

Functioning of NITI Aayog of India : A Study

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ABSTRACT

“NITI Aayog” of India is a new institution structured in January, 2015 as replacement of the Planning Commission. It provides different public services through its various Vertical. Main initiatives of NITI Aayog include: public administration reforms and enhancement of administrative efficiency of government programmes, facilitating centre-state and inter-ministerial coordination for governance, and to provide best repository practices to aggravate developmental agenda. NITI Aayog can replace the one-way Centre-to-State flow of policy through ‘cooperative federalism’. It recommends various policies and their implementation is regularly executed by all State Governments. Of course, the NITI Aayog is a distinguished ‘think tank’ that has a good strategic vision and expertise with responsibilities to provide advice to the Government. Hence, the NITI Aayog by giving more control to the States, aims at avoiding top-down approach to policy making and tries to give it a bottom up approach.

HIGHLIGHTS

- NITI Aayog of India has been established in January, 2015, and is recognised as a ‘Think Tank’ of India.
- NITI Aayog is engaged to provide various services through its different Vertical to Government as well as to the people of India.
- The Aayog works on the principles of ‘Minimum Government and Maximum Governance’ together with the ‘Cooperative Federalism’, and aims to foster involvement and participation in the economic policy making process by the State Governments of India.

Keywords: Functioning of NITI Aayog Government, India, Policy, Think Tank

On Independence Day in 2014, the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi announced the establishment of “NITI Aayog” (National Institution for Transforming India Aayog), in place of the ‘Planning Commission’. Hence, on 1st January 2015, this new institution was constituted by the Government of India. Its first meeting was held on 8th February 2015. In NITI Aayog, the Prime Minister is the Ex-officio Chairman (NITI Aayog, 2019; NITI Aayog Annual Report, 2017, 2020 & 2022; Pandey and Shukla, 2022a).

NITI Aayog is engaged in providing various services through its different Vertical to Government as well

as to the people of India. The Verticals of NITI Aayog are responsible for designing, management and implementation of various policy initiatives, innovative projects, programmes, activities and partnerships related to governance and public service delivery. The main jobs of this institution include: public administration reforms and enhancement of administrative efficiency of government activities and programmes, facilitating

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centre-state and inter-ministerial coordination for the governance, and also to provide best repository practices to aggravate developmental agenda as per the principles of 'Minimum Government and Maximum Governance'. As the Indian economy is increasing day-by-day and becoming more market-driven and the States are requiring better policy for development, the NITI Aayog is aimed to provide several necessary plans and projects to the all needed State Governments. NITI Aayog can replace the one-way Centre-to-State flow of policy through 'cooperative federalism'. Presently, the NITI Aayog recommends different policies and their implementation is regularly executed by all State Governments (NITI Aayog, 2019; NITI Aayog Annual Report, 2017; Pandey and Shukla, 2022a; Wikipedia, 2022).

Further, the NITI Aayog facilitates and empowers the need for good governance that is people-centric, participative, collaborative, transparent and policy-driven. It gives important inputs for development of India. This is an incubator and disseminator of original and new thought and ideas. The Aayog may create knowledge and innovation through collaborative community of experts, practitioners and other partners, so as to aggravate good governance practices with good public service delivery. This aims 'to foster involvement and participation in the economic policy making process by the State Governments of India'. Hence, it is now an established fact that NITI Aayog has become 'Think Tank' of the policy of Government of India (NITI Aayog, 2019;

NITI Aayog Annual Report, 2017; Pandey and Shukla, 2022 a & b; Wikipedia, 2022).

Apart from the above, NITI Aayog provides the opportunity to State Governments for getting an equal role in the developmental process of country, and so NITI Aayog achieves the target of 'principle of cooperative federalism' of India. Since the Aayog is a 'think tank institution' or a hub for knowledge for good governance, this has become a big platform to monitor and implement all government policies by bringing together various ministries of the Central and State Governments. Thus, the priorities of NITI Aayog include upliftment and empowerment of poor, marginalised and downtrodden people like gender, region, religion, caste and class of the public of India. Taking these in view, NITI Aayog suggests different policies, and their execution is regularly performed by all the Governments of India for welfare of the country (NITI Aayog, 2017 & 2018; Pandey and Shukla, 2022 a & b; Wikipedia, 2022).

SOURCES AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Composition and portfolio of NITI Aayog are elicited in Tables 1 and 2, respectively (NITI Aayog Annual Report, 2017, 2020 & 2022; Pandey and Shukla, 2022b).

