

ISSUES RELATING TO DEVELOPMENT & MANAGEMENT OF SOCIAL SECTOR/SERVICES

Educational Crisis in India

➤ **Context:** Education stands as the linchpin of societal advancement, wielding the power to shape nations by equipping individuals with knowledge and skills. In India, the educational system grapples with multifaceted challenges, ranging from political interference to the pervasive rise of a tuition culture.

➤ **Education Sector Crisis:**

- ✓ The state of India's education sector is precarious, marked by a dangerous amalgamation of reckless commercialization and politicization. A meticulous, step-by-step strategy and a national consensus are deemed imperative to rebuild the sector. Recent events underscore the limitations of an overreliance on technology, with edutech start-ups succumbing to pitfalls like greed, compromising the very essence of education.
- ✓ While acknowledging technology's potential, caution is urged against viewing it as a panacea for deeply ingrained issues in the education system. The critique extends to a market-driven approach prioritizing technology over substantive investments in quality education. The burgeoning tuition industry, currently valued at over Rs 58 billion, serves as a stark testament to systemic failures exacerbated by governmental policies that inadvertently devalue high school examinations.

✚ **Parental Preference for Tuition Centers:** A disconcerting trend emerges as parents increasingly favor tuition centers over traditional schools. The toll on mental health and the rise in stress-induced suicides, consequences of the pressure and humiliation rampant in these unregulated centers, are poignantly highlighted. The government's failure to monitor and uplift the quality of teaching further contributes to the proliferation of tuition centers and the concerning reliance on apps.

✚ **Socioeconomic Divide and Quality Disparities:** The existing education system inadvertently widens the gap between the "well-educated" hailing from affluent families and the "less educated" from more modest backgrounds. Across categories, the quality of teaching is alarmingly subpar, fueling the mushrooming of tuition centers. References to the ASER Report 2023 reveal disturbing statistics regarding students' proficiency levels in fundamental skills.

✚ **Inadequate Infrastructure in Schools:** According to UDISE (2019-20), only 12% of schools have internet facilities, and 30% have computers. 42% lack furniture, 23% lack electricity, 22% lack ramps for the disabled, and 15% lack WASH facilities.

✚ **High Dropout Rate:** Dropout rates are high in primary and secondary levels. NFHS-5 reports 21.4% of girls and 35.7% of boys drop out due to disinterest in studies.

✚ **Brain Drain:** Intense competition for top institutes leads many students to pursue education abroad. Quantitative expansion exists, but qualitative aspects lag behind.

✚ **Mass Illiteracy:** Despite efforts, around 25% of Indians remain illiterate, leading to social and digital exclusion.

✚ **Neglect of Indian Languages:** Indian languages are underdeveloped; English dominates science subjects, creating unequal opportunities. Standard publications in Indian languages are lacking.

✚ **Lack of Technical and Vocational Education:** Generalistic education system leads to a lack of technical and vocational education. This contributes to a rising number of educated unemployed individuals.

✚ **Unaffordability:** Meager incomes in rural areas prioritize work over education. Lack of awareness and financial stability hinders enrollment, especially in higher education.

✚ **Gender Inequality:** Despite efforts, gender inequality persists, driven by poverty and cultural practices like female infanticide and early marriage.

✚ **Lack of Sanitation:** Sanitation issues in schools across the country hinder educational progress.

➤ **Comprehensive Solutions for Educational Revitalization:**

✚ **Social Participation and Volunteerism:** Engage senior citizens, civil society, and volunteers to contribute to the educational ecosystem. Leverage the collective wisdom and experience of society to bring fresh perspectives into the teaching and learning process.

✚ **Conditional Incentives for Parental Involvement:** Tie cash doles to women to the academic performance of their children, fostering a direct link between parental engagement and financial benefits. Encourage parental involvement as a cornerstone for a child's educational journey.

✚ **Teacher Accountability and Reduced Governmental Interference:** Make teachers accountable for results, emphasizing the role of educators in shaping the future. Minimize governmental interference to allow educational institutions the flexibility to innovate and adapt to evolving needs.

