

ASPIRATIONAL DISTRICTS

An Assessment of the Programme 2018-2020



MICROECONOMICS *of* **COMPETITIVENESS**

AN AFFILIATE NETWORK OF HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL

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Introduction:

The Aspirational Districts Programme

- The Aspirational District Programme (ADP) was launched by the NITI Aayog in January 2018.

- It is an outcome-focused, data-driven framework., aimed at bringing expeditious improvements in the socio-economic indicators of the most underdeveloped regions in the country. Currently, the programme has been implemented in 112 of such regions, spread across the country.

- Strategy: The 3Cs Approach – Convergence, Collaboration and Competition



CONVERGENCE

Create convergence among State and Central Government initiatives at the district level to overcome constraints



COLLABORATION

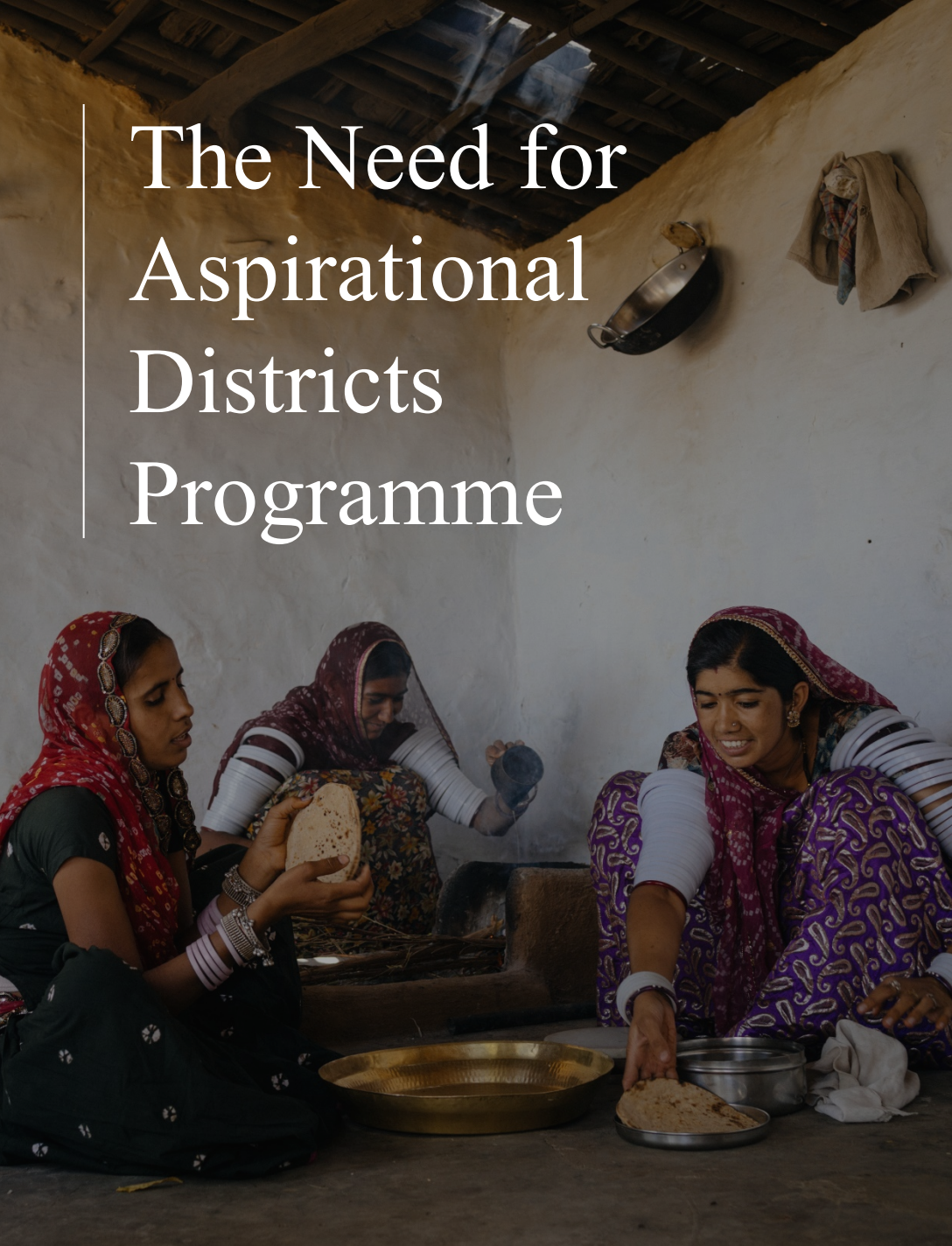
This implies forging of cooperation between the civil society and the functionaries of Central & State Governments including district government bodies.)



COMPETITION

Promote competition among states and districts using the “Champions of Change” monitoring dashboard

The Need for Aspirational Districts Programme



Focusing solely on economic measures will not lead to Inclusive Development

The Aspirational District Program is a step in that direction as by measuring the current state of various social and economic issues it highlights the most pressing issues.

High prevalence of regional disparity in India requires targeted approaches

The Aspirational District Program focuses on underdeveloped pockets of India which will help in addressing the issue of regional disparities in India.

Until now less focus has been laid on implementing targeting policy actions in under developed areas

Though there has been several studies to identify backward districts in India, there has been little high-level drive to implement targeted policy intervention in the underdeveloped pockets in India. ADP has been perceived as one of the first steps in that direction.

Project Overview

- The research presented in this study intends to document the social development outcomes in some of the most challenging regions of India, study several institutional best practices, coordination frameworks across government bodies and other partners, and governance and leadership initiatives at the district level which can be utilized to replicate the success of this initiative not only in other districts of India, but also in regions across the globe facing similar socio-economic challenges.
- Keeping the above objectives in mind, the study is categorized into three parts:

01

Socio-Economic Assessment

02

Understanding the Partner Ecosystem

03

Building the Way Forward

Socio-Economic Assessment: Performance Measurement

Performance measurement is a broader category that encompasses “the ongoing monitoring and reporting of program accomplishments, particularly progress toward pre-established goals”.

The role of performance measurement is to provide a descriptive picture of the “participants” under a given programme and their intermediate outcomes.

There are a lot of methods by which performance measurement can be used to evaluate the policy programs such as Aspirational Districts.

In this study we use the following two methods:



Distance to Frontier Analysis

We utilize the Distance to Frontier (DTF) analysis as a Performance Measuring Procedure. The distance implies the position of an Aspirational District vis-à-vis its targets.

In this study, the Distance to Frontier is measured at the district level for all the six pillars of the Aspirational Districts Programme. For the same, average scores were deducted from the Benchmark Targets assigned for each district. And if the difference is zero, then the districts have achieved their respective benchmark.

Benchmark Value – Average Pillar Value = 0 : Achievement of Targets

Based on this difference, quartiles are prepared which would help in identifying the leaders and laggards across various pillars.

