

ASPIRATIONAL DISTRICTS PROGRAMME (ADP): UNLOCKING POTENTIAL THROUGH FISCAL FEDERALISM

Dr Meenal Annachhatre, Assistant Professor
Dept. of Economics, Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune
m.annachhatre@gmail.com

Dr Manasi Gore, Assistant Professor
Dept. of Economics, Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune
manasigorev@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

To overcome the issue of horizontal imbalance, persisting largely across and within the states in India, and to promote the spirit of competitive & cooperative federalism, the NITI Aayog has initiated 'Transformation of Aspirational Districts' Programme (ADP) since April 2018. The objective of this programme is to monitor the real-time progress of these Aspirational Districts based on 49 indicators from 5 identified thematic areas. After four years of implementation of ADP, assessment of the given themes of selected districts has happened in 2022.

This paper gets divided into two sections. The First section focuses on details of ADP and its themes and their assessment (delta ranking), etc. In the second section of this paper, researchers have chosen Maharashtra State, and the selected districts to study and analyse the process of assessment of these districts based on Five ADP themes. Here, baseline scores and rankings of the districts in 2018 and composite scores and rankings in 2022 are majorly taken up to comment on the districts' performance on selected parameters. Researchers have extensively used secondary data sheets for this analysis and few formal as well as informal interactions with the ADP stakeholders.

Keywords: Aspirational districts, fiscal federalism, Health, Education, Finance, Skill Building.

Introduction

On Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) basis Indian Economy Continues to be the World's third largest economy in the World. (Press Information Bureau (PIB), GoI) this claim is backed by the World Bank data too. Despite this robust growth indicator, the data on Human Development Index (HDI) or rise in the standard of living of people portrays a completely contrasting picture with India's global ranking at 135 out of 189 countries with a score of 0.645. This clearly underlines the need for Public Policy with reference to achieving of major Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to enable a good quality life to the Indian masses. In addition to the above indicated picture of the HDI ranking, the states in India are more vulnerable due to the typical nature of Fiscal Federalism as the system gives limited autonomy to the states and thereby the states struggling to enhance their respective HDI values. The Finance Commissions being a statutory body in India, enables the states to correct the vertical imbalances in this Fiscal Federalism but then horizontal imbalances persist largely across and within the states in India.

The Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP) is a program initiated by the Government of India to transform the 112 most backward districts in the country into model districts through a convergence of central and state schemes. The program aims to address the economic, social, and developmental gaps in these districts and unlock their potential for growth and development.

The ADP operates on the principle of fiscal federalism, which involves the transfer of funds and decision-making power from the central government to state and local governments. The program incentivizes states to focus on these aspirational districts by providing additional funding for schemes and programs, based on their performance. Deb (2021). The ADP identifies key performance indicators (KPIs) across five sectors - health and nutrition, education, agriculture and water resources, financial inclusion and skill development, and basic infrastructure. These KPIs are used to measure the progress made by the districts and to incentivize them to improve their performance. Marquez, (2019); Alderman (2007). The program uses a bottom-up approach, where the district administration and local communities play a crucial role in identifying the key challenges and developing solutions that are tailored to the local context. This approach ensures that the program is responsive to the needs of the communities and that the interventions are effective in addressing the challenges faced by the districts. Storper (2005).

The ADP has seen some notable successes, with several districts making significant progress in areas such as health and nutrition, education, and agriculture. The program has also helped improve the quality of life for people in these districts by providing access to basic services and infrastructure. Irshad (2022).

Literature Review

Report of the high-level committee on Balanced Regional Development Issues in Maharashtra (2013) (Report of the High-Level Committee on Balanced Regional Development issues in Maharashtra, October 2013), emphasises on greater empowerment and accountability at regional level and local level to achieve balanced development on a sustainable basis. Same report has proposed policy measures for tribal areas of the State, ensuring drinking water and basic healthcare, etc. The above Committee formation and its recommendations have its deep roots in the Maharashtra Economic Development Council's reports and publications. (Maharashtra Economic Development Council 1976 Report on Regional Imbalances in Maharashtra, 1976)

Hatekar (2013) in their analytical work published in Economic and Political Weekly, 2013, tried assessing inter-district inequality based on the per-capita income of the region. Recently, Hatekar (2013) along with Azim Premji University, developed the district level ranking based on parameters which are close to the aspirational district parameters.

While doing this research we have also referred to some of the books and research papers, which are not directly referred to in our writings but some of them are mentioned in the reference list for the readers' interest's sake. To overcome the issue and to promote the sense of competitive & cooperative federalism, the NITI Aayog has initiated 'Transformations of Aspirational Districts' Programme (ADP) since April 2018. (Aayog, 2018)

The objective of this programme is to monitor the real-time progress of these Aspirational Districts based on 49 indicators from 5 identified thematic areas with specific weightages as Health (30%), Education (30%), Agriculture and Water resources (20%), Basic Infrastructure (10%) and Financial Inclusion and Skill Development (10%). The selection of these five themes is because they have a direct bearing on the quality of life and economic productivity of citizens. In a Quasi-Federal structure in India, the real growth drivers are the states through their local administration. This role of the local and state governments is very well brought out by the policy document on Aspirational Districts which says, "We need to identify existing aspirations in the districts and channelise them to create a ripple effect for transforming Aspirational Districts. (Transformation of Aspirational Districts - A New India by 2022, 2022)