Various reports (NITI Aayog, 2019; NITI Aayog Annual Report, 2017, 2020 & 2022; Pandey and Shukla, 2022a) have elucidated that NITI Aayog is a distinguished 'think tank' that has a good strategic vision and expertise with responsibilities to provide advice to Government. Therefore, NITI Aayog by giving more control to States,

Table 1: Composition of NITI Aayog

CHAIRMAN (CHAIRPERSON)- PRIME MINISTER
➤ Vice-Chairman (Vice-Chairperson): Appointed by PM
➤ Ex-Officio Members: Maximum 4, nominated by PM
➤ Social Invitees: Experts, Specialists, Practitioners with common knowledge
➤ Governing Council: Chief Ministers (States) & Lt. Governors (Union Territories)
➤ Full-Time Members: from universities, research or relevant institutions
➤ Part-Time Members: Maximum 2, rotational, from relevant institutions
➤ Chief Executive Officer (CEO): Appointed by PM for fixed tenure
➤ Regional Councils: on need basis, incorporates CMs & Lt. Governors of the region
➤ Secretariat: If necessary

Table 2: Portfolio of NITI Aayog

Portfolio	Name of Person
Chairman	Hon'ble Shri Narendra Modi (Prime Minister)
Vice-Chairman	Dr. Suman Bery
Full-Time Members	Shri V.K. Saraswat, Prof. Ramesh Chand, Dr. V.K. Paul
Ex-Officio Members	Shri Amit Shah, Shri Rajnath Singh, Mrs. Nirmala Sitaraman, Shri Narendra Singh Tomar
Special Invitees	Shri Nitin Gadkari, Shri Piyush Goyal, Shri Virendra Kumar, Shri Ashwini Vaishvaw, Rao Inderjit Singh
Chief Executive Officer	Shri Amitabh Kant
Governing Council	All Chief Ministers of States (and Delhi and Puducherry), Lieutenant Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Special Invitees

aims at avoiding top-down approach to policy making and tries to give it a bottom up approach. Functioning of Aayog is based on a bottom-up approach, wherein the decisions will first be taken at local level and then considered by the Central Government. So, it is a fruitful change from past provision and process in which the constituent units had 'little or no say' in planning process. According to these reports, NITI Aayog plays an important role with active involvement of States, civil society and other think tanks for the development of a shared vision of national priorities and strategies in complex areas. One of the main aims of NITI Aayog is 'to design strategic and long-term policy and programme frameworks and initiatives, and monitor their progress and their efficacy'. NITI Aayog is taking lead to set up the Vertical targets, and to foster the innovative environment for best innovation and cooperation. Thus, the target is to bring innovation, technology, enterprise and effective management together for policy formulation and implementation.

Beside, thirteen tasks of NITI Aayog have been discussed by Rao (2015) under four major functional groups that include: (a) Cooperative federalism: platform for interface between Centre and States, (b) Strategic planning, (c) Knowledge and innovation hub, and (d) Coordination.

On account of above, the main objectives (www.pib.nic.in-nitiaayog, 2022) and functions (NITI Aayog Annual Report, 2017, 2020 & 2022) of NITI Aayog have been presented in Fig. 1 and 2, respectively. However, functions and role of NITI Aayog have been described in Table 3 (NITI Aayog Annual Report, 2017, 2020 & 2022; Pandey and Shukla, 2022 a, b & c).



Fig. 1: Main objectives of NITI Aayog (Source: www.pib.nic.in-nitiaayog)

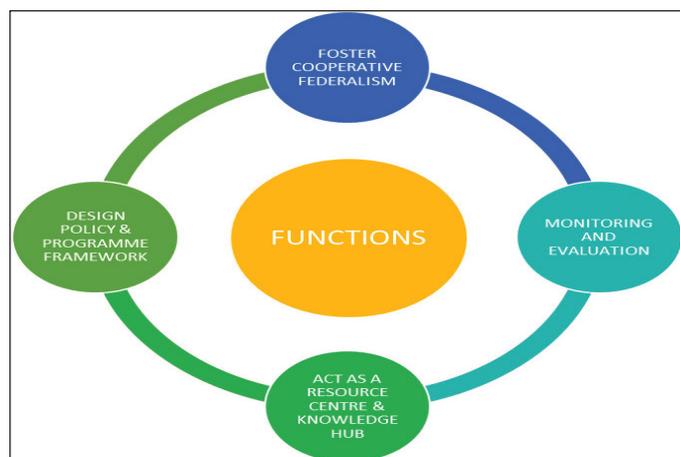


Fig. 2: Functions of NITI Aayog (Source: NITI Aayog Annual Report, 2017 & 2020)