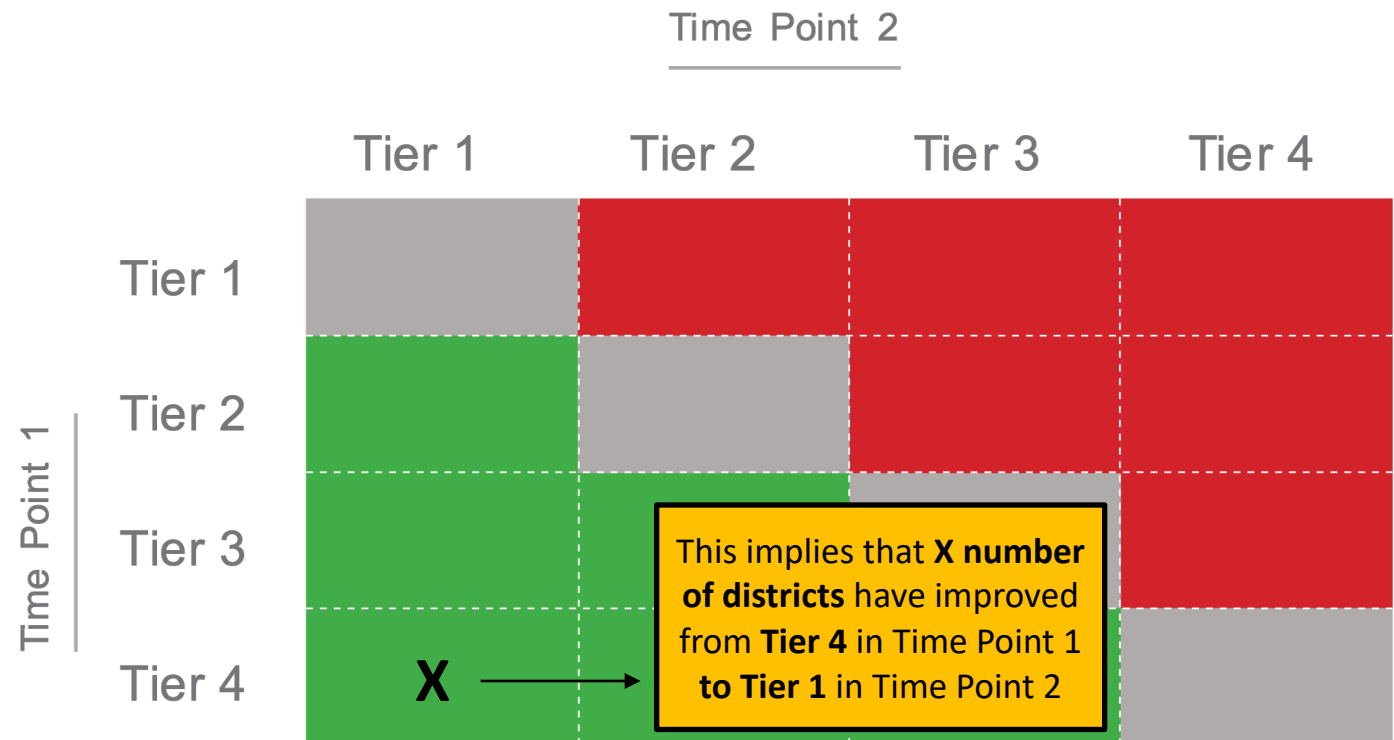
Mobility Matrix Analysis

The mobility matrix forms the second step of the performance measurement of the aspirational districts. It goes beyond the Distance to Frontier (DTF) analysis by taking into account the progress of the districts over time. While DTF is a static representation of the district performance, the mobility matrix represents their dynamic movement.

Tiers represent the relative position of districts compared to other districts in a particular time period
Tier 1 = Top Tier

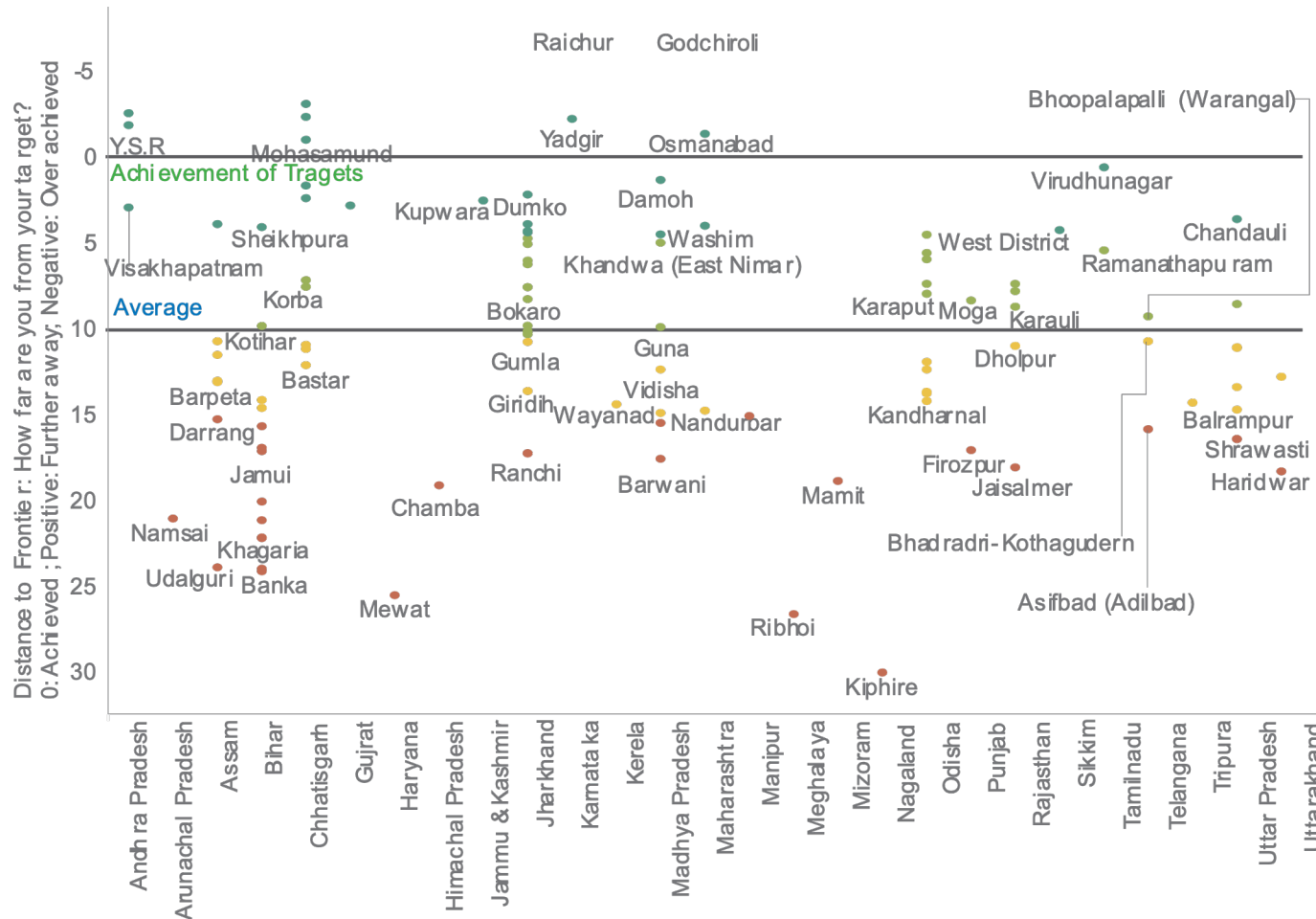
How to read the Mobility Matrix?

- The more the districts will be shifting from lower tiers to upper tiers between Timepoint 1 (baseline) and Time Point 2 (average for 2019); the better the improvement that has been observed in that particular pillar.
- Each cell will carry the number of districts
- The green portion in the figure signifies positive movement of districts from lower to higher tiers over the tested period of time.
- The portion in red will show the number of districts that have shown regressive movement with time across tiers.
- The grey cells show a lack of movement across tiers.



