



Initiatives of NITI Aayog During its Beginning Year: A Research

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ABSTRACT

'NITI Aayog' is a Government of India (GOI) policy 'think tank' whose goal is to 'promote involvement and participation in the economic policy making process by the State Governments of India'. It provides an important directional and strategic input to India's development process, and focuses on the 'cooperative federalism' of India. Aayog promotes and empowers the demand for good governance, which is people-centric, participatory, collaborative, transparent and policy-driven. It is a catalyst and communicator of new thinking and ideas for development. Hence, NITI Aayog can develop knowledge and innovation in collaboration with experts, practitioners and other partners to become the enabler and convener of governance practices aimed at enhancing public service delivery at the Central level. NITI Aayog has provided various beneficial policies and activities for the people of India. In recent times, NITI Aayog has been recognized as the Government's apex 'public policy think tank' that acts as the 'nodal agency' for enhancing economic development through various initiatives/functioning. Since NITI Aayog was structured on January 1, 2015, hence the main initiatives/functioning of Aayog in various Verticals (Divisions) have been discussed here for its beginning financial year (2015-16).

KEYWORDS: Government of India (GOI), Initiatives (Functioning), NITI Aayog (Aayog), State Governments, Verticals, Year 2015-16.

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I. Introduction

The Government of India (GOI) has constituted "NITI Aayog" (National Institution for Transforming India Aayog) on January 1, 2015 in place of the earlier 'Planning Commission'. The first meeting of 'NITI Aayog' was held on 8th February, 2015 under the Chairmanship of the Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, as the Prime Minister serves as 'Ex-officio Chairman' of NITI Aayog. The Aayog is a GOI policy 'think tank' whose objective is to 'promote involvement and participation in the economic policy making process by the State Governments of India'. Aayog provides an important directional and strategic input to India's development process. It focuses on the 'cooperative federalism' of India. Unlike Planning Commission, NITI Aayog does not have power to distribute Central Government funds to State Governments, and the funds are now allocated by the Ministry of Finance, GOI. Aayog promotes and empowers the demand for good governance, which is people-centric, participatory, collaborative, transparent and policy-driven. It is a catalyst and communicator of new thinking and ideas for development. It seeks to appoint an expert in the governance and public service delivery sector who can undertake the design, management and implementation of policy initiatives, ingenious projects and partnerships related to the theme-based area of governance and public service delivery. Some of these responsibilities are: improving public administration, increasing administrative efficiency in Government programmes, facilitating centre-state and inter-ministerial cooperation for good governance and formation of the best practices depot to promote the developmental agenda as per the principles of 'Minimum Government and Maximum Governance'. Hence, NITI Aayog can develop knowledge and innovation in collaboration with experts, practitioners and other partners to become the enabler and convener of governance practices aimed at enhancing public service delivery at the Central level (NITI Aayog, 2019; NITI Aayog Annual Report, 2016; Pandey, 2022; Pandey and Shukla, 2022a-b; Wikipedia, 2022).

In NITI Aayog, the State Governments play an equal role through NITI Aayog for the development of country, and so the NITI Aayog acts for the principle of cooperative federalism. Therefore, NITI Aayog as a

'*think tank institution*' of India is not only a hub of the knowledge but it also works for good governance. This is a big platform to detect and execute all governmental policies by bringing together various ministries of the Central and State Governments of India. The preferred working agenda of NITI Aayog are: raising and strengthening of the poor, diminished and exploited people who have continuously faced their identity-based inequality because of gender, region, religion, caste and class, etc. in India, as a whole (NITI Aayog Annual Report, 2016; Pandey, 2022; Pandey and Shukla, 2022a; www.nitiayog.com, 2022; Wikipedia, 2022).

Keeping the above in view, NITI Aayog seems to be a reputed '*think tank*' with good strategic vision and expertise, and the responsibility of giving objective advice to the Government is essential in any democratic set-up. Functioning of NITI Aayog is believed to be based on a bottom-up approach, in which decisions will be taken at the local level first, and then approval will be received from the Central Government. Thus, it is a welcome change from the earlier position and process in which constituent units had '*little or no say*' in the planning process (NITI Aayog, 2019; NITI Aayog Annual Report, 2016; Pandey and Shukla, 2022a).

II. Salient Functioning of NITI Aayog

NITI Aayog has provided various beneficial policies and activities for the people of India. For example, the '*Secretaries of Central Ministries*' advised the States to formulate a formula for allocation of funds under the '*Centrally Sponsored Schemes*' (CSS). To formulate the distribution of CSS funds, a three-member committee has been formed with the Secretary of the Nodal Ministry implementing CSS as the Chairman, the Financial Adviser of the Ministry and NITI Aayog Advisor as its member. NITI Aayog then recommends the report of committee to all State Governments. However, the formulation of such a formula provides transparency in timely allocation of funds to all concerns. Thus, with prior knowledge of funds to be allocated to them under each CSS, the States can allocate the funds as per their budget to the respective areas without waiting for the release of Union budget. Now, NITI Aayog ensures direct participation of States in national policy making (Wikipedia, 2022; www.insightsonindia.com, 2017; www.nitiayog.com, 2022).