The development of every village of these 115 districts is vital to our commitment to social justice". This programme aimed at transforming 115 districts that were identified from across 28 states and covered Gram Panchayats (8,603) across these districts. The three core aspects of the programme are: 3 C's Principle - 1. Convergence (of Central & State Schemes) 2. Collaboration (of Central, State-level 'Prabhari' Officers & District Collectors) 3. Competition among districts

Themes	Weightage	Focus area
Health & Nutrition	30%	Pre- and post-natal care, contagious diseases, growth of health infrastructure. Severe Acute Malnutrition, supplementary nutrition under ICDS
Education	30%	learning outcomes at primary and secondary level, students' performance in Mathematics and Language, infrastructure pertaining to education institutions such as girls' access to toilets, electricity supply, drinking water.
Agriculture Water resources	20%	improving access to water management as well as market access for farmers, improved agricultural inputs, livestock

Financial Inclusion Skill Development	10%	six indicators for Financial Inclusion which include improved access to bank accounts through Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, disbursement of loans under Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana skill development includes both short- and long-term training schemes and the number of apprentices trained
Basic infrastructure	10%	housing water access, electricity, and road connectivity. It mainly involves community level infrastructure

TableNo.1:ADPStructureSummary.

(Source: <https://www.niti.gov.in/aspirational-districts-programme>)

Focused at district level and instituted by states, the programme focuses on the strengths of local governments to accelerate the realisation of SDGs aspirations for communities, households, and individuals in our country. This programme thus highlights the collaborative nature with an attempt to converge schemes across the sectors at the national, state or district levels. It aims to improve coordination among central and state governments to improve social development indicators. “Aspirational Districts Programme: An Appraisal” 2020, by the UNDP Report, “Aspirational District Programme a global example in enlisting sub-national government, with multi-stakeholder partnerships, to ensure that SDG progress becomes real in the eyes of people in their daily lives. The programme is not only replicable within India, but also across the globe”. ADP has given attention to districts otherwise neglected due to their lower performance. The funding for the programme is provided by the Union government and the recent budget 2023-24 allocated Rs.60,000 for Har Ghar, Nal Se Jal Scheme as a part of ADP. This is the best collaborative effort of the Union and the States through the local governance by the district level authorities.

This programme used the Delta Ranking Method that measures incremental changes in performance indicators on a monthly basis. The methodology adopted by NITI Aayog for this purpose, employs a mix of self-reported data entered by the selected districts. The districts were chosen by senior officials of the Union government in consultation with State officials. The progress of the districts was gauged on the basis of Resilience: positive changes that are added to the development capacity of the districts and secondly Vulnerability: a set of negative indicators that would hinder ability of districts to attain their development goals. The Champions of Change (CoC) Dashboard was developed solely for the purpose of tracking and measuring growth.

To shortlist the states, a Composite Index of deprivation was constructed using a range of socio-economic indicators. The Composite Index comprised the challenges faced by the districts in terms of poverty, poor health, nutrition and education status and infrastructure deficiencies. While clarifying the role of this programme, the NITI Aayog has expressed, “After several rounds of consultations with various stakeholders, 49 key performance indicators have been chosen to measure progress of the districts. Districts were prodded and encouraged to catch-up with the best district within their state, and subsequently aspire to become one of the best in the country, by competing with, and learning from others in the sense of competition & cooperation-based federalism.”

Objectives of the Study

- 1.To understand the concept of Aspirational District with reference to fiscal federalism in India.
2. To study the performance of aspirational districts in Maharashtra
3. Understanding the challenges and loopholes in transforming these aspirational districts and suggesting some policy prescriptions.

Methodology

For this paper, researchers have chosen Maharashtra State, and selected districts to study and analyse the process of assessment of these districts based on Five ADP themes. Researchers have extensively used secondary data sheets for this analysis and few formal as well as informal interactions with the ADP stakeholders as the source of primary data.

Maharashtra State

Out of the total 112 Aspirational Districts, four districts were chosen from Maharashtra in 2018 on these bases. Selected districts in Maharashtra are facing deep rooted inequalities and pockets of instability. Most of these districts are located in remote areas, having more tribal population. Bringing these tribes into the mainstream is a stupendous task. These factors continue to hinder the growth and make it more difficult for any development programmes to be implemented. This is in big contrast with the other districts of Maharashtra and looking at the progressive status of this state, vouching on high per capita income, industry spread, strong agriculture base, literacy rate and reduction in poverty rate, etc. Challenge here is to minimize this contrast and achieve fair uniformity in the district’s progress on account of decent standard of living for all.

District name	Rank	Delta Score
Washim	7	13.8
Osmanabad	52	5.7
Nandurbar	53	5.7
Gadchiroli	72	4.4

Table No.2 Ranks of ADP in Maharashtra

(Source: <https://www.niti.gov.in/aspirational-districts-programme>)

These ranks of the AD in Maharashtra clearly indicates that out of these four districts, the performance of Washim district was much better in 2018 with its rank much higher and the rate of change (incremental) in the given parameters too was quite impressive. The ADP has aimed at the Real time data and accordingly tapping the potential of these districts in transforming them by 2022. This brings us to the comparison of these four districts based on the data in 2018 and 2022 for all the five parameters and within those parameters with reference to few sub-indicators under each parameter. Let us have a look at these data for 2018.