Health and Nutrition

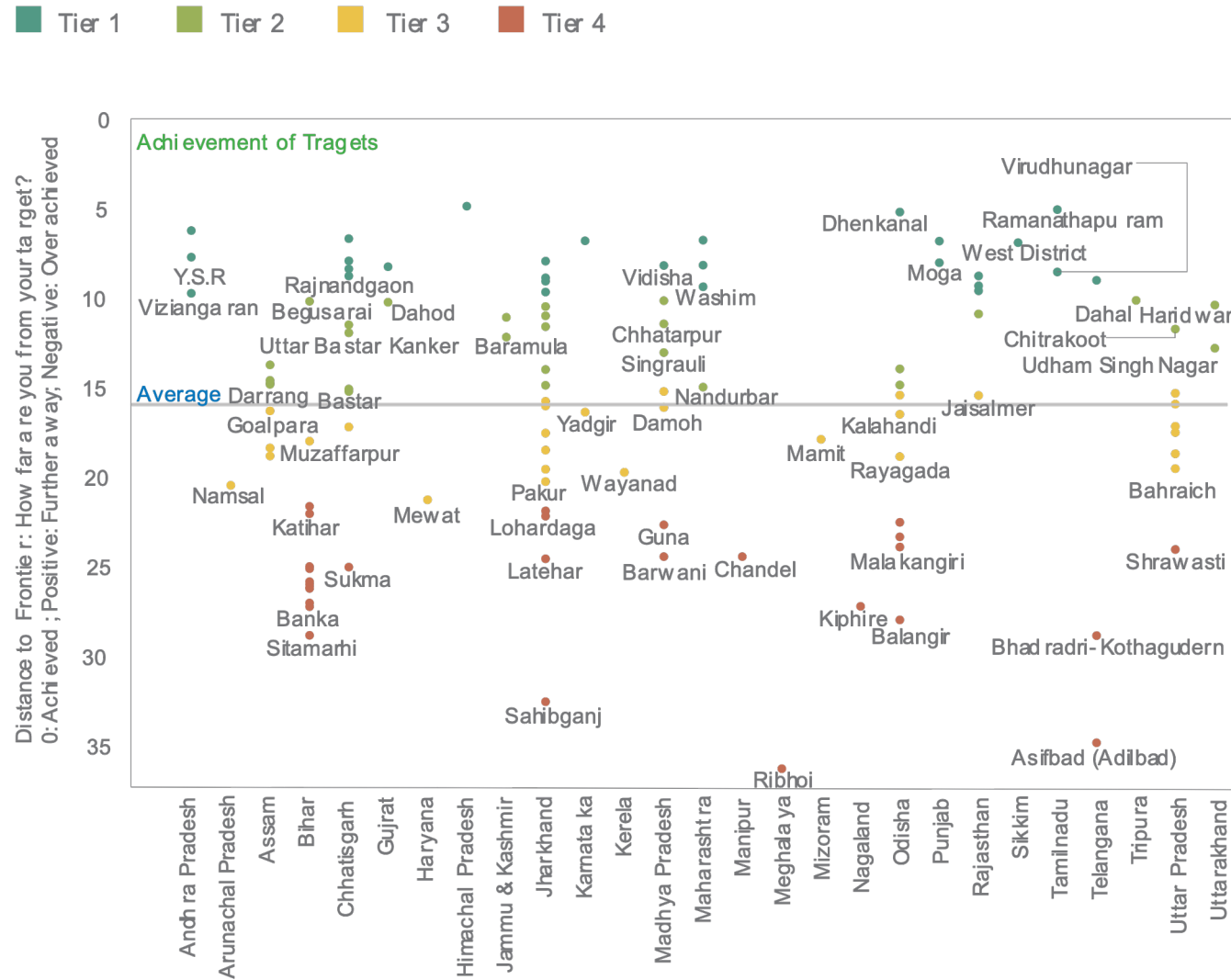
Tier 1 Tier 2 Tier 3 Tier 4



Data for 2019

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
Tier 1	20	8	0	0
Tier 2	6	12	8	2
Tier 3	2	7	10	9
Tier 4	0	1	10	17

- Health and Nutrition have delivered some impressive results as around **10 percent of districts have managed to meet their respective benchmark targets.**
- Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka and Sikkim have 100% representation in the first tier**
- Most of the districts (71 percent) that were in the first tier during the baseline have retained their position while 29 percent of them slid down to Tier 2.

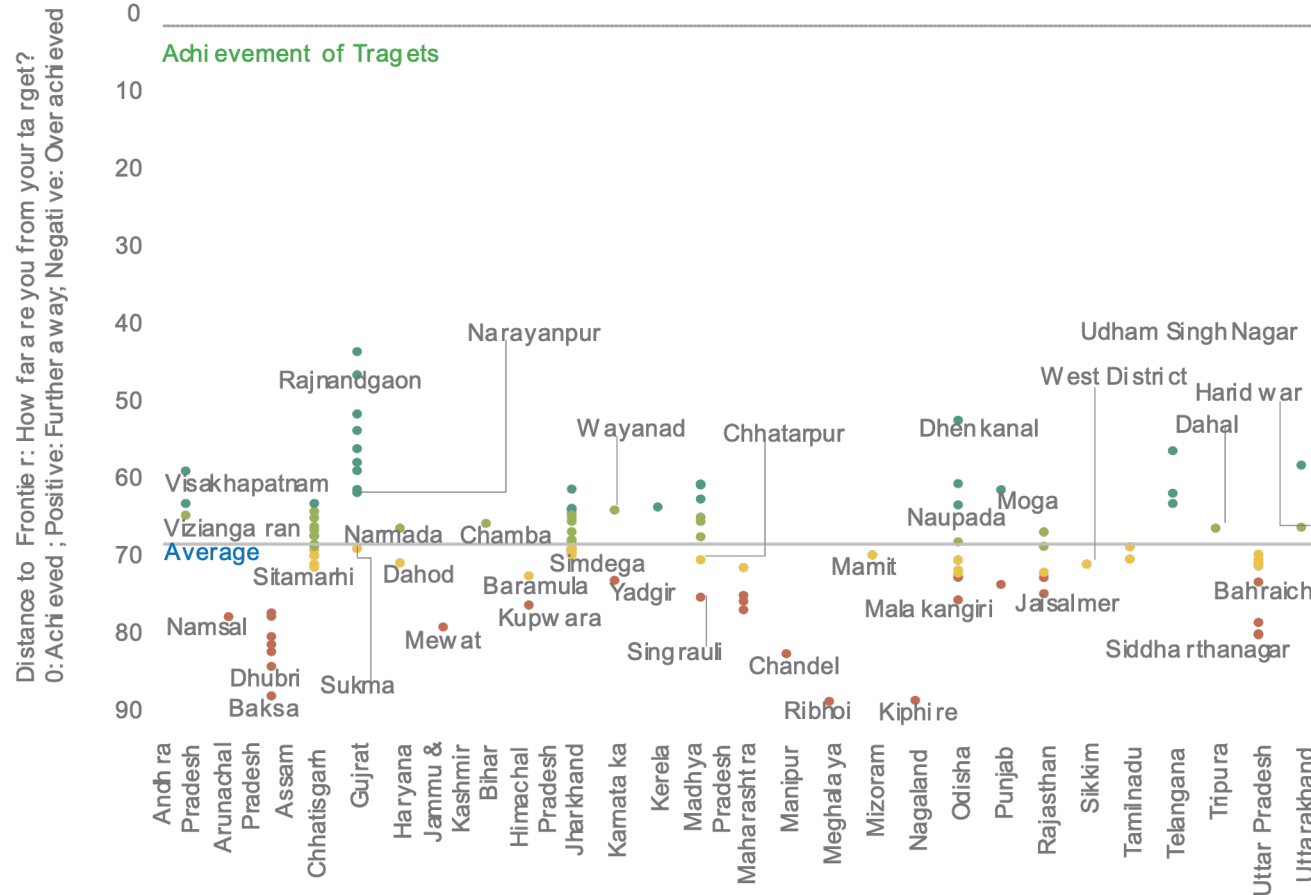


		Data for 201 9			
		Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
Baseline data	Tier 1	20	7	1	0
	Tier 2	5	10	12	1
	Tier 3	3	6	8	11
	Tier 4	0	5	7	16

- **Andhra Pradesh and Sikkim have achieved 100% representation in the first tier** followed by Maharashtra where three out of four districts feature in the top tier.
- **Majority of districts are at most 15% away from achieving their set targets.**
- A total of 8 districts have moved from bottom tiers to Tier I, showing significant improvement.