In recent times, NITI Aayog has been recognized as the Government's apex '*public policy think tank*' which acts as the '*nodal agency*' for enhancing economic development. NITI Aayog includes many initiatives, such as: (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 (Wikipedia, 2022d).

NITI Aayog has launched '*NITI Lecture: Transformation India*'. This initiative aims to bring eminent policy makers, experts and administrators from abroad to India to impart their knowledge, expertise and experience in policy making and good governance. The first lecture was presented by Mr. Tharaman Shanmugaratnam, Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore. He discussed about '*India and the Global Economy*' at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi (NITI Lectures, 2022). Similarly, NITI Aayog provided a good '*State Statistics Handbook*' which discloses the chief and popular statistics of all sectors of Indian States/UTs. This book may help in a '*one-stop database*' of vital State statistics (Kaur, 2017). It has been stated that the policy initiated on the use of '*blockchain*' in e-governance, and named- '*IndiaChain*' which provides the project to develop a nationwide blockchain network (IndiaChain, 2020). At the "2016 World Economic Forum", the Prime Minister said that '*artificial intelligence, machine learning, internet of things, blockchain and big data have the potential to take India to new heights*'. Its main aim is to link '*IndiaChain*' with '*IndiaStack*', the digital infrastructure which forms the backbone of the '*Aadhaar project*' (IndiaChain, 2018a-b). Hence, this initiative on the blockchain system will provide quicker award of contracts, prevent fraudulent transactions and help farmers through quick disbursement of subsidies. Thus, Aayog is going to provide a job portal whereby employers will be connected to workers who have returned to their homes due to COVID-19 lockdown in India (Wikipedia, 2022).

A report shows that NITI Aayog has launched a project of Rs. 75,000 crore for industrial development of Great Nicobar Islands in Andaman and Nicobar. The project is engaged in the development of a green-field international airport, township and a trans-shipment terminal with solar and gas based power plants. This plan could place a significant ecological pressure on the island, its wildlife and its surroundings (EJOLT, 2019). Besides, a '*Student Entrepreneurship Programme*' (SEP) 1.0 was introduced in 2019, while '*SEP 2.0*' has arrived in 2020 to transform basic innovations of students of '*Atal Tinkering Lab*' (ATL) into final products. SEP 2.0 provides work to ATL students through '*Dell volunteers*'. The students have also been provided mentor support, end user feedback, manufacturing support and launch support of their products in the market. The project will be driven by '*AIM*' in association with Dell Technologies (AIM, 2020) under NITI Aayog. In

September 2021, NITI Aayog in association with BYJU has launched another initiative which aims to provide free technology-driven education to engineering aspirants from 112 districts of India (NITI Aayog, 2022a-b; Wikipedia, 2022).

III. Initiatives of NITI Aayog in its Initial Year (2015-16)

Since NITI Aayog was structured on 1st January, 2015 and its first meeting was held on 8th February, 2015, hence the main initiatives/functioning of NITI Aayog in its various Verticals (Divisions/Units/Sector) are discussed as follows for the beginning year of NITI Aayog, i.e. financial year 2015-16 (NITI Aayog Annual Report, 2016):

Agriculture Vertical: Important achievements of this Vertical are as follows:

- (a) **Task force on agriculture development (TFAD)-** TFAD was constituted on 16 March, 2015 by the NITI Aayog Vice Chairman. All the States and some union territories also constituted similar task forces.
- (b) **Contribution to the implementation of budget announcements and schemes-** Important initiatives are: (1) Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY); (2) Price Stabilization Fund (PSF); (3) Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY); (4) Agricultural Infrastructure Technology Fund (AITF); (5) Organic Farming Mission for North Eastern States; (6) Fisheries Development Aligning with Port Led Development; and (7) Blue Revolution.
- (c) **Contemporary paper by task force on agricultural development-** A paper titled 'Increasing Agricultural Productivity and Making Farming Remunerative to Farmers' based on the work of TFAD 16 was uploaded on NITI Aayog's website (www.niti.gov.in) for public opinion.
- (d) **Price deficiency payment (PDP)-** Maharashtra and MP were consulted with the Ministry of Agriculture, Commerce, Food and Public Distribution that will implement a pilot for cotton in Maharashtra and pulses in MP. In identified districts, the PDP will manage risk on price behaviour and ensure income to farmers.
- (e) **Bamboo development-** Action plan for bamboo development, especially for use in the Industry Sector was prepared and submitted to the PMO. The member (Agriculture) also led a team of NITI Aayog officials in Mizoram to discuss with State about the development of bamboo in North Eastern States.
- (f) **Breeder seed availability-** Consultations were held with Seed Corporations, State Agricultural Universities, National Seed Association, Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare, ICAR with private seed agencies and States, and suggested for road map on breeder seed production and replacement of varieties.
- (g) **Pilot on pulses in Bihar-** A collaboration project with 'Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation' was launched to conduct pilots on pulses in Bihar to bring nutritional security at household level. The crops identified for pilots are pigeonpea (tur), chickpea (gram), lentil (masoor) and summer green gram.