Table 3: Functions and Role of NITI Aayog

Sl. No.	Functions and Role
1	To provide a <i>'think tank'</i> which provides Governments at the Central and State levels with relevant strategic and technical advice across the key elements of policy.
2	To foster cooperative federalism via framed support initiatives and mechanisms with States, considering that strong States make a strong country.
2	To overview monitoring and adoption of <i>'Sustainable Development Goals'</i> (SDGs) and promote competitive and cooperative federalism among States and UTs.
3	To advice and promote partnership between stakeholders and <i>'think tanks'</i> at all levels, including educational and policy research authorities.
4	To produce innovation, entrepreneurial support system and knowledge through national and international experts, practitioners and other partners.
5	To evolve a vision of national development priorities sectors and strategies by involving the States to fulfil the aims of country, as a whole.
6	To provide a critical directional and strategic input into development process.
7	To replace <i>'Centre-to-State one-way flow'</i> of policy (that was the hallmark of Planning Commission era) by a genuine and continuing partnership of the States of India.
8	To end the slow and tardy implementation of policy, by fostering better inter-Ministry coordination and better Centre-State coordination.
9	To develop mechanisms to formulate important plans at village level and enhance them progressively at higher levels of Government.
10	To provide a framework for preparing plans to the States and the latter, in turn, to the lower levels of Government.
11	To promise the desires of national security on specified areas to incorporate in the economic strategy and policy.
12	To pay special attention to those classes of society which may be at risk of not benefited sufficiently from the economy.
13	To make long term and strategic policies and programmes, and initiatives, and to monitor their progress and efficacy. These will be used to make innovative improvements, including necessary mid-course corrections.
14	To monitor and evaluate the initiatives and programmes, including identification of required resources, so as to enhance the delivery and success of NITI Aayog's initiatives and programmes.
15	To focus on the enhancement of technology and capacity building for initiatives and implementation of programmes.
16	To provide a platform for rules of inter-sectoral and inter-departmental matters to implement the agenda for development.
17	To maintain <i>'State-of-the-art Resource Centre'</i> , be a research repository on good governance and practices in development, and to help the stakeholders.
18	To have an administration paradigm in which the Government is an <i>'enabler'</i> rather than a <i>'provider of first and last resort'</i> .
19	To progress from <i>'food security'</i> to a mix of agricultural production, as well as actual returns that farmers get from their produce.
20	To facilitate the exchange of information and experiences, and promote healthy inter-governmental competition through monitoring and regulation.
21	To deal with the rationalisation of <i>'Centrally Sponsored Schemes'</i> (CSS) as there is considerable resentment by the States on them.
22	To start other programmes / activities which may be necessary for the development of national agenda and objectives as mentioned above.

With regard to development of *'New India'*, the fruitful functioning of Aayog is done through two hubs: (A) Hub of India Team (HIT), and (B) Hub of Innovation and Knowledge (HIK). *'HIT'* fosters cooperative federalism and makes policy, and designs programmes. This hub provides desirable support and cooperation to States. *'HIK'* maintains a state-of-the-art centre; to be research repository for good governance and practices, and helps the stakeholders. HIK also advices and promotes partnerships to chief stakeholders, including think tanks, universities, institutions, colleges and NGOs in India and abroad. Both HIT and HIK have 20 Verticals (NITI Aayog Annual Report, 2020): (1) Administration (General Administration and Accounts); (2) Governing Council Secretariat and Coordination; (3) Governance and Research; (4) Agriculture and Allied Sectors; (5) Human Resources Development; (6) Industry; (7) Tourism; (8) Culture; (9) Infrastructure Connectivity; (10) Infrastructure-Energy and International Cooperation; (11) Natural Resources and Environment; (12) Social Justice and Empowerment; (13) Social Sector-I (Skill Development, Labour and Employment,

and Urban Development); (14) Social Sector-II (Health and Nutrition, Women and Child Development); (15) Science and Technology; (20) Sustainable Development Goals and Rural Development; (16) State Coordination; (17) Data Management and Analysis; (18) Decentralized Planning; and (19) Project Appraisal and Public Private Partnership (PPP).

Furthermore, the NITI Aayog Annual Report (2020 & 2022) elucidated that the functioning of NITI Aayog can be examined and assessed under these four categories, viz.: (a) Fostering cooperative federalism, (b) Resource centre and knowledge hub, (c) Designing of policies and programmes, and (d) Monitoring and evaluation.

