



Mains Practice Question

Q. The Aspirational Districts' Programme seeks to remove heterogeneity in socio-economic indicators reflected in prevalent inequality in districts of India. Discuss. (250 words)

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Approach

- Briefly explain the socio-economic disparity in India.
- Mention the key provisions of the Aspirational District Programme and its impact on society.
- Give suggestions to improve the condition.

Introduction

India ranked 130th in UNDP's Human Development Index, 2018 pointing towards India's sluggish growth on socio-economic indicators. The living standards in India are affected by significant inter-state and inter-district variations. 'Transformation of Aspirational Districts' Programme (ADP) was launched in order to remove this heterogeneity.

Body

Aspirational Districts' Programme

- The Aspirational Districts' Programme aims at overall improvement in human development across 115 most backward districts of India. NITI Aayog monitors 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 fruit 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 administration.

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 ranking system of the Aspirational Districts combines the innovative use of data with pragmatic administration, keeping the district at the locus of **inclusive development**.

- **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.

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.

Conclusion

Initial evidence suggests that the ADP has already contributed towards improving the lives of millions. Hence, ADP is a crucial step which will help achieve the motto of 'Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas'.

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