Health and Nutrition Vertical: In 'Health' Sector, NITI Aayog has achieved better progress, but the inter-state variation in achievements remains a matter of concern. In 'Nutrition' Sector, proportion of underweight children has shown a decline, but wasting and anemia disorders still exist and absolute levels of malnutrition remain high. However, Aayog is: (1) Improving MCI to bridge gap in the availability of doctors; (2) Creating an online portal to track the performance of hospitals through outcome indicators to improve the efficiency of hospital functioning; (3) Developing PPP mechanisms to enhance and strengthen service delivery through improving infrastructure and improving quality of care; (4) Restructuring and expanding the scope of health protection scheme, 'Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana'; (4) Working with the Ministry of Women and Child to achieve the goal of 'Kuposhan Mukta Bharat' and giving the shape to 'National Nutrition Mission'. In addition, NITI has conducted an inter-ministerial group to formulate a national nutrition strategy to address the problems of 200 high burden districts plagued by endemic malnutrition. This Vertical is also successful in shaping policy debate on the universalization of 'Maternity Benefit Scheme', and has the responsibility of conducting field assessments of pilots engaged in operations. NITI has contributed to and participated in drafting phase of the preparation of 'National Health Policy'.

Education Vertical: Important achievements of this Division are as follows:

- (a) Proposal for 'Association for Higher Education e-Resource' was evaluated.
- (b) Proposal for setting up of 'Indian Institute of Science Education and Research' (IISER), Tirupati was evaluated. IISER will cater to the needs of more than 600 students for BS-MS dual degree courses, Ph.D. and post-doctoral programmes.
- (c) NITI Aayog also evaluated the proposal for setting up a 'National Institute of Technology' (NIT), Andhra Pradesh during the XII and XII 5 Year Plans.
- (d) The Aayog supported the proposal to create 'Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds' - India Chapter of Massive Open Online Courses.

- (e) Aayog proposed to set up a 'National Sports University' in Manipur with the objective to serve national interest through various vocational sports education programmes, and act as a world class centre for research in physical education, Sports Science and their application to improve India's sporting performance, etc.
- (f) Aayog also proposed to set up a 'National Programme for Development of Sports' (Khelo India) by merging the three components of Rajiv Gandhi Khel Abhiyan (RGKA), USIS and NSTSS.
- (g) Proposal for re-development of 'National School of Drama' (NSD) campus.
- (h) Execution of the first phase of 'e-Bhasha (Sahitya) Project' was accepted through the Sahitya Akademi. Objective of the proposal is to provide digital vernacular content of classical literature of India in various languages.
- (i) It took various initiatives on policy issues including deliberating on outstanding issues in school education to analyze the progress of major flagship programmes (viz. SSA, MDMS, RMSA) and prepare folders for home visits of the PM. Besides, 60 officers of Aayog visited 60 districts to review the progress of 'Swachh Vidyalaya Abhiyan' launched by MHRD. Information received from these visits accelerated the pace of construction of toilets in schools. Vertical also analyzed reports and legislative bills to prepare a concept paper/road map on setting up of 'Foreign Educational Institution' (FEI) campuses in India.

Skill Development and Employment (SD&E) Unit: Main achievements this Unit are:

- (a) **Schemes-** Important proposals evaluated include: (1) Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) 2016-20, a skill development component of the umbrella PMKVY; (2) Common Norms for Skill Development Schemes of Government of India; (3) National Skill Development Mission; (4) Udyamita (entrepreneurship and training scheme); (5) Skill Training for Employability Leveraging Public Private Partnership (STEPPP); (6) National Skills University establishment through the country; (7) Apprenticeship Training Institutes for Women'; (8) Apprenticeship Ecosystem strengthening; (9) 1500 ITIs in PPP Mode establishment in unreserved blocks and areas under Kaushal Vikas Yojana (Skill Development Scheme); and (10) Institutional Capacity for Training of Trainers enhancement to establish institutes to train mainly trainers in PPP mode.
- (b) **Labour acts-** Important proposals evaluated were- amendment in the 'Payment of Bonus Act, 1965'; providing a 'Minimum Pension of Rs.1000/ per month' to pensioners under the Employees' Pension Scheme, 1995; amendment in the 'Minimum Wages Act 1948'; amendment in the 'Employees Provident Funds & Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952'; 'Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana' (scheme to encourage employers for employment generation).
- (c) **Research-** Many policy papers were published in various journals of repute.

