



Mains Practice Question

Q. Despite having definite foundational objectives in respective fields, the ISRO as an organisation proved more successful than the DRDO. Discuss. (150 words)

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Approach

- Introduce the answer by mentioning the vision of the two institutions and how they fared in achieving their respective goals
- Highlight the main reasons why ISRO became more successful than DRDO
- Conclude on a positive note while mentioning the need for reforms in DRDO

Introduction

ISRO and DRDO are the two institutions conceived in independent India with the vision of making our new nation an advanced space power and achieving self-reliance in defence technology respectively. However, after decades of their establishment, while ISRO has grown as an eminent space agency at the global stage, DRDO continues to look for the same success story.

Body

Reasons for ISRO achieving greater success than DRDO -

- After its constitution in 1969, ISRO was placed under the Department of Space (DOS) in 1972 and Space commission was set up for formulating policy and seeing its implementation. This entire structure functioned directly under the aegis of the Prime Minister, which saved ISRO from cumbersome bureaucratic procedures. For instance, ISRO's current chairman K.Sivan is also chairman of the Space Commission and Secretary of DOS.
- ISRO's structural organisation promotes vertical integration between policymakers, who are in a position to understand the nature of the long-term projects ISRO undertakes and those delivering the end results. In Contrast with this, the DRDO, which functions under the Ministry of Defence and is entrenched in the bureaucratic culture, suffers delays in project clearances and fund acquisition.
- ISRO also benefited from the presence of specialists and technocrats, starting from Vikram Sarabhai himself at the upper echelons of the organisation. DRDO, on the other hand, lacked such expertise in its formative years.
- Despite several impediments, ISRO has been able to work with the international scientific community since inception. This has been a through-line from the first component of the space programme, the Thumba Equatorial Rocket Launching Station to the agreement between ISRO and the US' National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to work on future joint missions to Mars. The DRDO, on the other hand, faced far greater barriers here. This has partly to do with geopolitics and international restrictions on sharing defense-related technology during the Cold War and thereafter.
- Another difference is accountability in the form of outcome budgets mandated in 2005-06. While DOS submits an outcome budget that contains a detailed breakdown of ISRO projects while DRDO which functions under Ministry of Defence is exempted from such accountability.

Conclusion

Although ISRO's success story dwarfs DRDO, one cannot deny the success of DRDO in terms of making India capable of developing indigenous missile technology and other essential defence equipment for example-development of Supersonic Cruise Missile 'BrahMos', Light Combat Aircraft 'Tejas', Airborne Early Warning & Control (AEW&C), etc. However, DRDO needs to bring reforms in its organisational structure, functioning and work culture where ISRO could offer itself as a role model. In the present context, it is important to establish ISRO and DRDO both as a valuable asset for rising India.

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