Themes	Districts’ Scores and Ranks (Composite)			
	Washim 54.5 and 112	Osmanabad 63.8 and 65	Gadchiroli 58 and 80	Nandurbar 47.8 and 106
Health and Nutrition	60.3 (71)	70.8 (55)	60.9 (89)	51.1 (92)
Education	71.5 (07)	80 (31)	78 (31)	57 (31)
Agriculture and Water resources	18.8 (112)	23.7 (38)	16.3 (84)	15.8 (41)
Financial inclusion and Skill Development	18.3 (110)	23.1 (78)	25.8 (12)	24.5 (112)
Basic Infrastructure	72.4 (98)	90 (88)	78.4 (74)	74 (96)

Table No.3 - Relative Positions of ADP

(Source: <http://championsofchange.gov.in/>)

The above table shows the relative positions of these four ADs in Maharashtra. In terms of the Ranks as well as scores, Nandurbar and Washim are at the last. Osmanabad had been better than others in terms of the Rank as well as the score. If we look at the five parameters, Osmanabad has done well in the case of Health and Nutrition, Education, Agriculture and Water resources and Basic Infrastructure too. The only parameter where it lagged was the financial inclusion and Skill Development. This could be due to the low coverage of various schemes of financial inclusion and skill development in Osmanabad. The worst performance was of Nandurbar except for Financial inclusion and Skill Development as well as Basic Infrastructure where Washim performed the worst. So, the ADP has offered financial assistance as well as capacity building for potential development of these districts, otherwise would have been neglected due to such low performance. After four years of inspection with the Real time data, it is interesting to look at these states' performance by the end of 2022 and then compare and/or contrast the performance.

Themes	Districts' Scores and Ranks (Composite)			
	Washim 55.8 and 58	Osmanabad 59.5 and 103	Gadchiroli 51.4 and 85	Nandurbar 57.7 and 54
Health and Nutrition	78.7 (78)	83.2 (92)	77.4 (87)	71.2 (41)
Education	63.2 (23)	62.7 (12)	53.5 (18)	75.2 (23)
Agriculture and Water resources	23.9 (65)	37 (61)	15.8 (74)	22.3 (46)
Financial inclusion and Skill Development	31.4 (14)	26.9 (39)	22.9 (78)	22.5 (61)
Basic Infrastructure	53.1 (96)	56.5 (112)	66.4 (59)	71.1 (65)

Table No.4 Ranking of the Aspirational Districts in Maharashtra 2022.

(Source: <http://championsofchange.gov.in/>)

Comments on the data comparison of ADs in Maharashtra in 2018 and 2022

- The two districts, Nandurbar and Washim, who were at last in 2018 in Rank and score, have indicated real time development. For Washim, with a marginal rise in its score (54.5 to 55.8) its rank has been upgraded from 112 in 2018 to 58 in 2022.
- Washim's success story is on account of its performance in Health and Nutrition score (from 60.3 to 78.7), Agriculture and Water resources score as well as the Rank (from 18.8 to 23.9 and from 112th Rank to 65th Rank). Same is the case in financial inclusion and Skill Development (from 18.3 to 31.4 and from 110th Rank to 14th Rank). However, for Basic Infrastructure, Washim has performed worst of all these districts. It has the lowest score of 53.1 against the highest score of Nandurbar at 71.1 for this parameter.
- Coming to Nandurbar, the score has increased from 47.8 to 57.7 and the Rank is upgraded from 92 in 2018 to 54 in 2022. The major themes in which Nandurbar has performed are Health and Nutrition score as well as Rank (51.1 and 92 to 71.2 and 41), Education (57 and 31 in 2018 to 75.2 and 23 in 2022). The score of Nandurbar is the highest of all these ADs. Referring to Agriculture and Water resources, Nandurbar's score is upgraded from 15.8 to 22.3 but the Rank has not been upgraded. On the

other hand, for financial inclusion and Skill Development (112 to 61) and Basic Infrastructure (96 to 65) the Ranks have improved a lot but not the scores. To improve these scores the measures taken up by the district administrative body have been clearly mentioned in the District Vision Document. (Nandurbar - Vision 2022, 2022)

- Looking at Osmanabad, like 2018 it performed well in Health and Nutrition score (70.8 to 83.2), Agriculture and Water resources score (23.7 to 37) and financial inclusion and Skill Development score and Rank (23.1 and 78 to 26.9 and 39). It has lagged very badly in case of Basic Infrastructure score as well as Rank (90 and 88 to 56.5 and 112).
- Gadchiroli is the only district that performed well only in Health and Nutrition score and Rank both (60.9 and 89 to 77.4 and 87). In case of Education, Agriculture and Water resources and Basic Infrastructure, Gadchiroli has decelerated in its score but has upgraded its Rank (31-18, 84-74 and 7459 respectively).
- To conclude the whole picture of development of these Ads in Maharashtra, we see that all the districts performed well in Health and Nutrition scores but not so well on Education except positively progressed Nandurbar. In case of Basic Infrastructure, all these Ads have degraded their scores and Rank too for Osmanabad but others upgraded at least their Ranks (Washim 98 to 96, Gadchiroli 74 to 59 and Nandurbar 96 to 65).

These observations further probe into the indicators under each theme as specified by the NITI Aayog policy document on ADP. Even though the weightages for all these themes are not the same as mentioned earlier in this paper, it becomes interesting to investigate these intricacies.

