

Study the Impact on Government Policies of Niti Aayog

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Abstract – On 1 January 2015, India's 64-year-old apex policy-making body, the Planning Commission, was replaced by a new institution, the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog. While it is still too early to assess the NITI Aayog's impact on India's complex policy landscape, or the full extent of its social and political implications, the emerging architecture of the new institution provides valuable insights into the Modi government's economic policy priorities and preferred style of governance. One of the main objectives of NITI Aayog is, 'To study NITI Aayog will spur innovative thinking by objective 'experts' and promote 'co-operative federalism' by enhancing the voice and influence of the states, the new institution is being crafted to enlarge the power of the executive government and the prime minister.

Key Words – Niti Aayog, Government Policy, Co-Operative Federalism, Economy

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INTRODUCTION

In order to evolve a shared vision of national development priorities, sectors and strategies with the active involvement of States in the light of national objectives, Government of India has replaced Planning Commission by the NITI Aayog (National Institution for Transforming India) which has commenced operations w.e.f. January 1, 2015. As a dedicated Think Tank of the Government, NITI Aayog is expected to carry out this 'directional' role, strategically charting the future of the nation. It is expected to provide specialised inputs - strategic, functional and technical - to the Prime Minister and the Government (Centre as well as States), on matters critical to the fulfilment of the national development agenda. Besides, it is envisaged that NITI Aayog will play an important role in monitoring the implementation of policies and programmes, and evaluate their impact. The Aayog is expected to provide advice and encourage partnerships between key stakeholders and national and international like-minded Think Tanks, as well as educational and policy research institutions. One of the strategies to achieve these objectives is to put in place a mechanism for getting quality research work done through outside professional/expert agencies and individual experts besides supporting for exchange of views and fostering new ideas. This would be in addition to the in house and outsourced research done by the Development Monitoring and Evaluation Organisation (DMEO), which is a part of the NITI Aayog.

CONSTITUTION AND COMPOSITION OF NITI AAYOG

National Institution for Transforming India, also known as NITI Aayog, was formed via a resolution of the Union Cabinet on 1 January 2015. NITI Aayog is the premier policy think tank of the Government of India, providing directional and policy inputs. Apart from designing strategic and long-term policies and programmes for the Government of India, NITI Aayog also provides relevant technical advice to the Centre, states and union territories (UTs). NITI Aayog acts as the quintessential platform for the Government of India to bring states to act together in national interest, and thereby fosters cooperative federalism. On 6 June 2019, the Prime Minister approved the reconstitution of NITI Aayog.

The list of verticals is as below:

- Administration, General Administration and Accounts
- Agriculture and Allied Sectors
- Culture
- Data Management and Analysis
- Decentralized Planning
- Governance and Research

- Governing Council Secretariat and Coordination
- Human Resources Development
- Industry
- Infrastructure-Connectivity
- Infrastructure-Energy, International Cooperation
- Natural Resources and Environment
- Project Appraisal, Public Private Partnership
- Science and Technology
- Social Justice and Empowerment
- Social Sector-I (Skill Development, Labour and Employment, Urban Development)
- Social Sector-II (Health and Nutrition, Women and Child Development)
- State Coordination
- Sustainable Development Goals and Rural Development
- Tourism

The administration in NITI Aayog functions in accordance with the service rules and existing Government of India instructions through the nodal department, i.e. Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), on issues related to personnel management of employees working in NITI Aayog. The administration is concerned with all aspects of service conditions of officers and staff, viz. recruitment, promotion, postings, transfers, retirement, deputation, court cases related to service matters, besides providing information under the RTI Act on these matters.

During the year, the NITI administration circulated five posts of senior adviser/adviser in flexi pool. After screening/shortlisting the candidates, interviews were conducted by a selection committee and consequently, three people were selected. The proposal for appointment of these three candidates was sent to DoPT for obtaining the approval of ACC thereon. Subsequently, four posts of senior adviser/adviser in the Knowledge and Innovation Hub were also circulated. Additionally, five posts of deputy adviser and two posts of joint adviser were advertised by the composite method of deputation/promotion. The entire process of screening and completion of requisite documents—cadre clearance, vigilance clearance, integrity certificate, APARs, etc.—was completed and

interviews were conducted by the UPSC in October 2019.