✚ **Inclusive Budget Allocations:** Despite the critical state of education in India, the nation allocates a meager 2.61% of GDP to this fundamental sector. References to global standards advocate for countries to dedicate at least 6% of their GDP to education.

- ✓ Double the education budget, recognizing that sustained growth and development hinge on a well-educated populace.
- ✓ Allocate resources imaginatively, ensuring that increased budgets translate into tangible improvements in infrastructure, teacher training, and educational resources.

✚ Experiential Learning Approach

- ✓ India's participation in COP-28 was marked by distinctive stances on crucial declarations.
- ✓ While the UAE declaration on climate and health, signed by 123 countries committing \$1 billion to address climate-health issues, gained momentum, India opted not to sign.
- ✓ The rationale was rooted in the potential impact on healthcare infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, as reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the health sector could compromise essential healthcare requirements.

✚ Implementation of National Education Policy (NEP): Shift from 10+2 to a 5+3+3+4 system. Bring pre-school age group formally into the education setup.

✚ Education-Employment Corridor: Integrate vocational learning with mainstream education. Provide mentorship to guide students toward suitable career paths.

✚ Reducing the Language Barrier: Give equal importance to Indian languages alongside English. Establish special publication agencies for translation.

✚ Learning from the Past to the Future: Draw inspiration from the holistic Gurukul system. Focus on values like self-reliance, empathy, creativity, and integrity. Implement systems of assessment that evaluate practical knowledge application.

Conclusion

In summation, the imperative of prioritizing education in India is underscored, urging both political attention and a substantial increase in fiscal resources. The inadequacy of current spending, stagnating at 3% of GDP over the past two decades, is highlighted. Real growth, development, and global leadership hinge upon a commitment to doubling the budget and a resounding collective demand for an imaginative and courageous approach to education. Until these conditions intersect, India risks perpetuating the illusion of "all is well" while grappling with a profound and systemic educational crisis.

GS Paper III

How the United States' climate response has been lacking

➤ **Context: United States has been one of the biggest laggards on climate action. Not only has it not cut down on its emissions so far, it has done little to meet its financial and technological obligations.**

- When the **Loss and Damage Fund** was opened for capitalisation at the recently concluded COP28 climate meeting in Dubai, hosts UAE promised US\$ 100 million, as did Germany. France and Italy committed about US\$ 110 million each. United Kingdom promised about US\$ 60 million.
- In contrast, all that the United States could muster was US\$ 17.3 million. Even Ireland, Denmark and Norway put in more money into the fund.
- Its small contribution to the Loss and Damage Fund was particularly jarring, but this was not the first time that the United States was found wanting in playing its expected role in the global fight against climate change. As the country with the largest share of historical emissions, and the world's biggest economy, the United States carries a greater burden than any other nation in taking climate actions. Both the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its 2015 Paris Agreement repeatedly mention that developed countries must take the lead in the fight against climate change.
- But far from taking leadership, United States has been one of the biggest laggards on climate action. Not only has it not cut down on its emissions so far, it has done little to meet its financial and technological obligations. It never ratified the Kyoto Protocol, and therefore never abided by the emissions reduction targets assigned therein.
- The Paris Agreement was negotiated largely on terms dictated by it, but it still walked out. It has rejoined the Paris Agreement now but its contributions to the climate cause have been extremely modest. The lack of enthusiasm from the United States is one of the biggest reasons why the world is not on track to meet the 2030 targets.

➤ **Historical Responsibility**

- Despite China emitting much more in the last 15 years, the United States continues to have the largest share of historical emissions, accounting for more than 20 per cent of all carbon dioxide emissions since 1850. Around the early 1990s, when the first international rules on climate change were emerging, US accounted for more than 30 per cent of historical emissions till that time.
- Broadly in line with the polluters' pay principle, developed and industrialised countries with the maximum share of historical emissions at that time were asked to take the lead in reducing emissions. That group of about 40 countries came to be known as Annex-I countries because they were listed in Annexure-I of UNFCCC. The 1997 Kyoto Protocol, the precursor to the Paris Agreement, had assigned specific emission reduction targets to each of these countries.