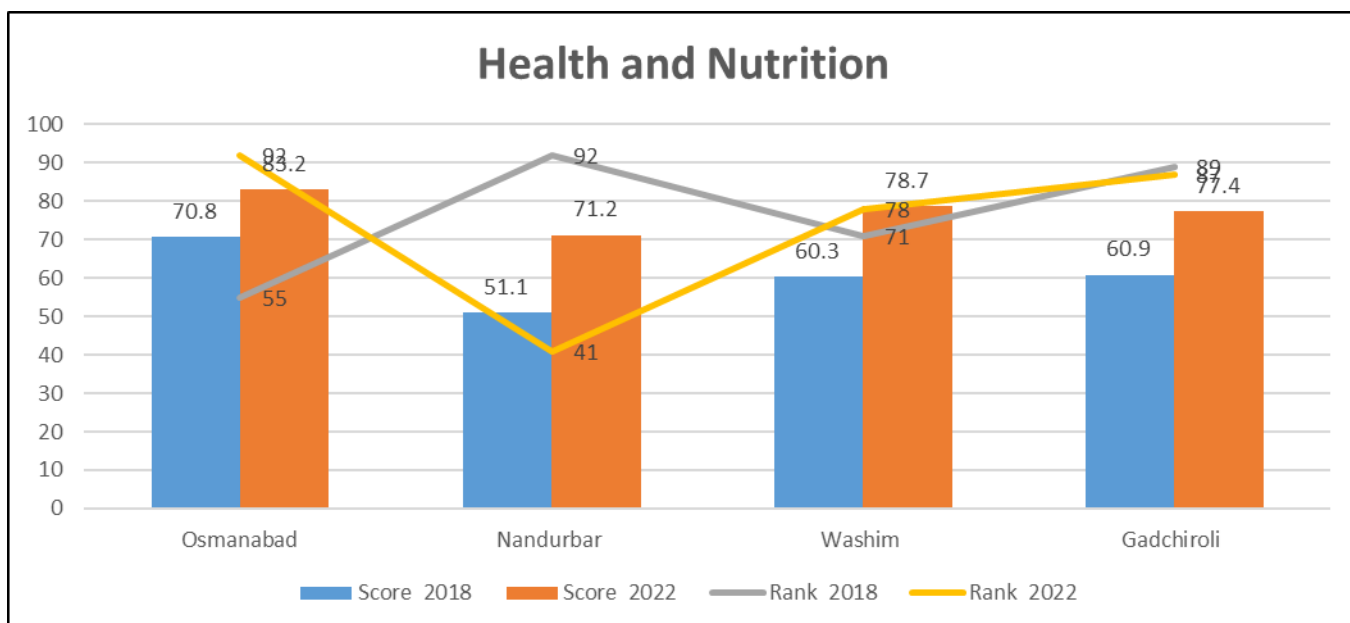
Data Analysis

Theme-wise details of ADP and Districts in Maharashtra

1 Health and Nutrition: With 30% of the weightage on Health & Nutrition, the program has been identified. 13 indicators to focus on antenatal care, postnatal care, gender parity, health of new-borns, growth of children, contagious diseases, and health infrastructure. It also includes contagious diseases, Severe Acute Malnutrition, supplementary nutrition under ICDS and so on. Again these 13 indicators have different weightages, some of them are as follows:

- Percentage of children fully immunized (9-11 months) (BCG+ DPT3 + OPV3 + Measles 1 (3%)
- Percentage of underweight children under 5 years (2.1%)
- Percentage of Pregnant women having severe anaemia treated against PW having severe anaemia tested cases (1.5%)
- Proportion of Primary Health Centres compliant to Indian Public Health Standards (1.5%)
- Percentage of Pregnant Women tested for Haemoglobin 4 or more than 4 times for respective ANCs against total ANC registration (1.2%)
- Percentage of institutional deliveries out of total estimated deliveries (1.2%)
- Percentage of new-borns breastfed within one hour of birth (1.2%)

With reference to some of the above dominant sub-indicators we can observe that in case of the sub-indicator the percentage of underweight children under 5 years (2.1% weightage), all the four ADs have performed well except Gadchiroli. This indicates a positive change towards Health and Nutrition which probably has overcome the issue of Severe Acute Malnutrition mentioned above in the focus areas. Rest all indicators also show a very positive picture of these districts such as the percentage of institutional deliveries out of total estimated deliveries, percentage of children fully immunized (9-11 months) (BCG+ DPT3 + OPV3 + Measles1. This injects hope while sorting out the issues of maternal as well as infant mortality rates as well as mal and under-nutrition to achieve the SDGs and thereby promote Human development through the states. Health being the Merit good and in the State list in India under the federal structure, this is a welcoming situation from the viewpoint of fiscal federalism.