The internship scheme initiated by NITI Aayog in 2016 continued in 2019–20 in accordance with the revised NITI internship guidelines dated 22 November 2018. Further, in pursuance of the guidelines a comprehensive internship portal was developed, which enabled decentralization and streamlining of the NITI internship scheme, thus leading to efficiency and effectiveness. The scheme seeks to engage students pursuing undergraduate/postgraduate degrees or research scholars enrolled in any recognized university/institute within India or abroad as interns. These interns are given exposure to various verticals/divisions/units within NITI Aayog.

OFFICES ATTACHED TO NITI AAYOG

Development Monitoring & Evaluation Office

The Development Monitoring and Evaluation Office (DMEO) was constituted on 18 September 2015 by merging the erstwhile Programme Evaluation Organization (PEO) and the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) and notified as an attached office under the aegis of NITI Aayog for fulfilling the mandate of evaluation and monitoring tasks assigned to NITI Aayog.

National Institute of Labour Economics Research and Development

The National Institute of Labour Economics Research and Development (NILERD) is a central autonomous organization under NITI Aayog. It was set up in 1962 in the name of the Institute of Applied Manpower Research. The Vice Chairman of NITI Aayog serves as the President of its general council, and the CEO, NITI Aayog, as the chairperson of the Executive Council of NILERD. Currently, the Senior Adviser of the governance and research vertical, NITI Aayog, is holding additional charge as Director General of the Institute. The primary objectives of this institution are research, data collection, and education and training programmes in all aspects of human capital planning, human resource development, monitoring and evaluation.

Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister

The Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) has been working on several matters that influence the economy of the country. The Council has been advising the Prime Minister/Prime Minister's Office on economic issues from time to time. It has submitted various reports such as the Beekeeping Development Committee Report, financial restructuring of L&T Special Steel and Heavy Forgings Pvt. Limited, continuation of Credit Linked Capital Subsidy and Technology Upgradation Scheme (CLCS-TUS) for three Years

from 2017–20, continuation of the Small Hydro-Power Development Programme for the period 2019–20, northeastern region development, Atal Innovation Mission, etc.

POLICY & PROGRAMME FRAMEWORK

- Transformation of Aspirational Districts Programme
- Nutrition Sector Reforms
- Health Sector Reforms
- Agriculture Sector Reforms
- Higher Education Reforms
- Energy Sector Reforms
- Transforming India's Gold Market

NITI Aayog plays an integrative role with the active involvement of states, civil society and other think tanks in the development of a shared vision of national priorities and strategies in critical areas of human and economic development.

One of the main objectives of NITI Aayog is, 'To design strategic and long-term policy and programme frameworks and initiatives, and monitor their progress and their efficacy.' NITI is taking the lead in setting up sectoral targets and fostering an environment of innovation and cooperation. The attempt is to bring innovation, technology, enterprise and efficient management together at the core of policy formulation and implementation.

NUTRITION SECTOR REFORMS

1. Second Bi-Annual Report on POSHAN Abhiyaan

The technical support unit of the Women and Child Development division has been mandated with the responsibility of preparing the biannual reports to appraise the progress of POSHAN Abhiyaan. Under this mandate, the second biannual report was prepared and shared with the Prime Minister's Office. It contains an Implementation Index reflecting the status of states and union territories for implementation of the Abhiyaan.

Engagement of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) under POSHAN Abhiyaan

To mobilize Panchayati Raj Institution (village council) members as nutrition champions, NITI Aayog and Ministry of Women and Child Development have partnered with National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), UNICEF and National Institute of Nutrition (NIN), TATA Trusts, Piramal Foundation for training 30 lakh representatives across

the country. In phase 1, the training will cover close to 1,00,000 PRI members from 25 aspirational districts spread across 7 states. The ambition of this initiative is to mobilize such members to take greater ownership of the Abhiyaan in their community and personalize the nutrition narrative as '*Hamari Gram Panchayat ki Poshan Kahani*' ('Our Gram Panchayat's Poshan Story').

