

Publication: Mint	Date: 26.01.2023
Edition: National	Page No: 17
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Headline: India could go from aspirational to inspirational in 25 years	

| GUEST VIEW

India could go from aspirational to inspirational within 25 years

We need hyperlocal collaborations among stakeholders so that attitudes change for the sustainable development of Bharat



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India stands at the threshold of 75 years as a sovereign, democratic republic, the country's performance on most indicators, particularly over the past decade, has been quite remarkable, thanks to the government's consistent, focused and multi-pronged efforts. Within days of Prime Minister Narendra Modi choosing fellow countrymen on Independence Day to take a pledge to make India a developed country by 2047, India overtook the UK in 2022 as the fifth largest economy in the world.

As we commemorate Republic Day, the narrative has now shifted to India becoming a developed country. Coupled with the fact that India is poised to become the world's third largest economy by 2030, this has led to changes of mindset, strategy and policy at all levels, where the conversations are now around the ease of living, especially for underserved populations so that they can be key contributors to the nation's growth. The thinking has shifted from backward to aspirational to inspirational.

Full steam ahead. To reach that destination, our improvement on human development indices needs close attention. On its part, the government is leaving no stone unturned to join the 'developed nations' club. To make it a reality, India's Human Development Index score needs to move from the current median tier level of 0.615 closer to a higher 0.8. We must intensify our focus on parts of India where the poorest live, such as designated aspirational districts. While covid disrupted the development trajectory globally, the setback in India can be offset through the right mix of policy support and private-sector efforts.

Launched in 2018, the government's aspirational districts programme is an ambitious endeavour to transform 112 of India's most backward districts by bringing about attitudinal changes among all local stakeholders. Much ground has been covered in four years and there are reasons to rejoice, as clear from a UNFPA appraisal report that commends it for applying 'innovative techniques' and calls it a model to be replicated globally. Many of these districts have performed better than others in the last four years, setting a bar for becoming inspirational.

In partnership with NITI Aayog, the Piramal Foundation had launched an aspirational districts collaborative effort in 2020 in all 112 of these across 27 Indian states to enhance people's ease of living. What sets this initiative apart from other development initiatives are the twin pillars of 'hyperlocal collaboration' and 'last-mile convergence', both of which have delivered satisfactory results.

Hyperlocal collaboration can catalyse behavioural change. This model has been leveraging the power of local communities by prioritizing what they need. By bringing together over 1,000 hyperlocal non-government organizations (NGOs), the voices

of thousands of community leaders, the energy of lakhs of volunteers, the grit of committed citizens and the ownership of local governments, the change sparked by this collaborative effort is visible and gathering pace. In just over a year, millions of lives have been positively impacted.

Last-mile emergence: This could become a revolutionary step to achieve the new goal of inspirational and empowered panchayats. This means multiple government departments (education, health and agriculture to name a few) having to shift from a department-focused approach to a citizen-focused approach. For example, if a mother needs support for her girl child to go to school or requires a health intervention, it is now about the girl child, and how various government departments can come together at the last mile to ensure that state services to enable ease of living actually reach citizens, and with ease.

Mile to go: To significantly move the needle on transformation in India's aspirational districts calls for innovative approaches from all players at scale and speed, be it the government, development sector and corporate India. It calls for hyperlocal collaborations that will put in place sustainable change drivers. In this model, the solutions emerge locally and are also implemented locally.

Innovations must lead the way. Let's remember that residents of our aspirational districts comprise 10% of the nation's entire population but receive only about 2% of Corporate Social Responsibility funding. To fast-track India's journey towards becoming a developed nation, we must direct more resources towards Bharat and underserved areas.

The country's private sector and philanthropists would be well-advised to prioritise aspirational districts as they increase support. Programmes that are initiated in these can later be replicated in other parts of India.

The need to promote local micro-research and innovation in local areas assumes importance as a means to solve local problems. The efficacy of such research projects would be higher if local administrations, bureaucracy and academia came together to support them, with a spin-off being an increase in employment opportunities and the potential emergence of local youth as change catalysts.

Women's empowerment is a key objective: Women and girls comprise almost half the population, and providing an enabling environment to empower them by keeping them at the centre of local solutions could significantly speed up India's journey to join the ranks of developed nations. For this, a renewed emphasis on education and healthcare is needed, which in turn requires effective implementation of the New Education Policy 2020 and the National Health Policy 2017.

Becoming inspirational is the new mantra: As Mahatma Gandhi once said, "The future depends on what you do today." India kick-started efforts to become a developed country some years ago, and the creation of a new ethos has accompanied that national goal.

If Bharat has to truly inspire other developing countries in the world, we must together build pathways that can take us from being a developing nation to a developed country—and from an aspirational nation to an inspirational one.

[**India could go from aspirational to inspirational in 25 years**](#)

As India stands at the threshold of 74 years as a sovereign, democratic republic, the country's performance on most indicators, particularly over the past decade, has been quite remarkable, thanks to the government's consistent, focused and multi-pronged efforts. Within days of Prime Minister Narendra Modi exhorting fellow countrymen on Independence Day to take a pledge to make India a developed country by 2047, India overtook the UK in 2022 as the fifth-largest economy in the world.

As we commemorate Republic Day, the narrative has now shifted to India becoming a developed country. Coupled with the fact that India is poised to become the world's thirdlargest economy by 2030, this has led to changes of mindset, strategy and policy at all levels, where the conversations are now around the ease of living, especially for underserved populations so that they can be key contributors to the nation's growth. The thinking has shifted from backward to aspirational to inspirational. Full-steam ahead: To reach that destination, our improvement on human development indices needs close attention. On its part, the government is leaving no stone unturned to join the 'developed nations' club. To make it a reality, India's Human Development Index score needs to move from the current medium-tier level of 0.645 closer to a high-tier 0.8. We must intensify our focus on parts of India where the poorest live, such as designated aspirational districts. While covid disrupted the development trajectory globally, the setback in India can be offset through the right mix of policy support and private-sector efforts.

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The need to promote local micro-research and innovation in focal areas assumes importance as a means to solve local problems. The efficacy of such research projects would be higher if local administrations, bureaucracy and academia came together to support them, with a spin-off being an increase in employment opportunities and the potential emergence of local youth as change catalysts. Women's empowerment is a key objective: Women and girls comprise almost half the population, and providing an enabling environment to empower them by keeping them at the centre of local solutions could significantly speed up India's journey to join the ranks of developed nations. For this, a renewed emphasis on education and healthcare is needed, which in turn requires effective implementation of the New Education Policy 2020 and the National Health Policy 2017

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