Management of Urbanization Vertical: Important achievements of this Vertical are:

- (a) **Capacity building of urban local bodies-** NITI Aayog has entered in a MoU with 'Singapore Cooperation Enterprises' (SCE) in November 2015 to harness Singapore's expertise in Urban Sector for capacity building in State Governments and ULBs. In MoU, a capacity building programme named 'Urban Management Programme' has been launched by NITI and SCE for capacity building in three critical areas of urban transformation, viz. (1) Urban Planning and Governance, (2) Water, Wastewater and Solid Waste Management and (3) Public Financing (PPP). Programme will include a series of workshops in India and Singapore.
- (b) **International conference-** An International Conference on 'Sustainable and Inclusive Urban Development in India' was held during August 1-3, 2015 in partnership with the Institute of Human Development (IHD) and Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Florida.
- (c) **National workshop-** In partnership with Centre for Study of Science, Technology and Policy (CSTEP), Bengaluru a national workshop on 'Transforming Urban India: Creating Smart and Sustainable Cities' was organized on September 2, 2015.
- (d) **Sustainable urban transport solutions for small and medium sized cities-** NITI Aayog has initiated to develop a toolkit in partnership with Institute for Transport and Development Policy (ITDP). Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Tamil Nadu are partnering with NITI in this initiative.
- (e) **Evaluation of proposals-** Cabinet Notes/PIS Memos/EFCs/SFCs/Metro Rail DPRs etc., for various initiatives by the Ministry of Urban Development, were evaluated.
- (f) **Urban rejuvenation mission-** GOI launched 'Urban Rejuvenation Mission' (URM) in June, 2015 which includes 'Smart Cities Mission' (SCM), 'Atal Mission for Urban Rejuvenation and Transformation' (AMRUT) and 'Housing for All' (HFA). SCM, which will create 100 smart cities, aims to promote cities that provide core infrastructure and provide their citizens with a good quality, clean and sustainable environment and applications of 'smart solutions'. AMRUT aims to ensure that every household has access to a tap with an assured supply of water and a sewerage connection, increasing value of city amenities by developing greenery

and well-maintained open spaces, preventing floods to reduce pollution by promoting non-motorized transport like walking and cycling in 500 cities. This Vertical gave suggestions for improving outcomes like systematic monitoring of reform implementation, charts, recycling/reuse of waste water and reduction in Non-Revenue Water (NRW) and introduction of PPPs in waste water projects, etc.

Rural Development Vertical: Important achievements of this Vertical are:

(a) **Housing for all (HFA) : ‘Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana’ (PMAY)-** Aayog has finalized a repository of type-designs for rural areas as well as skilled masons. Incorporation of geo-tagged images to monitor local low cost, disaster resistant building materials and home construction. Ministry of Rural Development has been advised to strengthen its housing MIS on the lines of GARV model of the Ministry of Power. Aayog has also urged the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation to fix annual and long-term targets and release long link funds to States. NITI Aayog has also initiated the implementation of rental housing scheme.

(b) **Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana’ (DAY) : National rural livelihood mission NRLM)-** This was launched in June, 2011 after restructuring of ‘Swarnajayanthi Grameen Swarojgar Yojana’. In May 2013, its name was changed to ‘Ajeevika’. Now, this mission is known as ‘Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana’ (DAY). Aim of DAY is to organize all rural poor families of India, and continuously nurture and support them till they come out of abject poverty. DAY strives to reach out to 8 to 10 crore rural poor families and mobilize one woman member from each household.

(c) **‘Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act’ (MGNREGA)-** It guarantees at least 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members are unskilled Volunteer to do physical work. Aim of the scheme is to enhance livelihood security of poor families in rural areas of the country. Besides providing livelihood security, goals of MGNREGA include: rejuvenating natural resource base, creating a productive rural asset base, stimulating local economy by providing a safety net to rural poor, ensuring women empowerment and strengthening various grassroots democratic institutions. Aayog has recommended that ratio of labour and material component to the overall works carried out by the ‘Gram Panchayats’ (GPs), or any other agency is to be reckoned at the district level instead of the Panchayat level. It will go a long way in creating some good durable and quality assets under the MGNREGA.

Energy and International Cooperation (EIC) Vertical: Main achievements of this are:

(a) Task of formulating a ‘National Energy Policy’ (NEP) was initiated. Firstly, NITI undertook a series of consultations with Central and State Governments, industries, academia, regulatory bodies and institutions for inputs on key thematic areas.

(b) A sub-committee was formed by the Ministry of Power, and headed by Adviser (Energy), NITI Aayog, to finalize India’s potential energy mix by the year 2030.

(c) Aayog in collaboration with International Energy Agency and TERI organized a workshop titled ‘India Energy Outlook’ on April 13, 2015.

(d) As part of ‘Sustainable Growth Working Group’, Aayog has identified subjects to conduct studies on energy, some of which are: (1) energy-water-food relationship, (2) water footprint of Energy Sector and (3) development of an energy data-portal.

(e) In ‘New and Renewable Energy’ Sector, Aayog constituted an expert group to propose financial options to meet the 175 GW target for renewable energy by 2022.

Report on “India’s Renewable Electricity Roadmap 2030” summarised the opportunities and barriers to renewable energy and justification, and benefits and costs of its adoption in the context of Indian electricity system. Aayog facilitated the development of a tool for geospatial analysis of solar and wind energy under ‘Sustainable Development Working Group’ (SGWG), a collaborative framework under India-US Energy Dialogue. It is a matter of pride that NITI Aayog received “Five Star Energy Efficiency Rating” from Bureau of Energy Efficiency in February 2015, becoming the first Government building in India to achieve this rating by performing energy efficiency retrofit. This policy also received “National Energy Conservation Award 2015”. Aayog was also able to bring in policy changes for implementation of ‘ESCO Model’ in all Government buildings in Delhi.