DISCUSSION

According to various studies and reports, it has been observed that the functioning of NITI Aayog in different institutions is performed through many processes and ways:

- ❑ *Innovation and knowledge hub*: NITI Aayog is both accumulator and disseminator of research, and best practices are done for good governance by means of a resource centre that identifies, analyses, shares and facilitates replication of the same.
- ❑ *Cooperative and competitive federalism*: NITI Aayog is the- (a) basic platform to run cooperative federalism by motivating States for policy formulation, and also for implementing quantitative and qualitative targets at a given time; (b) replacement of one-way flow of policy from centre-to-state because framed and systematic dialogs between State and Central Governments perform best development; (c) cooperative to increase more, and by vibrancy of competitive federalism with Centre as compared to States and vice versa for joint development of the country.
- ❑ *Sharing of national agenda*: NITI Aayog shares national agenda for development of country by actively involving the States. Implementation of 'national agenda' involves the PM and Chief Ministers of States / UTs.
- ❑ *NITI Aayog as a best friend of States at Centre*: NITI Aayog favours the States for their own activities / programmes to build up their strengths for taking advantages with the help of Ministries and Centre Government.
- ❑ *Domain strategies*: NITI Aayog builds a specialized domain expertise for good governance at the States and Central Government levels.
- ❑ *Monitoring and evaluation*: NITI Aayog monitors to implement different policies and programmes, and evaluates their performance. This will assess the weaknesses of concerns, and thereby motivate for correction so as to obtain greater efficiency.
- ❑ *Internal consultancy*: NITI Aayog gives an internal consultancy to Centre and States on policy matters and programme, particularly for skills through the PPP.
- ❑ *Decentralisation of planning*: NITI Aayog- (a) remakes the planning from bottom-to-up level, (b) strengthens States and guides them to further strengthen the local governments, and (c) formulates the mechanisms for better plans at village levels.
- ❑ *Scenario planning and vision*: NITI Aayog- (a) structures medium and long-term strategic planning for all sectors, (b) examines gaps and harness untapped potentialities, (c) monitors regularly for necessary mid-course recalibration and addresses the coming challenges and (d) works as basic transition by better planning for best economy of India.
- ❑ *Expertise network*: NITI Aayog provides main external ideas and experiences for Government policies and programmes through national and international experts, practitioners and other partners. It will link to Government from whole world links.
- ❑ *Coordinating interface with world*: NITI Aayog is a nodal point for the global expertise and resources from many platforms and countries, etc.
- ❑ *Capacity building*: NITI Aayog provides capacity building and upgradation of technology throughout the Government, with latest global trends, and also provides the managerial and technical knowhow.

- ❑ *Harmonization*: NITI Aayog enhances the harmonization of actions at different levels of Government through communication, coordination, collaboration and convergence across the stakeholders. This will bring all together at the proper approach for development of India.
- ❑ *Resolution of conflict*: NITI Aayog- (a) gives a platform for mutual resolution of inter-sectoral, inter-departmental, inter-state and centre-state issues and (b) provides solutions for all to bring about clarity and speedy execution.

As per the reports and findings, the result shows that NITI Aayog provides various beneficial policies and activities for the people of India. As observed, the 'Secretaries of Central Ministries' has advised to make a formula for allotment of funds to States under 'Centrally Sponsored Schemes' (CSS). On April 22nd 2015, the 'regional consultation on task force for poverty elimination, for western and northern States / UTS' was held at Jaipur (Rajasthan), wherein Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Daman & Diu, and Dadra & Nagar Haveli participated in this programme. On February 5th 2016, as recommended by the sub-group of Chief Minister, NITI Aayog said to have a goal and clear formula for distribution of central funds to the States under CSS. A letter was written by NITI Aayog to the Secretaries of all Central Ministries / Departments for taking quick action to develop a formula for distribution of CSS funds. It has been further noticed that for making a formula to distribute the CSS funds, a three-member committee consisting of the Secretary of Nodal Ministry implementing CSS as the Chairman, and the Financial Adviser of Ministry and Adviser of NITI Aayog as its Members was made. Then the NITI Aayog recommended the report of committee to all State Governments. Creation of such formula, however, provided transparency in allocation of funds in time to all concerns. Now with prior knowledge of funds which should be allotted to them under each CSS, the States can allocate funds to concern sectors in their budgets accordingly, without having to wait for release of Central budget. Now, NITI Aayog ensures the direct involvement of States in national policy making.