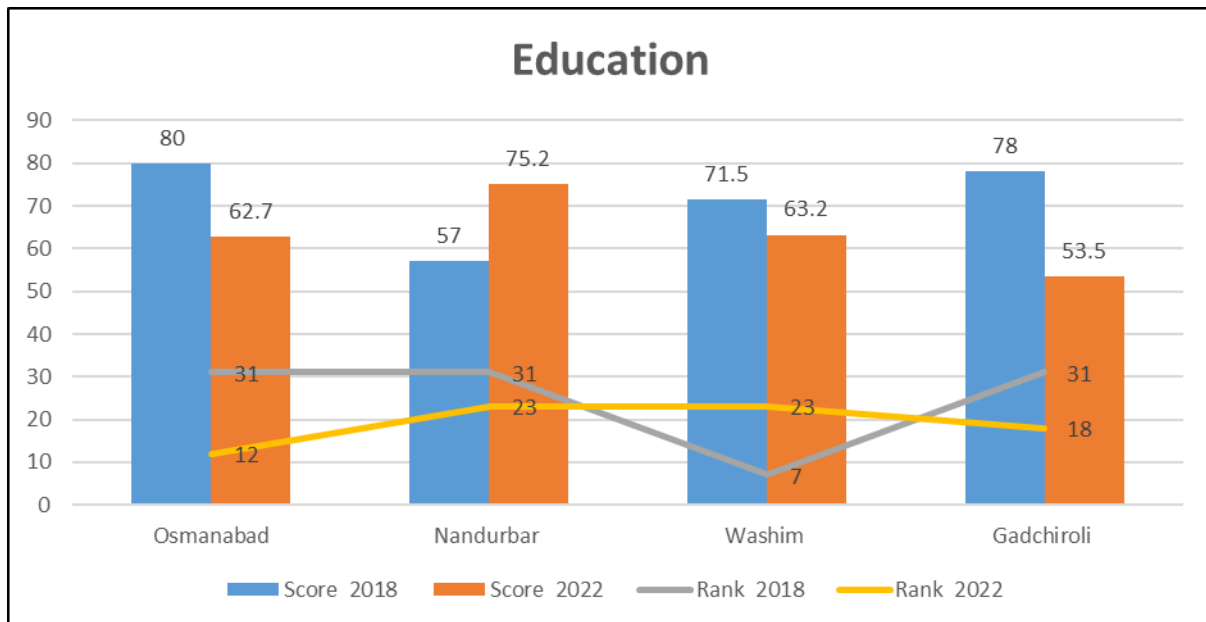


Graph No.1 Health and Nutrition. (Source: <http://championsofchange.gov.in/>)

2Education: Education sector accounts for 30% weightage of the overall index and 8 indicators have been identified focussing on learning outcomes such as transition rate from primary to upper primary, and subsequently to secondary schooling, average scores in mathematics and language etc., infrastructural indicators like toilet access for girls, drinking water, electricity supply and some institutional indicators like pupil-teacher ratio, timely delivery of textbooks and so on. In 2018, three ADs, namely Osmanabad, Gadchiroli and Washim were among Better 20 ADs in India.

- Learning outcomes (15%)
- Transition Rate - Primary to Upper Primary level (4.2%)
- Female literacy rate (15+ Age group) (2.4%)
- Percentage of elementary schools complying with Right to Education(RTE) specified Pupil Teacher Ratio (2.4%)
- Transition Rate - Upper Primary to Secondary level (1.8%)
- Toilet access: Percentage schools with functional girls’ toilets (1.5%)

Education again being the Merit good and in the Concurrent list from its strategic importance in the Human Capital development of a country like India, it is interesting to look at the performance of the ADs with reference to the weightages to its sub-indicators. Under this programme, States are required to declare and upload the data sheets on the Dashboard created by the NITI Aayog as Champions of Change. It needs to be taken seriously that no data is available for the sub-indicator, learning outcomes despite it having the maximum that is 15% weightage. This includes the performance of Mathematics and Languages at 3rd, 5th, and 8th standard students. In fact, this is the important indicator to gauge the soft skills capacity building among the students till 8th standard that would shape our Human Capital base. In case of another strong sub-indicator, percentage of elementary schools complying with RTE specified Pupil Teacher Ratio, only for Washim this ratio increased and this has a serious implication of higher drop-out rate as well as scarcity of well-qualified teachers. The great hope in the theme of Education is that most of these districts have reached 100% or near 100% in case of toilet access: percentage schools with functional girls’ toilets. This is remarkable from health, hygiene, and female literacy orientation in the state.



Graph No.2 Education. (Source: <http://championsofchange.gov.in/>)

3Agriculture and Water Resources- The third identified thematic area is, Agriculture and Water Resources in ADP. Agriculture and water resources by their very nature are localized activities and resources. With varied agro-climatic zones, cropping patterns, available local knowledge, access to markets, emphasis on research and development, etc, all this leads to differences in state-wise agriculture and water related issues. Agriculture is in the State list but the entry 33 of Concurrent list provides that Centre and States both have powers to control production, supply, and trade, agri-products. Then the districts which are aspiring to grow, are fully entitled to cooperative federalism.

Ten indicators have been identified for the 20% weightage allocated to this theme. The focus area is divided into following sub-areas-

- a. Inputs – which includes micro irrigation, quality seed access, soil health cards, etc.

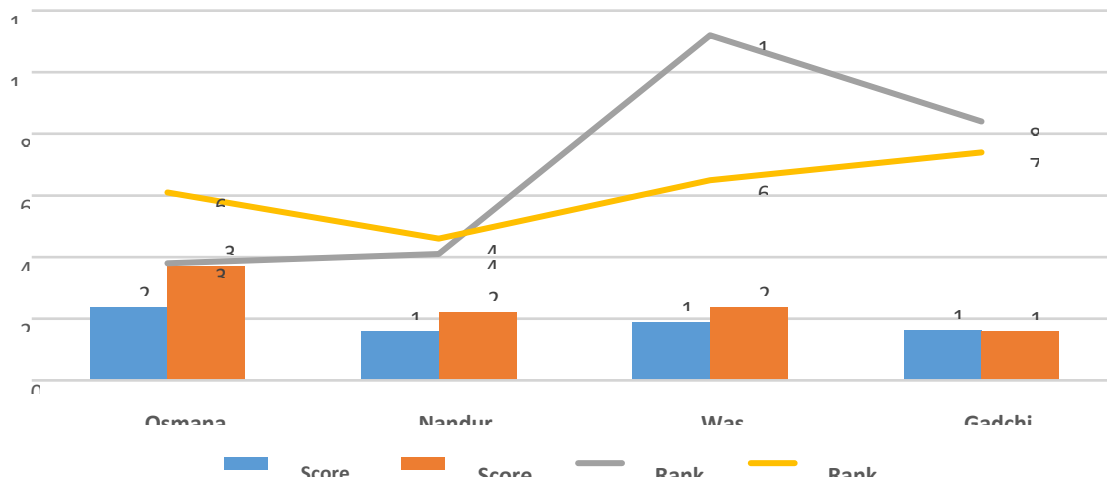
For example, for water related positive investment and employment purposes, ‘Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchan Yojana (PMKSY) has been launched and it ensures tying up of funds with PMKSY-micro irrigation for the district. Also, emphasis is on priority for water related activities under MGNREGA.