Country	Share of historical Emissions (1850-2021) in %
US	20.9

European Union	11.8
China	11.5
Brazil	4.6
India	3.3
Source: Study published in <i>Nature</i> , 2023	

- But since the US never ratified the Kyoto Protocol, it was not bound by those targets. And it did nothing to reduce its emissions voluntarily.
- A recent assessment by UNFCCC shows that by 2020, when the Kyoto Protocol came to an end, the Annex-I countries, as a group, had reduced their net greenhouse gas emissions by about 25 per cent from 1990 levels. The contribution of the United States in this was next to nothing. Its emissions came down by just 0.4 per cent during this period, that too after including the effect of Covid pandemic. In 2019, US emissions were about 6 per cent higher than in 1990.
- There are other Annex-I countries which have fared worse — eight of them — including Canada and Turkiye. But the United States alone emits about four times the combined emissions of all eight.
- The US still maintains that it has met its 2020 emission targets. That is because it had pegged its target — 17 per cent reduction by 2020 — to a 2005 baseline, unlike most other Annex-I countries that use a 1990 baseline. So, the United States let its emissions grow by about 15 per cent between 1994 and 2004, and then made some reductions from that peak to claim victory. Had it not been for the Covid-induced drop in 2020, the annual emissions of the United States in 2021, would have been well over 1990 levels, as it indeed was in 2019.
- This year’s Emissions Gap Report, an annual publication of the UN Environment Programme, showed that the US emissions were estimated to be about 1.6 per cent higher in 2022 than the previous year.
- **Modest Targets**
- The targets for future are not very ambitious either. The United States has promised to reduce its emissions by 50-52 per cent by 2030 on 2005 levels. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says global emissions have to drop by at least 43 per cent by 2030 from 2019 levels to retain any hopes of keeping the 1.5 degree Celsius alive.
- The upper limit of US emission reduction target, 52 per cent, on 2005 levels translates to less than 46 per cent from 2019 baseline. That is just about doing the bare minimum and nowhere close to the leadership role that it is expected to play.
- And even that is not certain to be achieved. According to the same UNFCCC assessment, mentioned earlier, current policies and measures by the United States could result in just about 20 per cent reduction from 2005 baseline by 2030. The United States is banking heavily on the Inflation Reduction Act which it passed recently to enable the emissions reductions that would help it to achieve the 50-52 per cent target.
- **Against Equity, Justice**
- Even if it does, the bare minimum act of the United States means that the global target for 2030 is almost certain to be missed. Meeting the global target from hereon would mean every country, even developing countries, would have to match the effort made by the United States. It is violative of the principles of equity and justice enshrined in the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement.
- The United States, indeed, has been working actively in the negotiating rooms to do away with the differentiation between developed and developing countries that is at the heart of the international climate change framework. Even in its public utterances sometimes, the US has suggested that every country must be held equally responsible, at least for certain aspects of climate actions, and subjected to the same standards. That is the reason why, at every climate change conference, a lot of energies of the developing countries is consumed in fighting to prevent further dilution of the differentiation principle.
- **Fossil Fuel Guzzler**
- While Saudi Arabia took most of the blame for attempting to prevent a mention of fossil fuel phase-out in the final outcome from Dubai meeting, the United States has largely got away with its record on fossil fuels. It continues to be the largest producer of fossil fuels — oil, natural gas and coal taken together – and more than 80 per cent of its energy needs are still met by these sources. This has remained like this for the last three decades.
- Yet, the United States has never faced the kind of pressure that India faces for its use of coal. In fact, till 2015, the US was using as much coal as India, and it is only in recent years that it has reduced its reliance on coal a little. But the shift away from coal has been compensated largely by natural gas and oil, and only partly by renewable energy.

