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Q6(b)

How does NITI Aayog as a 'policy think tank with shared vision' visualize the reorganization of planning in India? Justify your answer

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · PSIR GS 1 · 15 marks · Statutory Institutions/Commissions

Statutory Institutions/Commissions: Election Commission, CAG, Finance Commission, UPSC, NCSC, NCST, NCBC, National Human Rights Commission, National Commission for Women and National Commission for Minorities, NITI Aayog.

Core demand of the question

- How does NITI Aayog as a 'policy think tank with shared vision' visualize the reorganization of planning in India? Justify your answer. (15 marks)

Revision summary

NITI Aayog replaced the Planning Commission in 2015 as a Union policy think tank chaired by the Prime Minister.

Shared vision is institutionalised in a Governing Council of Chief Ministers, not in approval of State Plans.

Planning is recast as a fifteen-year vision, seven-year strategy, and three-year action agenda, plus competitive indices.

Allocative Plan grants ended; the Finance Commission and ministries now move money.

The reorganisation is justified as cooperative-federal honesty, and limited if States lose a bargaining forum over resources.

Introduction

NITI Aayog, created by Union Cabinet resolution in 2015, replaced the Planning Commission. As a policy think tank with a shared vision, it visualises planning as cooperative federal discussion, evidence, and strategy, not as a central body that allocates Plan funds and approves State plans.

Body

What was reorganised

- The Planning Commission (1950) combined five-year plans, the National Development Council, and discretionary Plan assistance, which States experienced as a second finance ministry.
- NITI Aayog's Governing Council of Chief Ministers and Lieutenant Governors is the shared-vision forum that replaced the NDC's plan-approval theatre.
- A Vice-Chairperson, full-time members, and a CEO serve the Prime Minister as Chairperson; Regional Councils can be formed for groups of States.
- The body has no constitutional status and no statutory grant-giving power; Finance Commission transfers and Union ministry schemes now carry the money.

Shared vision as the new planning idea

• NITI's documents speak of a fifteen-year vision, a seven-year strategy, and a three-year action agenda, instead of a single five-year command plan.

• **Cooperative and competitive federalism:** indices, ranking of States, and hand-holding on reform, rather than one-size Plan allocations.

• **Think-tank functions:** policy papers, modelling, Atal Innovation Mission, and monitoring of selected programmes, which is **Easton**'s outputs watched as feedback, not as Gosplan.

• Team India language treats States as partners in a national development agenda, which **Granville Austin**'s unity strand would recognise as political, not only technical, planning.

• **The visualisation is therefore:** Centre as catalyst and knowledge hub; States as laboratories; markets and local bodies as implementers.

Justification and limits

• The reorganisation is justified where the old Plan-grant political bargain distorted State priorities and duplicated the Finance Commission.

• It is weakly justified if shared vision means Union indices without a bargaining table that can move money, which many States say has happened.

• **Dahl**'s polyarchy at the federal scale needs contestable resources; a think tank cannot replace that contest.

• District planning under Article 243ZD was never the Planning Commission's strong suit and is still not NITI's completed substitute.

• **The accurate justification is institutional honesty:** India moved from allocative planning to indicative, federal, think-tank planning. Whether that is better depends on Finance Commission fairness and on Union respect for State lists, not on NITI's slogan alone.

Flow diagram

Planning Commission -> Plan grants and five-year plans

NITI Aayog -> Think tank

NITI Aayog -> Governing Council shared vision

NITI Aayog -> Indicative strategy and indices

Plan grants and five-year plans -> Ended 2014-15

Conclusion

NITI Aayog visualises planning as a shared-vision think tank of cooperative federalism, multi-horizon strategy, and evidence, after the end of Plan grants. The reorganisation is real. It is justified as an end to allocative tutelage, and incomplete as a federal bargain over resources.

Facts & figures

Cabinet resolution, 2015

Created NITI Aayog; the Planning Commission was wound up after the Twelfth Plan period.

Governing Council

Chief Ministers and Lieutenant Governors with the Prime Minister, the shared-vision political forum.

Three horizons

NITI's early template of a 15-year vision, 7-year strategy, and 3-year action agenda.

No Plan grants

NITI does not allocate Plan assistance; that political function of the old Commission ended.

Finance Commission

Constitutional body under Article 280 that now more clearly dominates vertical and horizontal transfers.

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