For quality seeds’ distribution and soil health card creation, Schemes like Krishi Unnat Yojana, Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY), etc have been taken up along with local bodies for effective implementation.

- b. Outputs – includes yields and price realization. The difference between Farm Harvest Price (FHP) and Minimum Support Price (MSP) is defined as price realization.
- c. Institutional Support – incorporates crop insurance, electronic markets, artificial insemination, animal vaccination.

For example, linking APMC (Agriculture Produce Market Committee) Mandi with e-NAM (e-National Agriculture Market), activation of an electronic auction platform, increasing the spread and awareness of Pradhan Mantri FasalBima Yojana (PMFBY), etc. Non-farm activities or agriculture allied activities constitute almost 40 percent of farmers’ income (FAO, 2022). Building up the capacities of all other agri-allied activities is on a priority and the same has been taken up in these aspirational districts in the form of schemes like Livestock Health and Disease Control Scheme. As per baseline ranking in 2018, Maharashtra’s Osmanabad was among the better 20 districts and fortunately the other three selected districts were not in the bottom 20 districts. Assessment in year 2022 of chosen four districts of Maharashtra, indicates the score-wise and rank -wise improvement of all districts, except fall in Gadchiroli’s scorecard from 16.3 in 2018 to 15.8 in year 2022-23.

Agriculture and Water Resources



Graph No.3 Agriculture and Water Resources.
(Source: <http://championsofchange.gov.in/>)

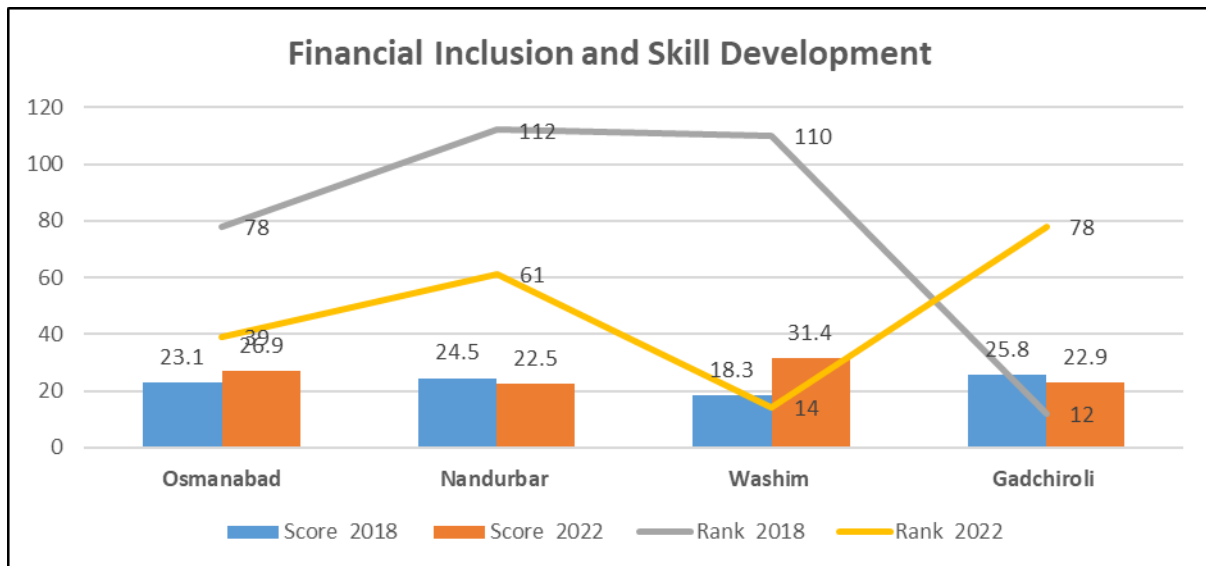
4 Financial Inclusion and Skill Development –these two themes account for 10% of the overall Index in ADP. Considering priorities like penetration of banking habits, easy access to financial institutions and finances, building up a sense of financial security among the informal/ unorganised labourers and last but not the least is providing government benefits in financial form and without any middle party, i.e., direct transfer to make the government help/support more effective.

Six indicators have been identified in financial inclusion to measure progress in take-up of important central government schemes (Atal Pension Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana, etc.), reach of institutional banking (the number of accounts opened under Jan Dhan Yojana), and ease of institutional financing for small businesses (disbursement of Mudra loans). The target here is, to tap the potential of micro-small medium enterprises, who would otherwise become non-functional without timely financial support.

Similarly, five indicators are identified in skill development to keep track of the progress in skilling of youth, employment, and the skilling of vulnerable/marginalized youth. Here, Centre schemes are divided into short and long-term training programmes in the age group of 15-29. Schemes like, Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY); Deendayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDUGKY) are the examples of it.

This provision for hard and soft infrastructure (including skilled human resources) has been made available and it ensures the timely assessment of the same and certification as well. For this, local government bodies are also getting involved. Organizing skill melas, distribution of awards like ‘Champions of Change,’ etc., it gets facilitated by the local bodies. Another important feature of this theme is to map the district-wise skills of the youth to ensure the demand-supply mismatch. On-job training or apprentice promotion is rising through this theme. There are schemes like National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS), National Apprenticeship Training Scheme (NATS) to facilitate target groups. Marginalised youth of the region have been given a separate attention and priority in the entire skill development theme.