Financial Inclusion

■ Tier 1 ■ Tier 2 ■ Tier 3 ■ Tier 4



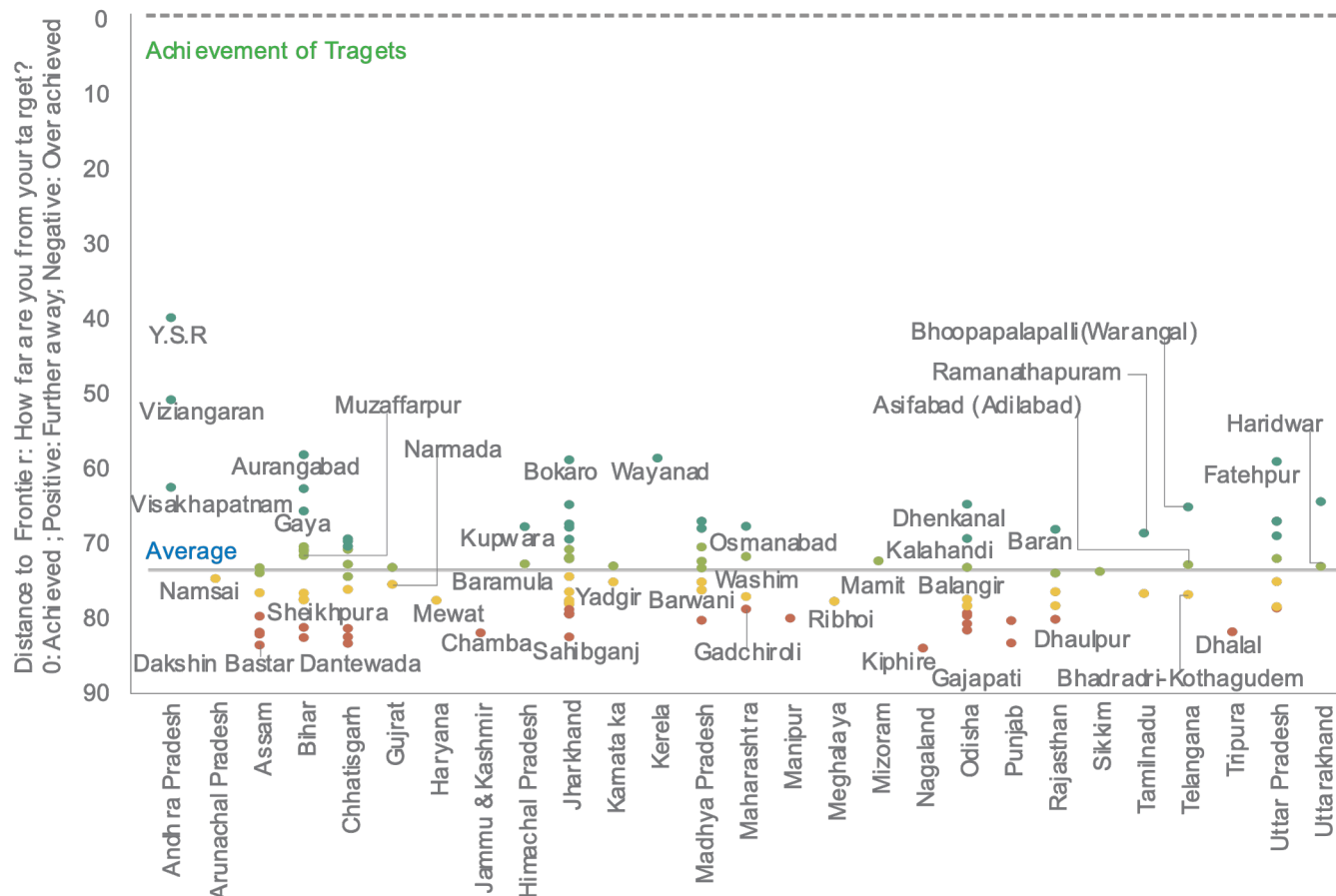
Data for 2019

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
Tier 1	20	8	1	0
Tier 2	6	14	7	1
Tier 3	0	6	16	6
Tier 4	2	5	5	21

- The financial inclusion pillar has immense scope for improvement in the Aspirational Districts programme and can become a focal issue for the districts.
- There are a good mix of districts from different states in the top tiers for financial inclusion.
- Two districts have moved from the bottom tier to the top tier compared to the baseline.

Agriculture

Tier 1 Tier 2 Tier 3 Tier 4



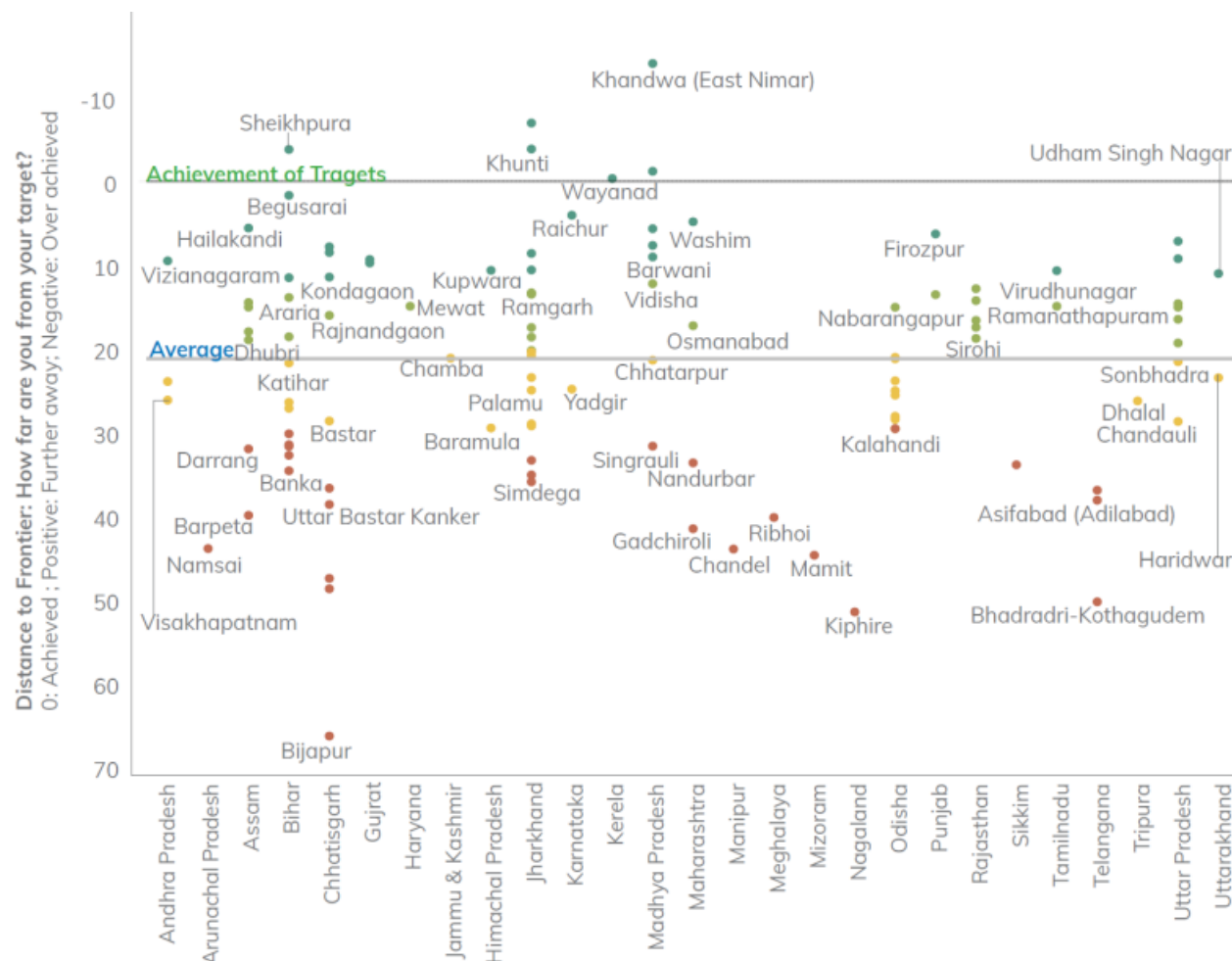
Data for 2019

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
Tier 1	8	6	8	6
Tier 2	7	7	7	7
Tier 3	5	11	6	6
Tier 4	8	4	7	9

- Along with financial inclusion, agriculture is also a pillar where the scope for improvement is immense. Districts can draw learning from Andhra Pradesh on this front since its regions are overperforming in comparison.
- Agriculture and Natural Resource pillar has recorded the most changes in the position of the districts across tiers. 42 districts have seen an upward movement and have been able to get closer to their targets at a faster rate than their peers

Basic Infrastructure

Tier 1 Tier 2 Tier 3 Tier 4



Data for 2019

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
Tier 1	14	8	4	2
Tier 2	10	12	5	1
Tier 3	4	4	10	10
Tier 4	0	4	9	15

- Basic Infrastructure is **one of the best performing pillars** along with Health and Nutrition
- Six districts have achieved their benchmark targets and many more are close to achieving their targets as well.
- The mobility among districts is also well spread out with some districts overachieving and some underachieving on a relative scale, which is common when targets are more or less close to achievement.

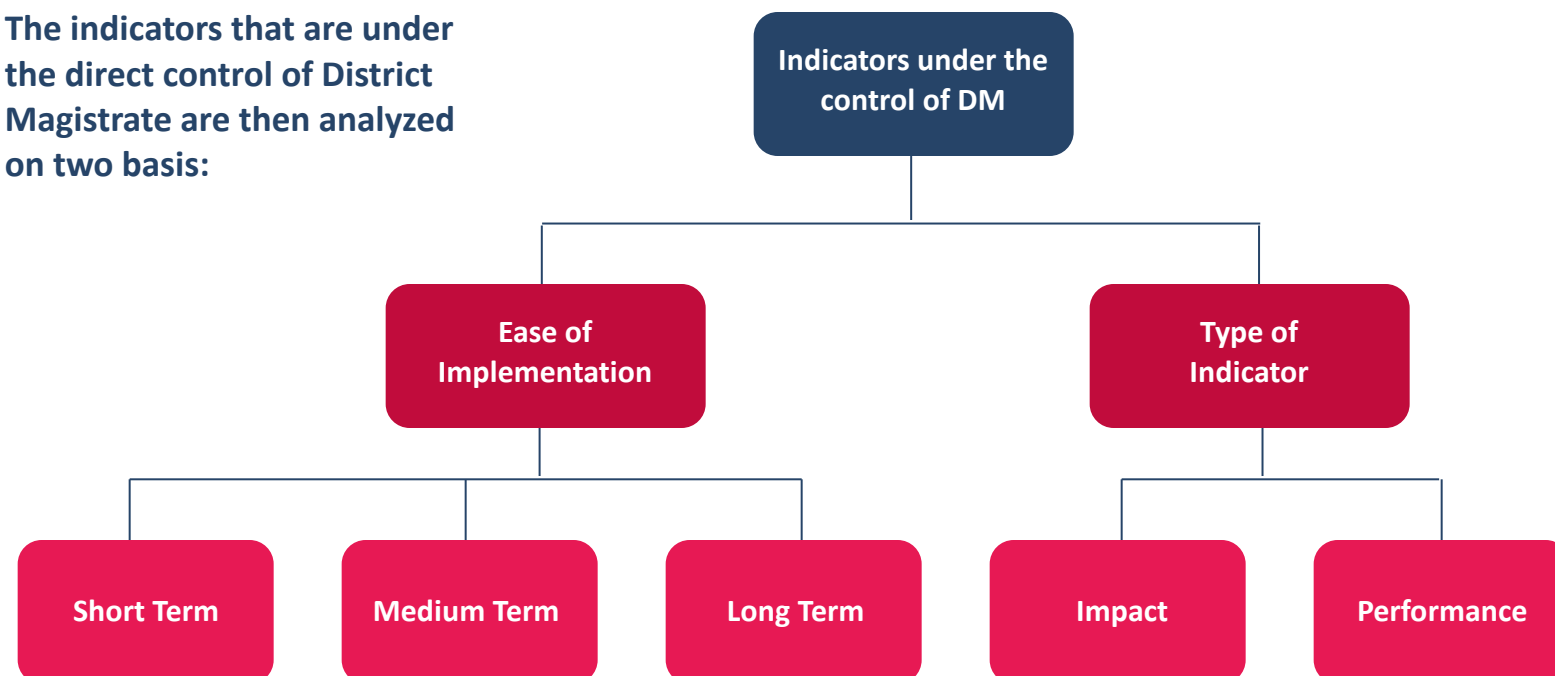
Socio-Economic
Assessment:

Examining Reasons for Observed Outcomes

We examine the reasons behind the observed outcomes through the following process:

Isolating indicators directly controlled by District Magistrate

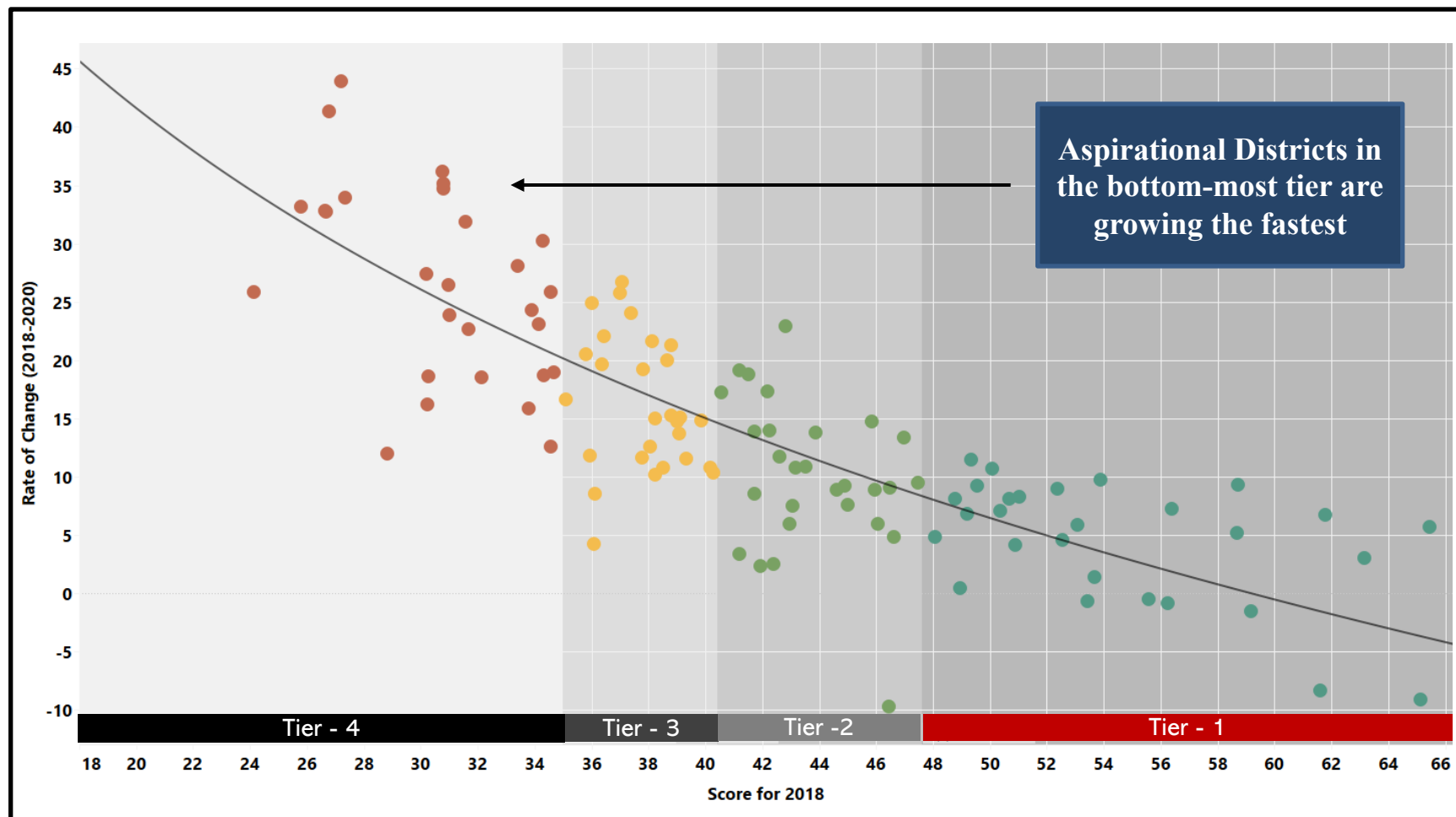
The indicators that are under the direct control of District Magistrate are then analyzed on two basis:



Assessing Governance:

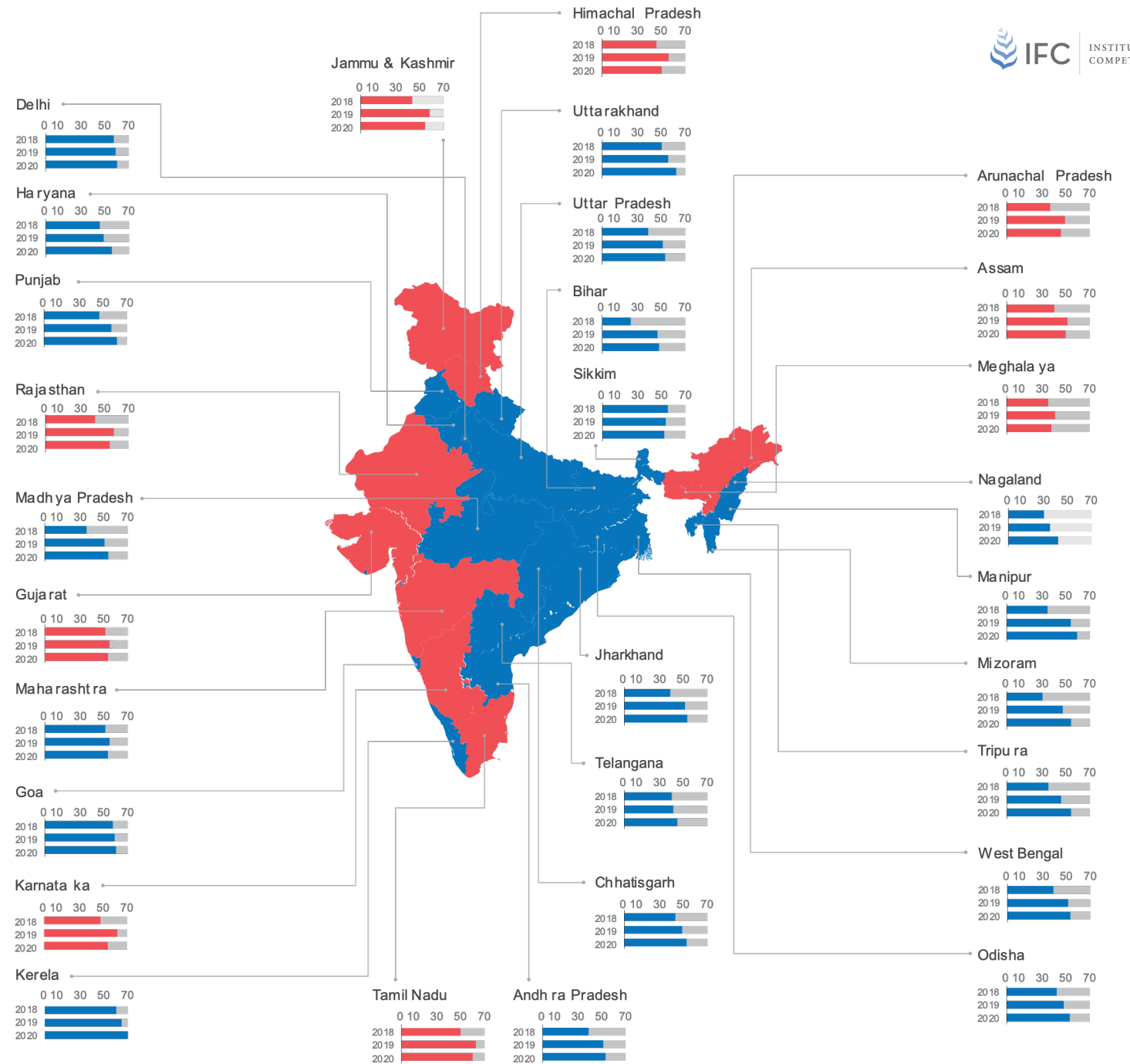
Overall Performance

- The graphs shows the relationship between the rate of change and baseline scores with a **strong correlation of -0.66**.
- This indicates that districts in the **bottom tier are catching up rapidly with the high ranking districts**.
- The average rate of growth of fourth quartile (Tier 1) districts is 8.2 percent while that of first quartile (Tier 4) districts is 25 percent.