In recent time, NITI Aayog is recognised as the top 'public policy think tank' of Government that acts as a 'nodal agency' to aggravate economic development. The results clearly indicate that NITI Aayog fosters cooperative federalism through States in economic policy-making process. The findings also elucidate many initiatives of NITI Aayog, and some of them include: (1) Digital India; (2) 7-Year Vision, Strategy and Action Plan; (3) 15-Year Road Map; (4) AMRUT; (5) Atal Innovation Mission (AIM); (6) Transforming India Lecture Series; (7) Agriculture Reforms (Model Land Leasing Law, Reforms of the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee Act, Agricultural Marketing and Farmer Friendly Reforms Index for ranking States); (8) Task Forces on Agriculture and up of Poverty; (9) Medical Education Reform; (10) Indices Measuring States' Performance in Health, Education and Water Management; (11) Sub-Group of Chief Ministers on Rationalisation of Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS); (12) Sub-Group of Chief Ministers on 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan'; and (13) Sub-Group of Chief Ministers on Skill Development.

As appeared in the study that on the advice of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, the NITI Aayog has started 'NITI Lectures: Transforming India'. Through this initiative, famous policy makers, experts and administrators are called upon from abroad to India for providing their knowledge, expertise and experience in policy making and good governance. This programme will have a series of lectures, and the first lecture has been presented by Mr. Tharman Shanmugaratnam, the Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore. He has discussed about 'India and the Global Economy' at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi. The Prime Minister of Singapore has stated that his idea about India is for quick transformation through the best vision (NITI Lectures, 2022). It has been further noted (Kaur, 2017) that NITI Aayog on 31 August 2017 has provided a good 'State Statistics Handbook' which discloses main and popular statistics for all sectors of Indian States / UTs. This book may help in 'a one-stop database' of important State statistics.

It has been found that NITI took initiative on 'blockchain' usages in e-governance, and given the name- 'IndiaChain' that provides project to develop a

nation-wide blockchain network (IndiaChain, 2020). The Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi at the “2016 World Economic Forum” said that ‘Artificial intelligence, machine learning, internet of things, blockchain and big data hold potential to take India to new heights’. The chief aim of this has found to link ‘IndiaChain’ with ‘IndiaStack’, the digital infrastructure which makes the backbone of ‘Aadhaar project’ (IndiaChain, 2018). Therefore, this initiative on blockchain system will provide the contracts quicker, prevent fraudulent transactions and help farmers via quick delivery of subsidies. Remarkably, this project will be a large system of record keeping and public good disbursement. Thus, the NITI Aayog is going to provide a job portal, so that the employers will be connected with workers who have returned to their homes due to Covid-19 lockdown in India.

Furthermore, a report shows that NITI Aayog has launched a project of ₹ 75,000 crores for industrial development of Great Nicobar islands in Andaman and Nicobar. The project is engaged in the development of a trans-shipment terminal with a green-field international airport, townships, and solar and gas-based power plants. This plan may put a significant ecological pressure on island, its wildlife and its surroundings. Besides these, a ‘Student Entrepreneurship Programme’ (SEP) 1.0 was introduced in 2019, while ‘SEP 2.0’ has come in 2020 for changing the basic innovations of ‘Atal Tinkering Lab’ (ATL) students into end products. It has been noticed that SEP 2.0 provides work to students of ATL by having ‘Dell volunteers’. They have been also provided mentor support, end user feedback, manufacturing support and launch support of their products in market. This project will be driven by ‘AIM’ under NITI Aayog in association with Dell technologies. In September 2021, NITI Aayog together with BYJU’s has started another initiative that aims free tech-driven learning to engineering aspirants from 112 districts of India (NITI Aayog, 2022; Wikipedia, 2022).

CONCLUSION

The present research study explores that NITI Aayog provides a notable directional and strategic input into development process. The centre-to-state one-way flow of policy, that was the hallmark of Planning Commission

era, has now been replaced by a genuine and continuing partnership of States. As a ‘think tank’, the NITI Aayog provides relevant strategic and technical advice to both Central and State Governments in all policy matters. NITI Aayog also shares the vision of national development priorities and fosters cooperative federalism, recognising that ‘strong states make a strong nation’. NITI Aayog develops mechanisms to formulate important plans to village level and aggregates these progressively at higher levels of Government. Further, the NITI Aayog creates a knowledge, innovation and entrepreneurial support system through a collaborative community of national and international experts, practitioners and partners. This gives a platform for resolution of inter-sectoral and inter-departmental issues in order to enhance the implementation of developmental agenda. Besides, NITI Aayog monitors and evaluates the implementation of programmes, and focuses on technology upgradation and capacity building. The effectiveness of NITI Aayog as a mechanism inducing Government will be accountable to the citizens of India, thereby a big dimension of public will be benefitted. There may not be observed much evidence of significant variation in public participation or awareness across the socio-economic status in India in future, if such policies will be recommended by the Government.

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