- Despite constant criticism, India has a far better record on fossil fuels than the United States. Data from International Energy Agency shows that about 27 per cent of India's energy needs were being met by non-fossil sources compared to less than 20 per cent in the case of United States.
- **No Money**
- As the world's leading economy, home to some of the largest global corporate houses, and the biggest influence on international financial institutions, the United States is uniquely positioned to mobilise financial resources for climate actions. But just like on emission reductions, it has not delivered on its climate finance obligations as well. A day after facing criticism for its paltry contribution to the Loss and Damage fund in Dubai, the US announced a US\$ 3 billion commitment to the Green Climate Fund (GCF) for the next four years, by far the largest sum from any single country.
- GCF is the main financial instrument of the Paris Agreement geared towards raising funds to help developing countries carry out their climate actions. It had raised about US\$ 10 billion for its first four-year cycle of funding climate projects. In Dubai, it was raising money for the next four-year cycle. The US had promised US\$ 3 billion for the first round of capitalisation as well but delivered only US\$ 2 billion.
- But GCF handles a very small fraction of the money that is required for climate actions, estimated to be a few trillions of dollars every year. It was the United States that, way back in 2009, had come up with a US\$ 100 billion per year figure to be mobilised by the developed countries from 2020 onwards. That target has never been achieved though developed countries claim that it was reached in 2022. Developing countries complain of double-counting, repurposing and greenwashing.
- A major concern has been the lack of money for adaptation activities. In Glasgow, countries had decided to double the financial flows to adaptation, but a recent Adaptation Gap Report showed that far from doubling, the money meant for adaptation had seen a year-on-year decline. The United States was among the countries that ensured that no separate financial provisions were included in the decision on Global Goal on Adaptation that was reached in Dubai this year.

PRELIMS

1. India's First Winter Scientific Arctic Expedition Launched

- **Context: Honourable Union Minister flagged off India's inaugural winter scientific expedition to the Arctic from the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) headquarters in New Delhi.**
- The expedition aims to conduct unique scientific observations during the polar nights of November to March, providing insights into climate change, space weather, sea-ice and ocean circulation dynamics, and ecosystem adaptations.
- Winter Operations Expansion after Himadri Review: Since 2008, India has maintained the Himadri research base in the Arctic, primarily hosting scientists during the summer.
- Encouragement for Scientific Prowess Expansion: Union Minister highlighted the strategic importance of the Arctic and urged Indian scientists to play a vital role in addressing global challenges. He interacted with members of the Arctic expedition departing for Himadri on December 19, 2023, expressing wishes for a safe and productive stay.
- The first batch includes researchers from NCPOR, IIT Mandi, IITM Pune, and Raman Research Institute Bengaluru.
- India among Nations with Extended Arctic Operations: With the launch of winter expeditions, India joins select nations with extended in-time operations in the Arctic.
- Research areas include atmospheric, biological, marine, and space sciences, environmental chemistry, cryosphere studies, terrestrial ecosystems, and astrophysics.
- NCPOR received 41 proposals for winter Arctic research this year, shortlisting 15 after a thorough peer review and expert selection committee process.

2. Operation Greens

- **Context: The government has been implementing a Central Sector Scheme Operation Greens (OG) under Pradhan Mantri Kisan SAMPADA Yojana since 2018-19.**
- **About**
- It is a price fixation scheme that aims to ensure farmers are given the right price for their produce.
- It focuses on organized marketing of Tomatoes, Onions and Potatoes (TOP vegetables) by connecting farmers with consumers.
- Nodal ministry: Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI)
- Its aim is to enhancing the value realisation of farmers and minimizing post-harvest losses and to promote Farmer Producers Organizations (FPOs), agri-logistics, processing facilities and professional management.
- **The scheme has two components:**
- ✓ Long Term Intervention-Integrated Value Chain Development Projects: Enhancing value realisation of farmers by targeted interventions to strengthen production clusters and FPOs, and linking/ connecting the farmers with the market.