Assessing Governance: State-Wise Performance

The figure shows the change in mean scores of the aspirational districts within each state over time. **While a majority of the states have shown an improvement in scores, the ones highlighted in red show a dip in the latest year of assessment. In addition to these states, the states that have lower mean score for the states in the latest year (visible by the amount of white space in each graph), require more focused attention as well.** These would include states like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Telangana. The states and the partners could provide additional focus to improve the social performance of the aspirational districts in these states.



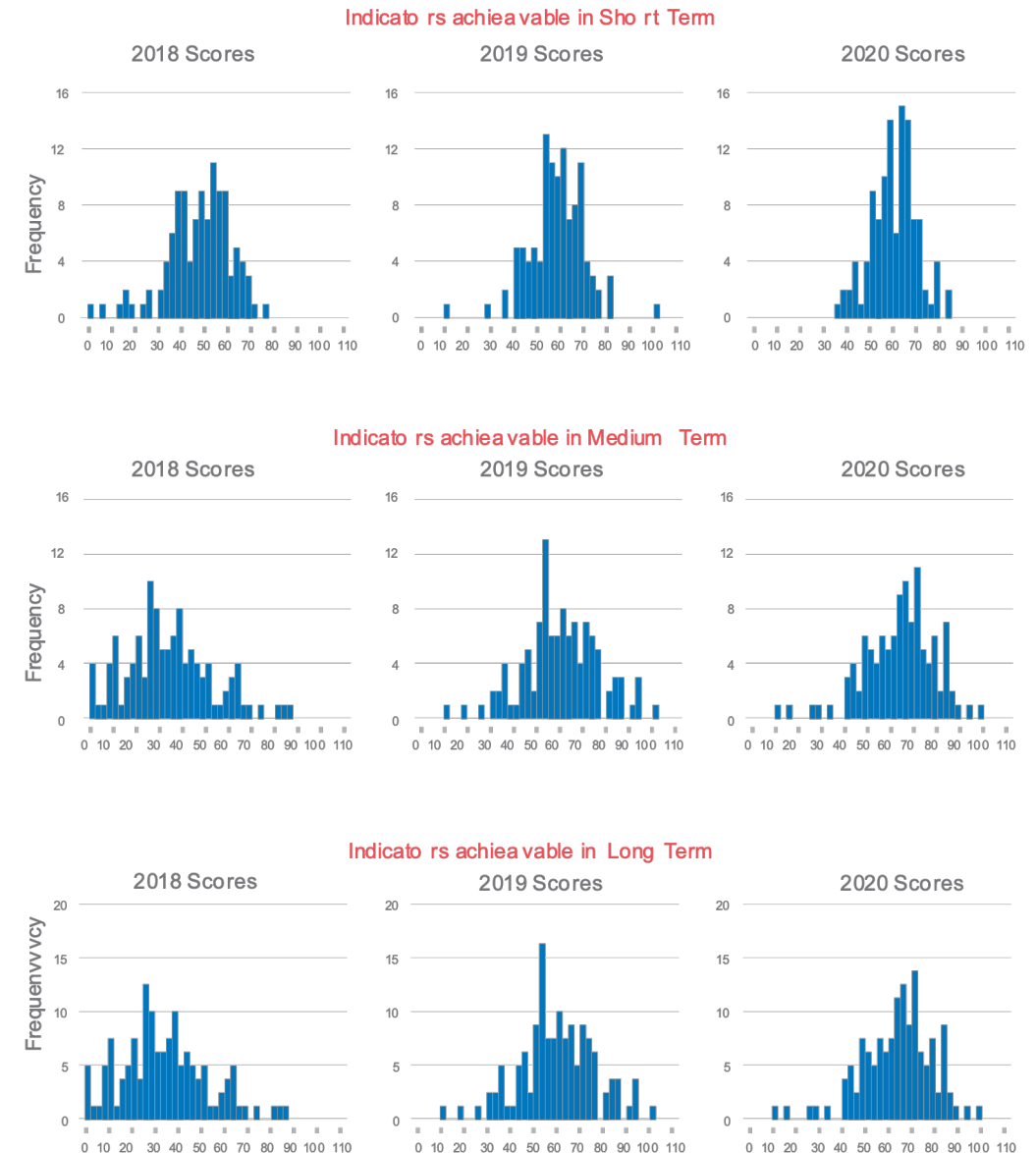
Ease of Achievement

The indicators have been further segregated into their ease of achievement over time: across short, medium and long term. Their performance has been depicted at these levels across the last three years.

- While short-run indicators were already at a high mean score in 2018, their dispersion has reduced over time.
- The medium-term indicators had the lowest mean in 2018 but have shown the most improvement across the three years. Their dispersion is also the highest in 2020 across all levels.
- The long-run indicators were more sticky across time, which is expected since the time span assessed here is too short.

The key learning is that the districts should develop goal posts based on the ease of achievement of the indicators.

Categorization of Indicators by Ease of Achievement

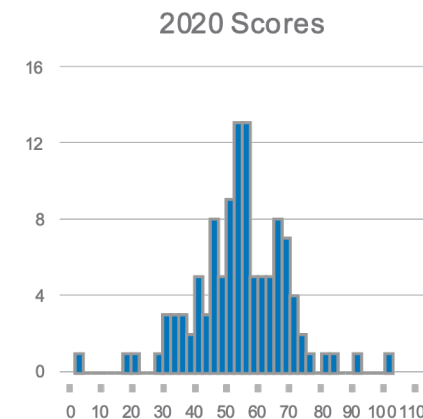
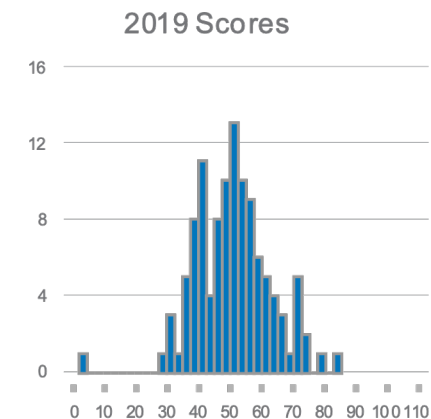
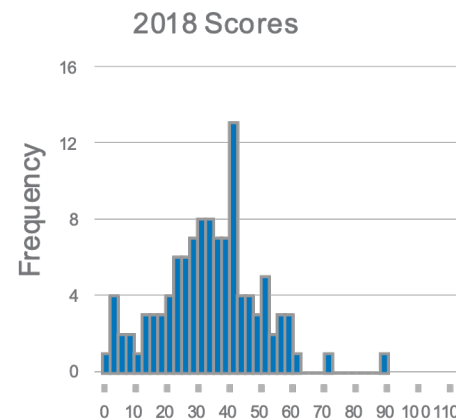