As per baseline ranking in 2018, None of the selected districts from Maharashtra were among the better 20 districts and in the bottom 20 districts. They were all in the middle category based on their performance with respect to financial inclusion and skill development. Assessment in year 2022 of four districts in Maharashtra, indicates that rank-wise, three districts namely Osmanabad, Washim and Nandurbar have performed well and same is applicable to their score-based performance, (except Nandurbar, reduction in score by some points) (Refer: table No.2 and 3). It is only in case Gadchiroli, where the score has gone down to 22.9 in 2022 from 25.8 in 2018 and rank has shifted to 78th rank from 12th rank.



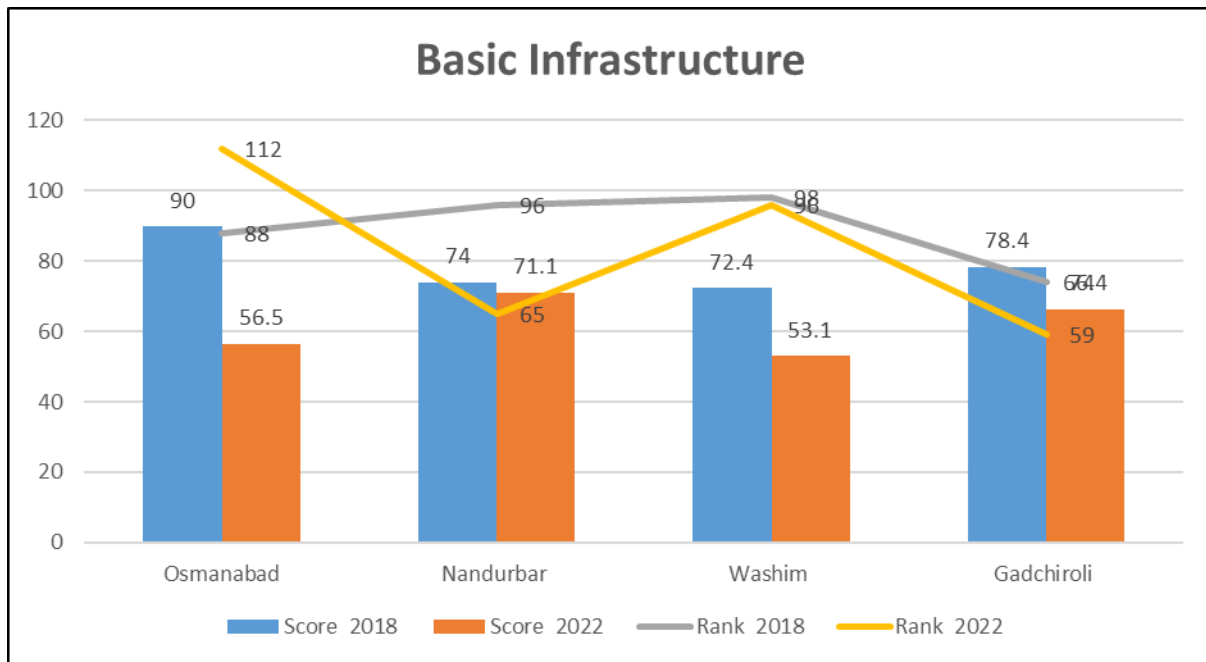
Graph No.4 Financial Inclusion and Skill Development
(Source: <http://championsofchange.gov.in/>)

5. Basic Infrastructure- Basic infrastructure has been identified as a key instrument for economic growth and development as well. Basic infrastructure does not directly produce any goods or services in the country but it facilitates the production of primary, secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy. Investing in basic infrastructure provides the firmest foundation for long lasting economic development.

A roof over one’s head, with water, electricity, and road connectivity is the priority of the Government. Ten percent weightage has been given to this theme and overall, seven important indicators have been identified here as key contributors to the basic infrastructure. Rural habitations with access to an adequate quantity of potable water, Pucca House construction, Electricity connections and individual household latrines are given the top priority in the basic infrastructure. The road connectivity and establishment of Common Service Centres at Gram Panchayat level along with internet connections are significant in this regard.

To give a real face to these objectives, Centre Schemes like Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana (Gramin) for pucca house building ensures land availability, construction-material and finance, Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) to take care of household latrines along with water. The National Rural Drinking Water Programme has been launched to ensure the availability of potable water, rainwater-harvesting, and ground-water level recharging in water-starved areas. Similarly, Pradhan Mantri Gramin Sadak Yojana has been taken up to improve the rural area connectivity.

As per baseline ranking in 2018, none of the selected districts from Maharashtra were among the better 20 districts and in the bottom 20 districts. They were all in the middle category based on their performance with respect to basic infrastructure. Assessment in 2022 of these four districts in Maharashtra, indicates that on the score basis, all four districts in Maharashtra have not scored higher numbers as compared to their baseline numbers. The reduction in the scores is a worrisome factor. If we look at the rank-wise data, Osmanabad’s rank has gone down dramatically from 88 to 112, but Nandurbar and Gadchiroli are able to improve their rank. Washim, apparently looks stagnant in the basic infrastructure building and in proving its capability there. (Refer: Graph no. 5 or table No.2 and 3).



Graph No.5 Basic Infrastructure.