(f) In ‘Power’ Sector, ‘National Electricity Plan’ (NEP) was prepared. Vertical also provided information about achievements of Power Sector schemes (‘Deendayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana’ and ‘Integrated Power Development Scheme’).

(g) In ‘Coal’ Sector, Aayog completed the process of estimation of coal demand for Annual Plan 2015-16 of the Ministry of Coal. Aayog represented and contributed in various meetings on ‘Standing Linkage Committee’ (long-term) for Thermal Power Plant, Cement Plant and Sponge Iron. Aayog developed GOI’s first dynamic and interactive web-based landscape creation tool for Indian Energy Sector, ‘India Energy Security Scenario’ (IESS), 2047. Thus, Aayog developed a new version of IESS 2047, incorporating new outputs, new

technologies and areas. To keep tool relevant in current policy space, IESS V2.0 builds on GOI's recent development goals. IESS is now being used as a platform to shape the vision of NEP.

(h) In 'Petroleum and Natural Gas' Sector, the topic "Promoting India's Oil and Gas Sector" was discussed between Prime Minister and global oil and gas experts. Aayog contributed on- 'Petroleum and Natural Gas' Sector of the 12th Plan Evaluation Document. NITI Aayog signed a 'Statement of Intent' (SOI) with the International Energy Agency in March, 2016. 'SOI' deals with the exchange of ongoing joint research on relevant technologies and analysis of global trends in pricing and supply of energy, as well as human resource development strategies for Energy Sector. Aayog has also signed an 'SOI' with Institute of Energy Economics, Japan to promote cooperation for analysis of Energy Sector related issues.

Infrastructure Connectivity (ISC) Vertical: Important achievements of 'ISC' are:

(a) On recommendation of NITI Aayog, the GOI and Japan signed a Memorandum of Cooperation for 'Mumbai-Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail' corridor project.

(b) Vertical is included for regional transport, especially in the North East region, where large investments are being made to improve rail and road infrastructure.

(c) Vertical helped in removing bottlenecks of some important transportation projects. Most important was the 'Pakyong Airport Project' near Gangtok in Sikkim.

(d) In Rail, 26 electrification projects and 39 doubling projects have been appraised by Transport and PMD Divisions. Aayog has worked closely with the Ministry of Railways to suggest alternative investment strategies, including the need to fast-track dedicated freight corridors for the new alignment.

(e) ISC Vertical has an important role in policy formulation in Transport Sector. Main policy initiatives were taken for: (1) Rail Development Authority (RDA); (2) Road Transport and Highways (RTH); (3) Road Safety under the 'Motor Vehicle Act' (MVA); (4) Rashtriya Sagarmala Initiative; (5) Mumbai Urban Transport Project Phase-III; (6) Road- implementation and revised funding pattern of 'PMGSY-I', implementation of 'SARDP-NE' and road connectivity to LWE districts, expansion of 'NH network', and 'Bharatmala' project; (7) Civil Aviation- establishment of 'National Aviation University' at Rae Bareilly, UP; airports in Tier-II and Tier-III cities, promotion of air freight and logistics, and policy relating to development of aviation hubs; (8) Port and Shipping- cabotage exemption policy to promote Indian shipping, 10 years financial assistance to shipbuilding and ship repair sector, ongoing implementation on 'Jal Marg Vikas' project to improve shipping efficiency and bring freight traffic to 'NW-1', incorporation of major ports, elimination of tamps, 'India-Bangladesh Coastal Shipping Agreement' and MoU for passenger and cruise ships, and implementation of 'Chhabahar Port of Iran'.

Industry Vertical: Important initiatives of NITI Aayog under 'Industry' are:

(a) 'IDFC Enterprise Survey on Business Regulatory Environment' is a flagship initiative of NITI Aayog. In collaboration with IDFC Foundation, Aayog is conducting an enterprise survey of manufacturing firms including start-ups in all States/UTs. Primary aim of this survey is to assess the 'Business Regulatory Environment' in each State/UT, and identify policy and regulatory hurdles faced by businesses in the States/UTs. Survey will take stock of the issues faced by the 'Make in India' initiative and trigger State-level reforms which will make it easier to do business in India while promoting competitive and cooperative federalism.

(b) Aayog held a meeting with senior officials of the Government of Odisha and representatives of the steel industry on January 7, 2016 at Bhubaneswar about progress and the present stage of problems.