Conceptualization and Conduct of Rashtriya POSHAN Maah in September 2019

NITI Aayog played a pivotal role in conceptualizing and conducting Rashtriya POSHAN Maah and POSHAN Pakhwada across the country in the months of March and September 2019 to turn this into a *jan andolan*. The purpose of celebrating the POSHAN month is to take the message of nutrition to every nook and corner of the country. POSHAN Maah 2019 had five components: first 1,000 days of the child, *Anaemia-Mukt Bharat*, Diarrhoea Prevention, WASH (or wash, sanitation and hygiene), and paushtik aahaar (wholesome food). Stakeholders across India organized various activities and reached out to more than 50 crore people (cumulative) at the grassroots level.

2. National Council on India's Nutritional Challenges under POSHAN Abhiyaan

This apex body formulates overall policies and guides and monitors all nutrition-based schemes, highlighting the life-cycle approach. It coordinates and reviews convergence among ministries for providing policy directions to address India's nutrition challenges. In 2019, the National Council met twice and focused on the following:

- i. Expedient procurement of smartphones and growth devices by the states and union territories as per the provision under POSHAN Abhiyaan. The procurement status to be monitored on a weekly basis. The status report and timelines for procurement of devices and measures taken to expedite the same to be presented by Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD) to NITI's Vice Chairman. As on 25 November 2019, 49.6% of smartphones, 56.06% of infantometers, 54.67% of stadiometers, 53.2% of weighing scales (infant) and 56.36% of weighing scales (M&C) had been procured.
- ii. Importance of behavioural changes among mothers, teachers and *anganwadi* workers to meet their targets on nutrition. A behavioural policy unit has been established at NITI Aayog to achieve the mandated targets.
- iii. A decision was made to conduct a pilot study on cash transfer in lieu of take-home

ration under ICDS to assess the effectiveness of cash vs in-kind transfers in two project blocks in two districts each in Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. It was decided to monitor and evaluate the pilot in a rigorous scientific manner to enable generation of credible evidence for further policy direction.

3. Work Related to National Technical Board of Nutrition (NTBN)

Under the chairmanship of NITI Aayog Member Dr V.K. Paul, the National Technical Board of Nutrition was constituted to provide technical, responsive and evidence-based recommendations on policy-relevant issues concerning nutrition for women and children. The third board meeting of the National Technical Board of Nutrition was held on 12 April 2019. It was a scientific consultation on childhood and adolescent overweight obesity in India. Likewise, the fourth meeting was conducted on 31 July 2019 to discuss the following issues:

- i. Pilot study to be conducted on conditional cash transfer
- ii. Periodicity of measurement and recording of height at AWCs

HEALTH SECTOR REFORMS

1. Ayushman Bharat/Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY)

NITI Aayog did detailed groundwork on conceptualizing PMJAY, which led to its announcement in the Union Budget. NITI also played a role in shaping the organizational and governance structure of the National Health Authority for smooth implementation of the scheme.

a) Healthcare Provisioning and Investments in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities

With the launch of PMJAY and 500 million beneficiaries, there will be requirement of 0.64 million additional beds over the next 10 years. Currently, the country has 14,379 hospitals with 6.34 lakhs beds. We need 3 times more growth but focusing primarily on tiers 2 and 3 cities. Private players (both for profit and not for profit) have a key role to play in bridging the supply–demand gap in health infrastructure while advancing standards of care. This highlights the need for more hospitals to be built at a faster pace.

b) Development of Contributory Insurance Scheme for Population outside PMJAY

As per the 71st round of the NSSO survey, 80% of Indians are not covered under any health insurance plan and only 18% (government-funded 12%) of the urban population and 14% (government-funded 13%)

of rural population are covered. PMJAY covers 40% of the population. It is envisaged to provide health cover to the remaining population. NITI Aayog is working towards evolving a scheme to cover this uncovered population, which is characteristically not poor and often referred to as the 'deprived above-poverty-line class.