(Source: <http://championsofchange.gov.in/>)

Findings

- Looking at the very framework of the ADP, the themes have quantitative as well as qualitative outcomes and District collectors are assigned the authority to institutionalize the mechanisms. Here the question of strong political will comes to the centre. In the case of Education, we have pointed out earlier that in case of learning outcomes despite it having the maximum (15%) weightage, no data is available on the Dashboard created by the NITI Aayog as Champions of Change. This is a serious issue in terms of implementation and implications too of this whole programme as it includes the performance of Mathematics and Languages at 3rd, 5th, and 8th standard students, most essential in developing basic skills among the students. In this regard we strongly feel that there must be a mandate for timely declaring the data of these states and that can be the precondition for receiving the funding from the Union government through the State governments. This would make the process smoother along with more transparency and accountability from all layers of governance that is the essence of Fiscal federalism.
- Specific to the ADs in Maharashtra, within these districts there are wide disparities in terms of remoteness, social structures, population profiles, the level of education, incomes, and employment. This calls for a more district specific flexible approach and we witnessed the same while doing the Pilot survey of our project on ADs in Maharashtra in general and Nandurbar in particular. The Ashram shalas are performing extremely well in some talukas of Nandurbar as compared to the ZP schools. This calls for a positive role of the Tehsils and Gram Panchayats in dealing with the masses.
- Drop-out rates in the primary and secondary schools are still a serious issue and the role of teachers and educating the parents are very critical here. Education extension and awareness can help in this regard. Schemes like the Central Kitchens for the schools' midday meals are doing very well in Nandurbar. They need to replicate elsewhere.
- Though the number of underweight children under 5 years have come down in all these districts, still the fact remains that more than 10% underweight children under 5 years are predominant and that is still a concern for us.
- While interacting with the stakeholders of this Aspirational District Programme, a need for an appointment of dedicated personnel such as Aspirational District Fellows or Technical Support Units across all the districts or to collaborate with development partners for providing technical expertise, got highlighted.

Conclusions

To conclude, the scheme of ADP has started picking up in a very short time frame of just 4 years and that is the ray of hope for all the stakeholders to lead the path of SDGs through effective collaboration and convergence between the Union and the States and through the competitive federalism among the districts of these states.

This serves the best for Competitive as well as cooperative federalism in India through unlocking the potentials of these ADs in India. This scheme will have a long way to go as they have started identifying the district specific commodity to vouch for the production, processing, sell and trade, its addition to supply chain management, etc. For example- in the case of Nandurbar, they have identified Chilli as a commodity and they have started referring Nandurbar as 'Chilli Capital' This itself gives a very big scope for further research and assessment of this project across the districts.

References

- Alderman H, Behrman J. & Hoddinott J. (2007) "Economic and nutritional analyses offer substantial synergies for understanding human nutrition", *J Nutr.*;137(3):537-44. Doi: 10.1093/jn/137.3.537. PMID: 17311936; PMCID: PMC1839860.
- Banerjee A, Kuri P. (2022), 'Development Disparities in India', book by Rawat Publication.
- Deb R. (2021), A ray of hope for rural India: Aspirational District Programme (ADP), The ObserverResearchFund, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/a-ray-of-hope-for-rural-india-aspirational-district-programme-adp/>
- Garima M. (2022), 'Disparities in Social Development in Maharashtra- A District-level analysis', *Economic and Political Weekly Journal*, <https://www.epw.in/journal/2022/29>
- Government of Maharashtra, Planning Department (Oct 2013), Report of the High-Level Committee on Balanced Regional Development Issues in Maharashtra, <https://www.maharashtra.gov.in/site/upload/WhatsNew/KCR-23122014.pdf>
- Hatekar N., Raju S. (2013), Inequality, Income Distribution and Growth in Maharashtra, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 48, Issue No. 39, 28 Sep, 2013 <https://www.epw.in/journal/2013/39>
- Irshad, R., Mehr-un-Nisa & Ghafoor, N. (2022)" Infrastructure and Economic Growth: Evidence from Lower Middle-Income Countries". *J Knowl Econ* (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13132-021-00855-1>
- Maharashtra Economic Development Council (1976), 'Regional Imbalances in Maharashtra', Maharashtra Economic Development Council, 1976 <https://www.medcindia.com/>
- Mohanty B. B. (Feb 2009), 'Regional Disparity in Agricultural Development of Maharashtra', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 44, No. 6 (Feb. 7 - 13, 2009), pp. 63-69 (7pages) <https://www.epw.in/journal/2009/06/special-articles/regional-disparity-agricultural-development-maharashtra.html>
- Marquez-Ramos, L. and Mourelle, E. (2019), "Education and economic growth: an empirical analysis of nonlinearities", *Applied Economic Analysis*, Vol. 27 No. 79, pp. 21-45. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AEA-06-2019-0005>
- Niti Aayog (2018), First Delta Ranking- Aspirational Ranking: Aspirational Districts Dashboard, <https://www.niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/2018-12/FirstDeltaRanking-May2018-AspirationalRanking.pdf>
- Nandurbar - Vision (2022) published by District Administration Nandurbar <https://cdn.s3waas.gov.in/s3db85e2590b6109813dafa101ceb2faeb/uploads/2018/03/2018032176.pdf>
- Niti Aayog (2022), Transformation of Aspirational Districts: A New India <https://www.niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/2018-12/Transformation-of-AspirationalDistricts-Primer-A-New-India2022.pdf>
- Storper, M. (2005)" Society, community, and economic development". *St Comp Int Dev* 39, 30-57 <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02686164>