(c) Empowered Committee of Aayog examined the revival mechanism of closed units of 'Fertiliser Corporation of India Limited' (FCIL) and 'Hindustan Fertiliser Corporation Limited' (HFCL). Aayog in an Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) constituted by the Department of Fertilisers discussed the 'Nutrient Based Subsidy' (NBS) policy on P&K Fertilisers and other subsidy issues. Besides examining the restructuring proposal of 'Fertilisers and Chemicals Travancore Limited' (FACT) and 'Brahmaputra Valley Fertiliser Corporation Limited' (BVFCL), the policy issues with regard to subsidy distribution, improvement in production, distribution of fertilisers, balanced utilization, etc. were examined.

(d) Study report on 'Access to Affordable Drugs in India - Challenges for the Pharmaceutical Industry and Consensus on Pricing and Patent Access Policy' in June, 2015 stated the need for a 'Pricing and Patient Access Policy Framework' which can ensure effective, appropriate and sustainable access in the context of 'Universal Health Coverage' (UHC). Aayog directed that Department of Pharmaceuticals and Ministry of H&FW may work together to develop a national strategy for access to affordable medicines, as per the report.

(e) Vertical was also involved in providing technical advice on investment proposals from techno-economic perspective.

(f) All policy issues relating to 'Central Public Sector Undertakings' (CPSUs) emerging from the Department of Public Enterprises and representation in Apex Committee for grant of Maharatna/Navratna status

were considered. Effective implementation of various schemes, e.g. North East Industrial and Investment Promotion Policy (NEIIPP), Indian Leather Development Programme (ILDP) and Industrial Infrastructure Upgradation Scheme (IIUS) were promoted. Various FDI policy issues were examined and remedial measures were suggested. The Vertical also assisted the Board of Trustees of DMIC Project Implementation Trust.

(g) 'Make in India' initiative in Textile Sector, 'Skill, Scale and Speed' (SSS), stated on 'Zero Defect and Zero Impact' on environment to make textile industry globally competitive. Major initiative in the textile sector was the launch of the 'Modified Technology Upgradation Fund Scheme' (ATUFS). Three brown field and two greenfield projects were sanctioned under 'Integrated Processing Development Scheme' (IPDS) to facilitate compliance with environmental standards.

(h) Initiatives were taken for increasing Uranium production and for implementation of Plastic Parks.

(i) Main programmes of 'Village and Small Enterprises' (VSE) Sector are: (1) Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP); (2) MSME Cluster Development Programmes; (3) Credit Guarantee Fund Scheme (CGFS) for MSEs; (4) Credit Linked Capital Subsidy Scheme (CLCSS); (5) Scheme of Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries (SFURTI); (6) National Handloom Development Programme (NHLDP); (7) National Handicrafts Development Programme (NHCDP); (8) Handicrafts Artisans Comprehensive Welfare Scheme (HACWS); (9) Khadi Reform and Development Programme (KRDP); (10) Handloom Weavers Comprehensive Welfare Scheme (HLWCWS); (11) Mega Clusters Scheme (MCS); (12) Rejuvenation, Modernisation and Technology Upgradation of Coir Industry (RMTUCI); (13) Catalytic Development Programme in Sericulture (CDPS); and (14) Infrastructure Development and Capacity Building.

Natural Resources Vertical:

(a) **Water resources-** Important initiatives of this are: (1) Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY)- 'Har Khet Ko Pani' to produce 'per drop more crop', accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme (AIBP) and watershed development; (2) Priority of projects for implementation under AIBP to cover more area under assured irrigation at the earliest; (3) Water Framework for India launched by NITI Aayog with assistance of the World Bank; (4) Amendment to Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956; (5) Initiative to develop a road map for interlinking of rivers in collaboration with the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation (MoWR, RD&GR) and the task force on interlinking of rivers; (6) Memorandum for Expenditure Finance Committee (EFC) prepared by MoWR, RD&GR for National Hydrology Project Phase-III; (7) Memorandum for EFC prepared by MoWR, RD&GR to set up National Water Informatics Centre (NWIC); (8) Proposal prepared by MoWR, RD&GR for Transforming Groundwater Management; and (9) Proposal of MoWR, RD&GR for implementation of Ken-Betwa Rivers Interlinking Project.

(b) **Environment and forests-** Important initiatives of this Division include: (1) Draft memorandum prepared by Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) for Standing Finance Committee (SFC) on National Adaptation Fund for Climate Change; (2) Draft memorandum on National Mission for Himalayan Studies (NMHS) prepared by MoEF&CC for SFC; (3) Draft memorandum prepared by MoEF&CC for EFC on the project- Pollution Alleviation of Mula-Mutha River in Pune; and (4) Two projects of the Government of Meghalaya, viz. Community Leadership Ecosystem Management Project, and Meghalaya Community Forestry and Bio-diversity Conservation Project.

(c) **Minerals-** This deals with the development of strategies for sustainable extraction of 'Mineral Resources'. Self-reliance in critical strategic resources of 'Rare Earths' (REs) are important resources for use in hi-tech applications in various strategic sectors like defence, nuclear power, space, oil, green energy, electronics, etc.