2. Reforms in Pharmaceutical and Medical Devices Sector

a) Pharmaceutical Pricing Reforms

The Standing Committee on Affordable Medicines and Health Products (SCAMHP) was constituted by the Central government on 21 January 2019, under the chairmanship of NITI Aayog Member (Health) Dr VK Paul, to give recommendations to the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) regarding prices of drugs and health products. The Committee could also take up a matter for examination suo moto or on request or recommendation by the Department of Pharmaceuticals, NPPA, and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

Trade Margin Rationalization (TMR): The first meeting of the Committee was held in February 2019 to discuss the framework for fixation of prices for non-scheduled drugs through the trade-margin-capping route. With approval from SCAMHP, in March 2019, NPPA piloted trade margin rationalization (TMR) by invoking the powers under para 19 of Drug Price Control Orders (DPCO) 2013 for 42 non-scheduled, anti-cancer drugs. The pilot was successful in accruing savings of Rs 984 crore per annum and in curbing unethical profiteering with more than 500 brands showing a price reduction of up to 91%.

b) Ease-of-Doing Business

i. Streamlining the process of approval of new drug regulation: The process of approval of new drug regulation requires recommendation of different bodies— Review Committee on Genetic Manipulation (RCGM) under Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) under Ministry of Environment and Forest and Climate Change, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), etc. Following the decision taken at NITI, key actions were initiated by the relevant ministries. They include:

- The task of developing guidelines for therapeutic use (commercial use) of stem cells and cell-based products.
- Gene-therapy research guidelines have been developed by ICMR and released publicly on 19 November 2019.

- Ministry of Health and Family Welfare notified the Draft New Drug and Clinical Trial Rules 2018, which have, inter alia, a provision for giving market authorization by the regulator within 30 days, along with a provision for deemed approval.
- ii. Outreach to entrepreneurs, innovators and manufacturers of medical devices: Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council set up a facilitation cell for start-ups and innovators of biomedical devices to communicate with relevant Government of India stakeholders through a single platform for early resolution of their queries. In its first year, the platform addressed over 250 queries through in-person visits and online.

3. National Medical Commission Bill

During the review of the health sector in March 2016, the PM constituted a committee to examine all options for reforms in the Medical Council of India and suggest a way forward. After extensive deliberations, the Committee finalized the draft National Medical Commission Bill for replacing the Medical Council of India with the proposed National Medical Commission. The National Medical Commission Bill was passed on 29 July 2019 by the Parliament.

AGRICULTURE REFORMS

1. Constitution of High-Powered Committee of Chief Ministers for Transformation of Indian Agriculture

In pursuance of the decision taken in the fifth Governing Council Meeting of NITI Aayog, the Prime Minister announced the setting up of a high-powered committee of chief ministers for transforming Indian agriculture under the convenorship of Devendra Fadnavis, former chief minister of Maharashtra. The member secretary of the committee was Prof. Ramesh Chand, Member, NITI Aayog. The committee also comprised:

- Chief Minister of Punjab, Capt. Amarinder Singh
- Kamal Nath, Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh
- Manohar Lal Khattar, Chief Minister of Haryana
- Narender Singh Tomar, Minister of Agriculture, Rural Development and Panchayati Raj.
- Naveen Patnaik, Chief Minister of Odisha
- Pema Khandu, Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh

- Vijay Rupani, Chief Minister of Gujarat
- Yogi Adityanath, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh

In its first meeting on 18 July 2019, the committee discussed ways to incentivize the states to implement various reforms in agriculture. The committee emphasized the need to accelerate the growth of the food-processing sector, modalities to draw more investment in agriculture, subsidy on drip irrigation, water conservation, including the need to stress upon required amendments to the Agricultural Produce Market Committee Act and Essential Commodities Act. The committee will also suggest the appropriate way out for adoption and time-bound implementation of agriculture sector reforms. The second meeting of the committee was held at Mumbai on 16 August 2019 after taking into account the inputs shared by participating states to develop the report in a more articulated and comprehensive manner. The report of the committee is yet to be finalized.

2. Ensuring the Implementation of Minimum Support Price (MSP), Including PM-AASHA

In the Budget of 2018–19, there was an announcement that NITI Aayog, in consultation with Central and state governments, will develop a foolproof mechanism so farmers can get remunerative price for their produce. A meeting of Central ministries, states and union territories was held on 9 March 2018 under the chairmanship of NITI Aayog Vice Chairman Dr Rajiv Kumar to discuss about the mechanism of implementation of MSP for the selected agricultural produce or to provide MSP to the farmers through some other way. As an outcome of the discussion, the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare rolled out new schemes—Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay Sanrakshan Abhiyan (PM-AASHA), Price Deficiency Procurement Scheme (PDPS), Price Support Scheme (PSS) and Private Procurement and Stockiest Scheme (PPSS)—for procurement of notified crops from farmers.

3. Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF)

A conference was held in NITI Aayog on 9 July 2018 under the chairmanship of NITI Vice Chairman Dr Rajiv Kumar to discuss about the scope and promotion of natural farming. The meeting was also attended by NITI Aayog Member (Agriculture) Dr Ramesh Chand; CEO Amitabh Kant; Secretary (Agriculture) Sanjay Agarwal; former minister of state (agriculture) Gajendra Singh Sekhawat; and other senior officers and academics. Padma Shri awardee Subhash Palekar, an expert on natural farming, was also present at the event. He narrated how zero budget natural farming is different from organic farming. However, Dr Chand mentioned that ZBNF should be scaled-up nationally only after scientific validation. NITI Aayog Vice Chairman Dr Rajiv

Kumar said states can promote natural farming under the set of existing farm-sector schemes, such as Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) and Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY). Dr Rajiv Kumar also attended a workshop on natural farming held at Gandhinagar, Gujarat, on 4 September 2019, and visited such farms. In addition, he visited Solan, Himachal Pradesh, on 13 July 2019, which is popularizing natural farming. The Vice Chairman, along with the Adviser (Agriculture), and senior officers of the Government of Andhra Pradesh went to Atkur cluster in the state on 13 September 2019 to interact with farmers, youth and women engaged in ZBNF cultivation. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman spoke in the first Budget speech of the seventeenth Lok Sabha on the promotion of natural farming under the back-to-basics approach; accordingly, Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers' Welfare planned to launch 'Bhartiya Prakritik Krishi Paddhati', in a pan-India mode to cover 12 lakh hectares of area and 600 clusters, as a centrally sponsored scheme.

4. Promotion of Village Storage Scheme

A meeting was held under the chairmanship of NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant on 17 May 2019 to discuss the strategies to be adopted for the Village Storage Scheme. Ways to enhance village-level storage facilities were critically deliberated.

While participating in the discussions, CEO, National Centre for Cold-chain Development (NCCD), Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers' Welfare (MoA&FW) mentioned that the Village Storage Scheme should address basic four categories of produce:

1. Hardy food crops like grains
2. Long-holding perishables
3. Short-life perishable crops
4. Produce like cotton, wool, industrial feedstock, which serve as raw material to the non-food industry.

It was further quoted that holding of perishables in refrigerated village stores may not promote the development of a suitable post-harvest supply chain but would instead delay the problem of establishing a supply line to market channels, leading to deferred distress.

It was suggested that village-storage and post-harvest facilities may primarily be set up at Gramin Agricultural Markets as an interface of APMC and farmers, which would provide pre-conditioning and connectivity to any market or user or organized storage in the country. It was also decided that the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development in collaboration with the National Centre of Geo-Informatics would create a portal and evolve a mechanism for

geotagging warehouses, including the refrigerated ones done in base-line survey for cold storages—all over India.

HIGHER EDUCATION REFORMS

Reforms in Higher Education

NITI Aayog has been playing a key role in identifying challenges and contributing to reforms in higher education regulatory frameworks. After the first phase of reforms that was implemented through University Grants Commission regulations and guidelines in recent years, NITI Aayog has been contributing substantively to a new parliamentary legislation for higher education, which is being drafted by the Department of Higher Education, MHRD.

ENERGY SECTOR REFORMS

Draft National Energy Policy 2019

The PMO had directed the work related to the National Energy Policy (NEP) to be looked after by the NITI Aayog. The process of drafting the Policy was initiated in 2015 after an interaction with leading economists at NITI Aayog, followed by various workshops/conferences organized by NITI Aayog in consultation with knowledge partners. The draft National Energy Policy was discussed at the Prime Minister's level in a meeting held on 17 May 2017.

The policy was revised by adding two chapters: 'Subsidies, Cross-subsidies and Taxation' and 'Restructuring of Energy Sector Governance'. The time horizon was revised from 2040 to 2030. The revised NEP was then circulated for inter-ministerial consultations in June 2018. The comments received were incorporated and a draft cabinet note circulated for inter-ministerial comments in August 2019. Further, the comments received from respective ministries/ departments were incorporated and the final cabinet note is being prepared for submission to the Cabinet Secretariat for obtaining approval.

