no one behind**” – the vital core of the **Sustainable Development Goals.**”
- **The Third Tier of the Government:** The programme highlights the districts as the third tier of the government and coherently brings focus on it

Aspirational District Programme and UNDP

- **Key Areas of Analysis:** UNDP's analysed across the key sectors of the ADP; health and nutrition, education, agriculture and water resources, basic infrastructure, skill development and financial inclusion.
 - The programme has been proved as a catalyst for expediting development in the districts.
 - All the progress of these indicators are captured on the **Champions of Change dashboard** on a real-time basis. Every month, the best performing district of the previous month is found out.
- **Delta Rankings:** The UNDP report commended the **Delta Rankings** provided on the Champions of Change dashboard.
 - Several low performing districts have been successfully pushed ahead to improve their standing in the past three years.
 - The districts of Simdega (Jharkhand), Chandauli and Sonbhadra (Uttar Pradesh) and Rajgarh (Madhya Pradesh) were found to have **progressed the most since the beginning of the programme.**
- **Best Practices Undertaken under Programme:**
 - **Learning from Peers:** Making the districts take inspiration from their fellow competitors and making them realise their own calibre.
 - **Assigning Responsibilities to the Districts:** Identifying the areas where the districts lag behind and vesting in them the responsibility of developing innovative ideas to overcome the situation is one of the best practices.
 - **Team Work:** The soul of the programme is teamwork.
NITI Aayog, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the Ministry of Education, various state governments and their notable officers all together form a team in this ADP.

- **Improvements in the Aspirational Districts (ADs):**
 - **Health and Nutrition:** As per the UNDP report, 9.6% more home deliveries are attended by a skilled birth attendant and 5.8% more pregnant women with severe anaemia were treated.
 - **Malaria Elimination:** The **Malaria** incidents in districts of Chhattisgarh have also been reduced by 71% and 54% and was recommended as one of the 'best practices' found in ADs.
 - **Financial Inclusion:** The UNDP report found registration of 1,580 more accounts per one lakh population under the **Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana**.
 - **Assisting Farmers:** GoalMart, an e-commerce portal launched by one of Assam's district administration promotes rural, ethnic and agrarian products of the district in the national and global markets.
 - It helped the farmers and retailers during the Covid-19 lockdown and was also profitable for the farmers.
 - **Exports:** The black rice cultivation of one of Uttar Pradesh's districts was a great success.
 - The high-quality black rice from the district is now exported to Australia and New Zealand.
- **ADP's Assistance Amid the Pandemic**
 - **Assisting the Vulnerable People:** The most vulnerable section amid the pandemic was the senior citizens. The development partners of ADP have reached out to the **elderly people**.
 - **Assisting the Doctors of Rural Areas:** Excessive information from various sources created confusion among the doctors of the remote areas.
 - At the platform **Omnicuris**, a panel of senior level doctors was created to provide support and the guidance to the block level doctors.
- **Creating Awareness:** In order to create awareness among the common people, **NITI Aayog** along with Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation created the '**India fights Covid**' platform on which all the practices of **Covid-19** management were provided.
 - Also, for the NGOs, the **NGO DARPAN** portal was created to provide assistance to 90000+ NGOs.
- **Surakshit Hum Surakshit Tum Abhiyaan:** Recently, NITI Aayog and Piramal Foundation launched '**Surakshit Hum Surakshit Tum Abhiyan**' in 112 aspirational districts.
 - This drive was launched to assist the administration in providing home care support to Covid-19 patients, who are either asymptomatic or have mild symptoms.
 - Most of these districts are in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Maharashtra.

Challenges

- **Lack of Coordination:** ADP is implemented by multiple ministries which leads to a lack of coordination.

- **More Focus on Quantity:** The Delta ranking is largely focused on assessing quantity (coverage of access) rather than quality.
- **Geographical and Political Constraints:** It must be noted that most Aspirational Districts are located in remote areas, and some even plagued with **Left Wing Extremist (LWE)** conflicts which hinder their growth and make it more difficult for any development programmes to be implemented
- **Data Related Issues:** There may be underreporting or overreporting of data.

Way Forward

- **Encouraging Developmental Plans:** There is a need to ensure that focus on the developments of these districts is encouraged further.
The momentum India has gained in expediting growth is maintained as well and keeping the competitive spirits high.
- **Determining the Time-Frame:** The way forward should be to decide that in what time frame these aspirational districts will achieve their goals. A district shall not remain aspirational for a long time.
Consuming too much time in achieving goals will defeat the idea of these developmental plans.
- **Resolving Data Issues:** In order to resolve the issue of under-reporting or over-reporting of the data, the solution is to have third party evaluation so that there are two or three fold rounds of third party survey.
- **Assistance from Non-Governmental Bodies:** The Government systems can be very well supported by the NGOs and Civil Societies, channelising their energy to identify individual performances of the households.
Taking advantage of these organisations' reach, even the last household should be covered.
- **Building Monitoring Capacity:** For strengthening our monitoring system, we also need to focus on building capacity to undertake those monitoring.
So that the success of the scheme is ensured by more closed and rigorous monitoring.