Science & Technology Vertical: Important initiatives of this are as follows:

(a) To create and accelerate innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem in the country, NITI Aayog has set up AIM including 'Self-Employment and Talent Utilization' (SETU). AIM acts as a world-class innovation hub, a platform for grand challenges, startup business and other self-employment activities, especially in technology driven areas. Activities of mission include: (1) promoting entrepreneurship for successful promotion of entrepreneurs and startups; and (2) promoting innovation to provide a platform for innovative ideas.

(b) To promoting 'Make in India', initiative was taken with road map for 'Manufacture of Body Armour' and related facilities for Security and Defence Sectors.

(c) 'Methanol' as alternative energy source is attracting the attention around the world.

(d) NITI Aayog is establishing working relationship with International 'Think Tank' on Methanol Institute for exchange of literature, research findings and experts.

(e) 'Monitoring Committee for Implementation of National Data Sharing and Access Policy' met twice to identify new data sets of NITI Aayog for uploading on the data portal and updating the existing data sets. Key socio-economic indicators/State profile data of 29 States were uploaded on the portal.

(f) Proposals relating to SFC/EFC/SPAC and Cabinet/CCEA Notes of Central Scientific Ministries/Departments such as DOS, DAE (R&D), DST, DBT, DSIR/ CSIR and MoES were examined and commented upon.

Social Justice and Empowerment (SJ&E) Vertical: Important initiatives of this are:

(a) SJ&E conducted a review of committed liabilities under the 'Post-Matric Scholarship' (PMS) for SC students in Maharashtra, Punjab and Telangana.

(b) A committee recommended many measures to streamline the procedures, including modifying certain provisions of PMS for SC students.

(c) Total 22 proposals were considered by the NITI Aayog. Important proposals received in 2015-16 include: (1) Proposal of National Policy on Drug Demand Reduction for medical treatment and psycho-social rehabilitation of drug addicts and facilitates Whole Person Recovery (WPR); (2) Modernization of Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation (ALIMCO), Kanpur; (3) Enhancement of Authorised Share Capital of National Schedule Castes Finance and Development Corporation (NSFDC); (4) Schemes merger under Integrated Programme for Older Persons (IPOP); (5) Proposal for Umbrella Scheme for empowerment of Transgender Persons as a centrally sponsored scheme; (6) SFC memorandum for revision of eligibility conditions under Credit Enhancement Guarantee Scheme; and (7) Venture Capital Fund for SC entrepreneurs.

(d) 'Nai Roshni' scheme for Leadership Development of Minority Women was launched through Development Monitoring and Evaluation Organization (DMEO). Scheme aims to empower and instill confidence in women from the minority community by providing them with knowledge, tools and techniques to interact with Government systems, banks and other institutions, so that they can move out of the confines of their homes and community, and assume leadership roles and assert their rights, collectively or individually, in accessing services, facilities, skills and opportunities, besides claiming their fair share of the Government's development benefits to improve their lives and living conditions.

(e) Study on 'Tribal Research Institutes' (TRIs) was assigned to National Institute of Labor Economic Research and Development (NILERD).

(f) SJ&E participated in 'Project Appraisal Committee' (PAC) constituted to approve the plan proposals of States/UTs under SCA to TSP, Grants under Article 275(1) and 'Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojana', etc.

Development Monitoring and Evaluation (DME) Vertical: Main functions of DME Office (DMEO) are: (1) to assist the Ministries in designing TORs for evaluation studies; (2) to oversee the implementation of Government programmes; (3) to promote the spirit of cooperative federalism; (4) to monitor the progress and implementation of SDGs; and (5) to evaluate the Government programmes/schemes. DMEO undertakes 'Evaluation' of selected programmes under implementation, suo-motu or on request of programme implementing Ministries/Departments of GOI. The following 'Evaluation Reports' of the following programmes/schemes were received in this Vertical:

(a) Border Area Development Programme (BADP);

(b) Command Area Development and Water Management Programme (CADWMP);

(c) Integrated Child Development Services Programme (ICDSP);

(d) Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Programme (KGBVP);

(e) Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti Scheme (NVSS);

(f) Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF); and

(g) Rajiv Gandhi Gramin Viduyutikaran Yojana (RGGVY).

Certain Other Functioning/Initiatives:

(a) **Governance and research:** 'Research Plan of NITI Aayog 2015' was prepared in 2015-16 with provisions for funding research studies, seminars/workshops, publications and NITI fellowships. This scheme can facilitate the development of NITI Aayog as 'prominent think tank' of GOI and as a repository of quality research work. Proposals for grants-in-aid for 4 new research studies and 12 seminars were approved during 2015-16. In addition, 7 ongoing research studies as per the old guidelines had been completed. A total of 233 study reports, including studies supported by the erstwhile Planning Commission, have been uploaded on the website of NITI Aayog and archived website of the erstwhile Planning Commission. 'Research Studies' approved during 2015-16 include: (1) Study of Estimating Water Footprints of India's Long-Term Energy Scenario (Institute: Institute of Energy and Resources, New Delhi); (2) Analysis of Food Security- the Water-Energy Nexus in India (Institution: RG Foundation, New Delhi); (3) Status of Women in Science among Selected Institutions in India- Policy Implications (Institution: Society for Socio-Economic Studies and Services, Kolkata, West Bengal); and (4) Development of an Energy Information Portal for India (Institution: Prayas- Energy Group, Pune). Another programme- "Study for Qualitative Assessment of Capacity Building Needs of Urban Local Bodies" was conducted. Objective of this study was to assess capacity building needs of

Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), especially in meeting the requirements of various initiatives taken by the Government for urban rejuvenation. Major findings of this study are: (1) Indore, Nagpur and Surat, compared to most cities were relatively better placed in terms of capacity development of officers and representatives; (2) Mussoorie had the least intervention in capacity building followed by Patna; (3) crop up in all cities was conflicted in functional relations between ULBs and States, acute shortage of staff at all levels (technical and general), frequent transfer of officers, lack of State level resource institutions and absence of dedicated municipal cadre; (4) ULBs in India need to invest in systematic knowledge management; (5) these bodies need to be reformed to complement capacity building.

(b) **Sustainable development goals (SDGs)**- The 17 ‘Sustainable Development Goals’ (SDGs) and 169 related goals have been resolved by 193 countries, including India, at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015, and came into force on January 1, 2016. SDGs cover the period from 2016 to 2030, and these are a universal agreement to end poverty in all its dimensions and develop an equal, just and secure world for people, prosperity and planet by 2030. Institutional arrangements at the Central and State/UT levels are: (1) At Central Government level, Aayog was entrusted with the role of monitoring implementation of SDGs, while the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) was developing indicators related to 17 SDGs and 169 targets; (2) Working group on SDGs was constituted consisting of representatives of NITI Aayog and MoSPI; (3) Draft mapping of ‘Goals’ and ‘Targets’ of Central Ministries, various flagship initiatives of the Government and ‘Central Sponsored Schemes’ (CSS) was done by NITI Aayog; (4) ‘National Consultation’ was organised by Aayog on February 9-10, 2016 and ‘Research and Information System’ (RIS) for developing countries, with focus on SDGs related to health and education; and (5) Seminar was held on 25th February, 2016 in which Vice Chairman of NITI Aayog, Director General, ADB and stakeholders deliberated on SDGs and related implementation issues.

(c) **Outreach and communication**- NITI Aayog provided necessary resources, knowledge and skills that would strengthen the Government’s ability to act rapidly to deliver strategic policy vision in its first year (2015-16). It is important to develop strong communication management and an outreach strategy, which provides new direction and rigor for policy making.

(d) **Women transforming India**- Government launched many interventions including ‘Beti Bachao Beti Padhao’, ‘Sukanya Samridhi Yojana’ and ‘Janani Suraksha Yojana’ for empowerment and education of girls and to tackle determinants of discrimination against girls and women. India supported the need for standalone target on gender in international dialogue before adopting Agenda 2030, recognizing that women have an important role in all SDGs. Aayog is entrusted with the responsibility of planning, monitoring and coordinating the efforts of Central Ministries and State Governments on SDGs. To mark “International Women’s Day 2016”, the Aayog in partnership with MyGov and United Nations in India presented a competition to ‘Source Crowd Stories’, which celebrated the indomitable spirit of women who have made a difference. The theme of campaign was “Women Transforming India”. Stories of women change makers breaking new ground, empowering themselves and/or others or challenging stereotypes have been sought by Aayog, especially in these areas: (1) Economic- demonstrated leadership in setting up small businesses/enterprises to create livelihood opportunities for communities; (2) Environment- pioneering initiatives to preserve environment and respond to challenges of climate change; and (3) Social and cultural- community leadership challenging discriminatory practices, norms and mindset.

IV. Conclusion

“NITI Aayog” is a GOI policy ‘think-tank’, whose objective is to promote involvement and participation in the economic policy making process by the State Governments of India. It provides an important directional and strategic input to India’s development process, and focuses on cooperative federalism. Important responsibilities of NITI Aayog include: improving public administration, increasing administrative efficiency in Government programmes, facilitating centre-state and inter-ministerial cooperation for good governance and formation of the best practices depot to promote developmental agenda as per the principles of ‘Minimum Government and Maximum Governance’. In its beginning year (2015-16), NITI Aayog has taken several initiatives under different Verticals. The important initiatives/functioning are: Make in India; Digital India; 7-Year Vision, Strategy and Action Plan; 15-Year Road Map; AMRUT; AIM; Transforming India Lecture Series; Agriculture Reforms; Task Forces on Agriculture and up of Poverty; Medical Education Reform; Indices Measuring States’ Performance in Health, Education and Water Management; Sub-Group of Chief Ministers on Rationalisation of Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS); Sub-Group of Chief Ministers on Swachh Bharat Abhiyan; Sub-Group of Chief Ministers on Skill Development; Kuposhan Mukh Bharat; Khelo India; Transforming Urban India; Smart Cities Mission (SCM); Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY); Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana (DAY); Deendayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana; Rashtriya Sagarmala Initiative; Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (Har Khet Ko Pani); Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and Women Transforming India (Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Sukanya Samridhi Yojana and Janani Suraksha Yojana).

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