TRANSFORMING INDIA'S GOLD MARKET

A Committee on Transforming India's Gold Market was constituted by NITI Aayog to recommend measures to tap into the potential of this market for providing a stimulus to exports, economic growth and employment. The report of the Committee was submitted in February 2018 and a presentation was made before the Governor of Reserve Bank of India in May 2018. The Union Budget 2018–19 had also announced that a comprehensive gold policy will be formulated to develop it as an asset class. Subsequently, a meeting of a committee of secretaries was held in April 2019 to deliberate on this.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

1. Development Monitoring and Evaluation Office
2. Performance Dashboards
 - a. Champions of Change: Aspirational Districts
 - b. Nutrition
 - c. Atal Tinkering Labs
 - d. SDG India Index 2019–20
3. Key Performance Indices
 - a. SDG India Index
 - b. India Innovation Index
 - c. School Education Quality Index
 - d. Composite Water Management Index
 - e. State Health Index
 - f. District Hospital Index
 - g. State Energy Index

Evidence-based policymaking should be integral to the overall governance structure in New India. To achieve this, it is important to be able to track performance, determine outcomes to understand how well a scheme is performing, and to help diagnose reasons for poor performance and generate recommendations for course corrections. This requires not only collecting data but putting in place proper frameworks with measurable parameters to help strengthen the effective management of limited public resources and achieve a deeper and broader impact of scheme interventions.

COOPERATIVE FEDERALISM

- Fifth Governing Council Meeting
- Sustainable Action for Transforming Human Capital (SATH) in Education
- Development Support Services to States (DSSS)
- NITI Forum for North East
- Holistic Development of Islands
- Sustainable Development in the Indian Himalayan Region

NITI Aayog has been constituted to actualize the important goal of cooperative federalism and to enable

good governance in India to build a strong nation state.

Two key features of cooperative federalism are (1) joint focus on the National Development Agenda by the Centre and states and (2) advocacy of concerns and issues of states and union territories with Central ministries.

NITI Aayog has also established models and programmes for development of infrastructure and to reignite and establish private-public partnership, such as the Centre–state partnership model: Development Support Services to States and Union Territories (DSSS); and the Sustainable Action for Transforming Human Capital (SATH) programme.

Governing Council

The Governing Council of NITI Aayog, comprising chief ministers of all states and union territories and lieutenant governors of union territories, came into effect on 16 February 2015 via a notification issued by the Cabinet Secretariat. So far, five meetings have been held under the chairmanship of the Hon'ble Prime Minister and with the chief ministers and lieutenant governors of all states and union territories and members of NITI Aayog.

The fifth meeting was held at the Rashtrapati Bhavan Cultural Centre, President Secretariat, New Delhi, on 15 June 2019.

The council held deliberations on:

- Rainwater harvesting
- Drought situation and relief measures
- Aspirational Districts Programme: achievements and challenges
- Transforming agriculture: need for structural reforms with special emphasis on:
 - a) Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee Act
 - b) Essential Commodities Act, 1955
- Security-related issues with specific focus on left-wing-extremism-affected districts.

At the end of the day-long deliberations, the Hon'ble Prime Minister highlighted the importance of the Governing Council of NITI Aayog as a platform to inspire cooperative federalism and emphasized the contributions of NITI Aayog in realizing the vision of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas'. He called upon the states to fix targets for district GDPs and increase the share of respective state GDPs.

THINK-TANK ACTIVITIES

1. Increasing Knowledge
 - Adoption of Frontier Technologies: AI Strategy Paper
 - National Health Stack: Strategy and Approach Consultation Paper
 - Strategy for Methanol Economy
 - Strategic Dialogues
 - ▶ Sixth India–China Strategic Economic Dialogue
 - ▶ Fifth NITI–DRC Dialogue
 - ▶ UN ESCAP Asia–Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development
 - ▶ High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
 - ▶ NITI Lecture Series
 - ▶ Economists' Meet
 - ▶ NILERD
2. Promoting Innovation
 - ▶ Atal Innovation Mission
 - ▶ Women Entrepreneurship Platform
3. Engaging Widely: High-Profile Visits
4. Networking with Think Tanks

NITI Aayog has taken some significant steps this year, towards fulfilling its objectives and with an eye on India's ability to meet future needs. These include developing a national strategy on artificial intelligence and igniting India's first methanol-based cooking stove in Assam on 5 October 2019.