Nature of Achievement

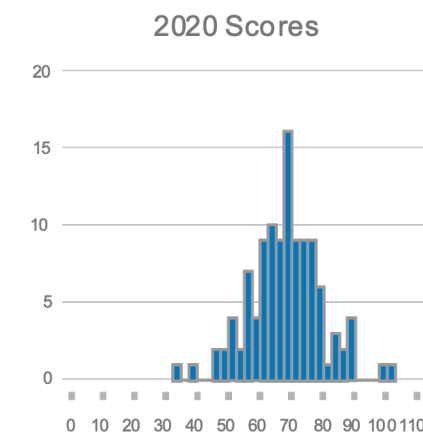
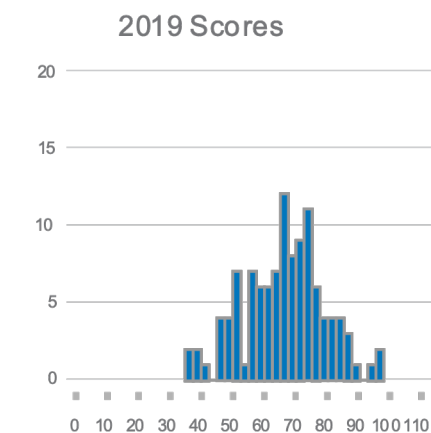
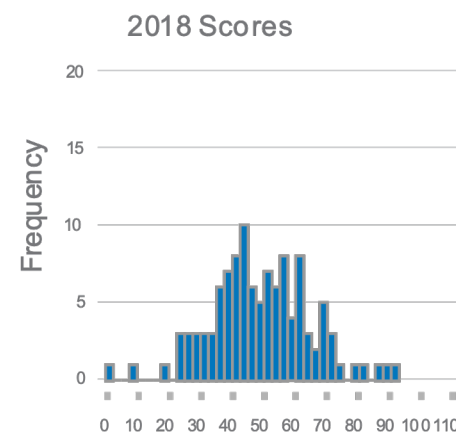
A similar analysis is undertaken based on the nature of achievement for the indicators in terms of whether they qualify as impact or performance indicators. It can be seen that the performance indicators had the most improvement in aggregate mean scores and their dispersion has also reduced with time. While impact indicators have also shown improvement, the extent of their improvement has not been similar. The superior performance of performance indicators could imply that the districts had the inputs in place to address social challenges and the monitoring mechanism of the programme has incentivised them to improve their output parameters.

Categorization of Indicators by Year

Impact Indicators



Performance Indicators



Socio-economic Assessment: Programme Impact - Health

Higher improvements are observed under the AD programme on health parameters in general

- Out of 9 indicators, 5 indicators have registered significantly higher improvements during the Aspirational Districts program.
- For 3 indicators, there is no significant change under the Aspirational Districts program at 5% level of significance. However, the percentage of live babies weighed at birth shows significant improvement at 10% level of significance.
- There is one indicator – Institutional Deliveries – for which the rate of change has been slower during the program.

Indicator	Is there significant difference due to the programme? $\mu_1 \neq \mu_0$	
Based on Z test (at 5 % level of significance)	p-value	Acceptance
Percentage of ANC registered within the first trimester	0.000	Yes
Percentage of Pregnant women having severe anaemia treated	0.001	Yes
Sex Ratio at birth	0.002	Yes
Percentage of institutional deliveries	0.000	Yes
Percentage of deliveries at home attended by SBAs	0.000	Yes
Percentage of new-borns breastfed within one hour of birth	0.000	Yes
Percentage of low birth weight babies (less than 2500g)	0.408	No
Percentage of live babies weighed at birth	0.058	No
Percentage of children fully immunised	0.714	No

Socio-economic Assessment:

Programme Impact - Education

Higher improvements are observed under the AD programme on education parameters in general

- Out of 5 indicators that mapped with U-DISE, 4 indicators have registered significantly higher improvements during the Aspirational Districts program.
- Only one indicator, viz. percentage of schools with drinking water facility has seen no significant improvement under the programme at all levels of significance.

Indicator	Is there significant difference due to the programme? $\mu_1 \neq \mu_0$	
	p-value	Acceptance
Based on Z test (at 5 % level of significance)		
Transition Rate (Primary to Upper Primary)	0.000	Yes
Transition Rate (Upper Primary to Secondary)	0.000	Yes
Percentage of schools with functional girls' toilets	0.015	Yes
Percentage of schools with functional drinking water facility	0.468	No
Percentage of schools with electricity facility (secondary)	0.000	Yes

Understanding the Partner Ecosystem

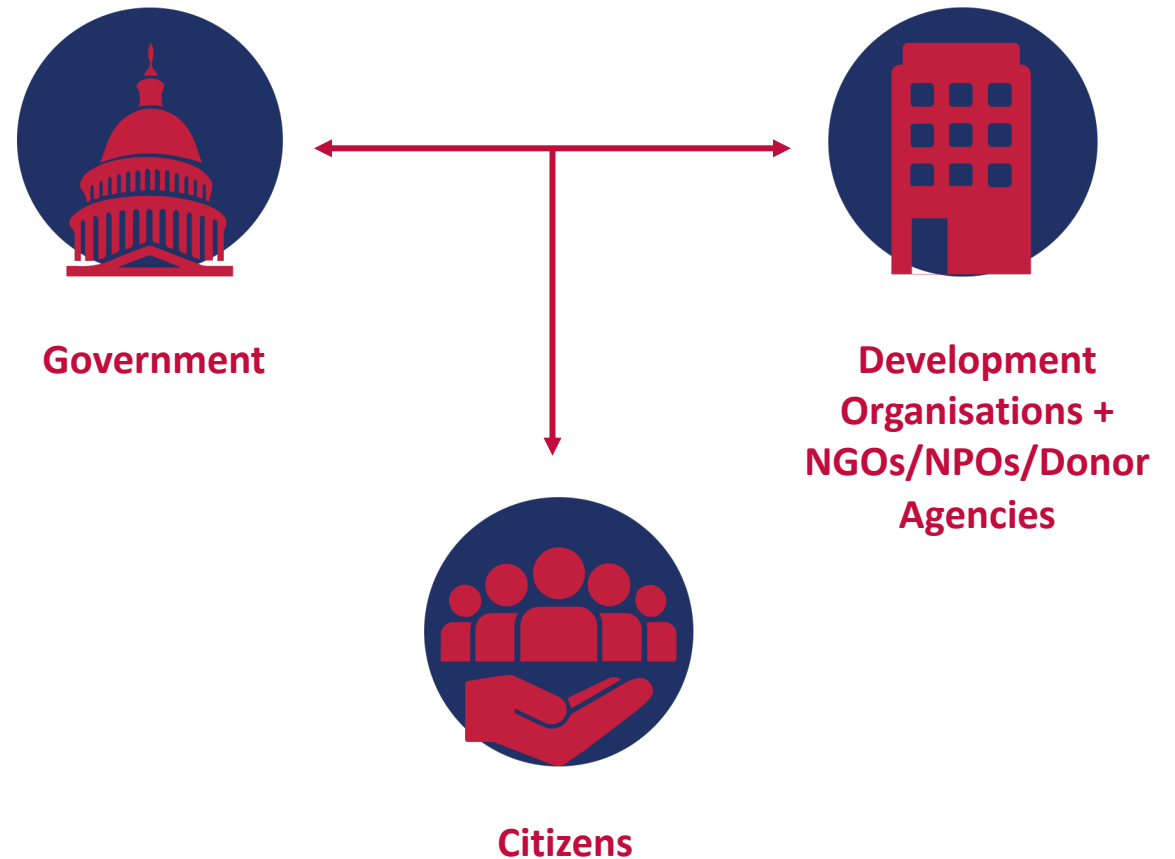
Partners in Development – Bridging critical gaps

- ADP one of the few policy initiatives that considers development partners as external knowledge resources that help the state bridge critical institutional voids.

- Partner embedded within the institutional rubric of the government à not functioning as external practitioners of development.

- Two categories of partners within the ecosystem – Development Partners (facilitates social and human development with field level engagements and programs) and Validation Partners (undertake field surveys to validate the MIS data to strengthen the performance management system under the program).