Further, engaging widely with national and international like-minded think tanks, educational and policy research institutions and subject matter experts has led to development of partnerships between key stakeholders.

ENGAGING WIDELY: HIGH-PROFILE VISITS

1. First India–China Economic Cooperation Forum

The first India–China Economic Cooperation Forum was organized by Confederation of Indian Industry in partnership with NITI Aayog and the international

corporation division of NDRC on 9 September 2019 at New Delhi on the sidelines of the sixth Strategic Economic Dialogue.

2. Second India–Russia Strategic Economic Dialogue (IRSED)

The second India–Russia Strategic Economic Dialogue (IRSED) was held on 10 July 2019 in New Delhi, under the chairmanship of NITI Aayog Vice Chairman Dr Rajiv Kumar and Deputy Minister of the Economic Development of the Russian Federation Timur Maksimov.

The dialogue included parallel roundtables, which discussed areas of cooperation and concrete roadmaps for future negotiations across core areas of transport infrastructure; agriculture; small and medium business support; digital transformation; trade; banking, investment; and tourism and connectivity. Participants included government officials, business leaders and experts.

3. Cooperation in Russian Far East and Arctic

NITI Aayog entered into an agreement with the Ministry for Development of Russian Far East and the Arctic during the Eastern Economic Forum (EFF) at Vladivostok on 4 September 2019, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi was invited as the chief guest. As per the agreement, both sides are working towards developing a programme for advancing cooperation in trade, economic and investment spheres in the Russian far east and the arctic from 2020–2025. The sides have also agreed to jointly host a business forum on the sidelines of the EEF each year going forward.

4. 1st NITI–Australian Treasury Dialogue

Based on the statement of intent exchanged between NITI Aayog and the Australian Treasury in 2017, the inaugural NITI–Treasury Dialogue was held on 30 April 2019 at Canberra. Both sides agreed to explore collaboration in frontier technologies, regulatory sandbox consultations, capacity building and regular exchanges. The second dialogue is scheduled to be held in India in 2020.

5. High-Level Meeting between Presidential Committee on New Southern Policy and NITI Aayog

The high-level meeting led by chairman, Presidential Committee on New Southern Policy of the Republic of Korea, and CEO, NITI Aayog, took place in New Delhi on 24 October 2019. Both sides agreed to establish regular channels of communication to foster cooperation across manufacturing in lines of Make in India and strengthen collaborations in the

areas of mobility, frontier technologies, 5G as well as on supporting start-ups and tourism and cultural exchanges.

6. High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

The meeting of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2019 convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, was held at the UN headquarters from 9–18 July 2019. The Indian delegation was led by NITI VC Dr Rajiv Kumar, and included Sanyukta Samaddar, Adviser (SDGs and Rural Development), NITI Aayog. The theme was 'Empowering People and Ensuring Inclusiveness and Equality'. Dr Rajiv Kumar presented India's progress in the SDGs in an address to the UN General Assembly.

NETWORKING WITH THINK TANKS

Samavesh is a networking and knowledge partnership initiative of NITI Aayog with reputed knowledge institutions and think tanks to catalyse development processes, enhance institutional capacity development and enable a field-level interface with the community for mutual enrichment. During 13–15 May 2019, a national conference on 'Growth and Regional Development in India: Recent Experiences and Emerging Perspectives' was organized under the SAMAVESH partnership. The conference was organized in collaboration with the Institute of Human Development and was supported by the Fifteenth Finance Commission. It deliberated upon different socio-economic performances, investment and financial flows and fiscal federalism.

CONCLUSION

It is still too early to assess the NITI Aayog's impact on India's policy landscape, or the full extent of its social and political implications. Nonetheless, the constitution, emerging architecture and leadership structure of the new institution allow clear insights into the Modi government's economic policy priorities and preferred style of governance. This paper has argued that, notwithstanding the government's claims that the NITI Aayog will enhance innovative thinking by objective 'experts', and 'cooperative federalism' by enhancing the voice and influence of the states, the new institution is being moulded to achieve the opposite.

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