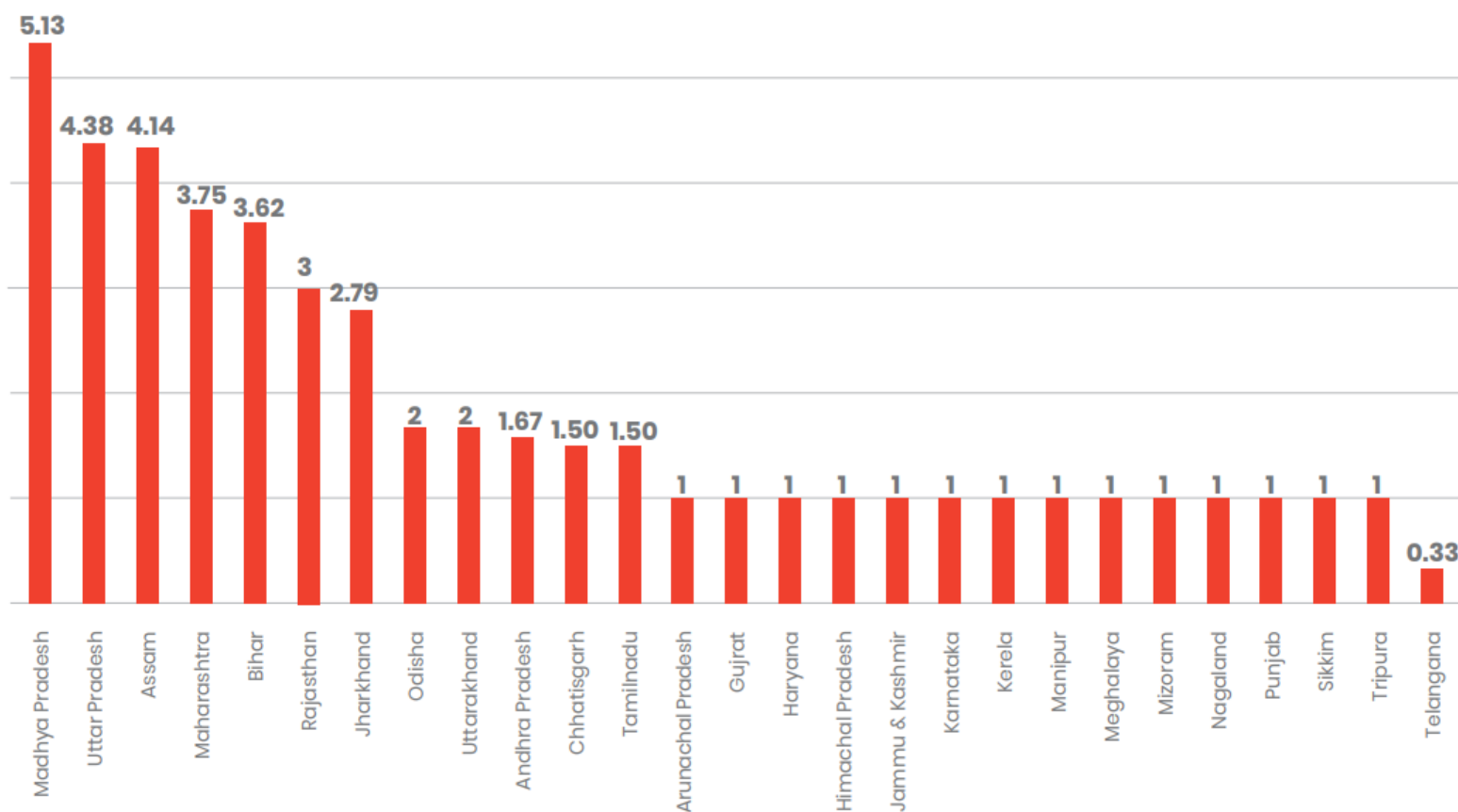
- Currently, there are over 309 distinct development partner engagements across 112 districts. Two partner organizations undertake validation surveys across all the districts under the program.



Partner Engagements

Not uniform across regions or pillars

Average Number of Development Partners working per Aspirational District



- Number of partner engagements not uniform across regions. On an average, Madhya Pradesh has almost 4.5X more engagements per district than Arunachal Pradesh. Regional disparities also exist among and within other states.
- Although not uniform, the program has been **successful in engaging development partners in the districts located in comparatively more challenging states** such as Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Assam, and Bihar.
- Finally, it appears that **some pillars are receiving much more partner engagement than others** leading to crowding of knowledge resources in some domains while leaving a need for more engagement in others. This is covered in the analysis of the presentation.

Partner Ecosystem: Key Insights

Development Partners

- There are currently two kinds of development partner engagements within the ecosystem – **program implementation engagements** and **policy innovation engagements**. Program implementation engagements have “hands on the ground” and operate on comparatively larger scales. “Policy innovation engagements” develop innovative interventions at a block/panchayat level which can be later scaled-up.
- ADP enables **partner organization to expand scale of operations as low financial commitments are needed** on the part of the partner. Access to untied funds with DC/DM allows testing of innovative policy solutions.
- **Institutional level engagements with NITI Aayog and Ministries allows better integration with the district administration** – overcomes any bureaucratic resistance and impetus comes from the very top.

Validation Partners

- Scope to make entire data collection process and dissemination **more automated**. Room for **simplification of indicators** as some are difficult to validate and others take time to show any significant movement.
- Exploring data at a **more granular level** – block/panchayat – with not only **facilitate better performance management** but also enable **better convergence and collaboration within the districts to achieve program targets**

Partner Ecosystem: Challenges

Development Partners

- Currently, implementation oriented engagements and smaller innovation engagements are treated equally under the partner ecosystem. Both have distinct challenges and outcomes. This creates **mismatch in the expectations of the district administration and the partners**.
- **Leadership changes in the district impact partner engagements.** New DCs/DMs take time to get on board with the partner engagement goals. Change in leadership can also change priorities – e.g: low priority on low weight indicators like financial inclusion – affecting engagements.
- **Low engagement with second-line officers and front-line workers** within the districts leads to lower clarity within the administration about engagement goals as well as the relevance or measure of an ADP indicator.
- **Engagements with Central and State Prabhari Officers have been very sporadic** across the board. Effective coordination between the DC/DM and the Prabhari Officers is necessary for policy convergence.
- **No forum** at the central level **for partners to converge activities** which often lead to better engagement outcomes. *Ex:* Financial inclusion drive in health camp activities have often led to better outreach in some districts. These were mostly independent outreach initiatives.

Validation Partners

- **Information apparatus and digital capacity** of personnel at the district level is **low** – leading to poor reporting of MIS data. **Lack of granularity** in targets block/panchayat level. Inherently challenging to measure some indicators – **scope to simplify the metric**.
- Surveying districts with poor physical infrastructure a **challenge**. **No mapping of partner support** to districts on the Champions of Change dashboard.

Partner Ecosystem: Recommendations

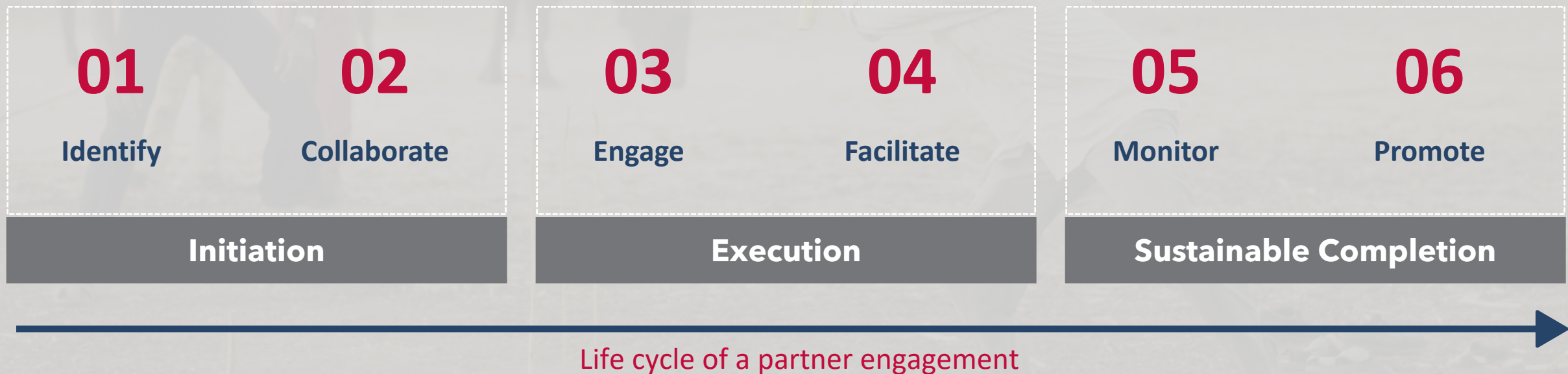
Development Partners

- **To avoid mismatch** between scale and scope of partner engagement and a district's aspirations - partners should **utilize the DTF analysis to select domain, region, and points of intervention**. Distinction between implementation engagements and innovation engagements should be made within the ecosystem.
- **Granularity in targets** to the block-level or panchayat level should be explored as **niche challenges may hinder engagement outcomes** for partners and the districts alike. Allows development of targeted engagement strategies.
- **Create engagement with second-line and front-line district officials** along with leadership – improves execution of engagement programs and maintains continuity in case of leadership change.
- Initiate a national forum for partner engagements to **facilitate partner convergence activities** – using the common platforms to test innovative policy interventions or coordinated field-implementation.

Validation Partners

- **Create convergence** with development partners to **improve capacity and information infrastructure** in challenging districts. Engage teams of **local youth** in challenging geographies for periodic validation exercises.
- **Incorporate partner engagement data on the dashboard** to prevent crowding-in or crowding-out in districts. Institutional mechanisms to **establish accountability in cases of data-inflation** should be put in place to create more transparency and awareness at the district level.

Partner Ecosystem: Recommendations



Recommendations

The following recommendations are indicative of the way forward for the programme and includes several steps that are already being addressed, especially with the building of a new dynamic dashboard

01

Streamlining the survey and collection mechanisms

02

Updating the plan of action based on new learnings

03

Driving targeted investments through partner ecosystem

04

Leveraging data to design effective evaluation systems

05

Engaging in customized local level interventions



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