- ✓ Reduction in post-harvest losses by creation of farm gate infrastructure, development of suitable agri-logistics, creation of appropriate storage capacity linking consumption centres.
- ✓ Increase in food processing capacities and value addition in value chain by creating firm linkages with identified production clusters.
- ✓ Short-Term Interventions: The objective of the Scheme is to protect the growers of Eligible Crops from making distress sale and to reduce post-harvest losses

3. **Paat-Mitro app**

- **Context: Recently, the Ministry of Textiles launched the 'Paat-Mitro' app with aiming to empower jute farmers by providing them with a technological platform.**

About the app

- Paat-Mitro is a mobile application developed by the Jute Corporation of India Limited (JCI).
- The app is designed to support jute farmers by providing information about agronomy, Minimum Support Prices and the latest agricultural practices.
- The app is available in six languages and all functionalities are free of cost.
- It also allows farmers to track the status of their payments for the raw jute sold to JCI under MSP Operation.
- The app highlights key features such as jute grading details, farmer-focused schemes for eye care, weather forecasts, JCI purchase centers' locations and a chatbot for farmers' inquiries.

ANSWER WRITING

Q. India's digital transformation presents both opportunities and challenges. Discuss the challenges faced by India in bridging the digital divide and the importance of analog foundations for a successful digital economy.

Answer

India's rapid digital transformation presents both opportunities and challenges. While the country boasts a significant online market and a thriving fintech landscape, it also faces issues of inequitable access and the need to address foundational analog infrastructure. As India approaches its 100th year of independence, policymakers must consider key principles to shape effective digital strategies and policies.

Addressing the Digital Divide:

- India's digital acceleration has exacerbated inequalities in access to technology, impacting remote work and education during the pandemic.
- The digitization of social security programs has highlighted issues such as biometric mismatches and inadequate access to smart devices and internet services, further widening income and opportunity gaps.

Importance of Analog Foundations:

- The State of India's Digital Economy Report emphasizes the importance of strong analog foundations that support the digital economy.
- This includes physical and social infrastructure, such as reliable power supply and improved levels of literacy, affordability, and digital skills.

Government Initiatives:

- The Indian government has set a target to provide 4G network coverage to all uncovered villages by 2024.
- Digital literacy initiatives are being strengthened through training, internships, and apprenticeship programs.
- Efforts are also underway to address cybersecurity and financial frauds, including raising awareness and building technical security measures.

India Stack and Digital Public Infrastructure:

- India has been a trailblazer in deploying technology at scale through initiatives like India Stack, which manages identity verification, payments, and data exchange.
- However, the focus should shift from merely increasing the number of users and participants to evaluating the impact on people's lives, including financial security, health benefits, and overall well-being.

Principles for Policy Makers:

- **Balanced Approach:** Not everything requires a digital solution. Policymakers should carefully examine the need and purpose before prioritizing digitalization. The preoccupation with "digital-only" approaches should be challenged.
- **Consultative Policy Making:** Beneficiaries should be at the center of the policy-making process. Efforts should be made to strengthen consultation and adopt a ground-up approach to policy formulation.
- **Adaptive Policy and Agile Regulatory Frameworks:** Policymakers and regulators should embrace adaptive policies and agile regulatory frameworks to keep pace with rapidly evolving technologies and business models. Regulatory innovation, including sandboxing and participative regulation, should be fostered.
- **Evidence-based Policy:** Adequate data on the digital economy is crucial for meaningful analysis and assessment. Transparency, regular monitoring, and impact assessments should be institutionalized to build accountability and establish long-term sustainability.

Conclusion:

India's digital transformation presents both immense potential and challenges. By adhering to these principles, policymakers can ensure that digital strategies and policies not only promote economic growth but also address inequalities, prioritize people's well-being, and foster long-term sustainability.

MCQs

- With reference to PM KUSUM Scheme consider the following
 - The Scheme is demand driven and open for all farmers of the country.
 - This scheme is implemented through three components to add a solar capacity.
 - The main objective of PM Kusum Yojana is to assist the farmers in installing off-grid solar pumps in rural areas, thereby decreasing their dependence on grid-connected areas.
 - The barren lands of the farmers will be used to install around 10000 Mega Watts Solar Plants.
 Which of the above statement/s is/are correct?
 - Only one
 - Only two
 - Only three
 - All the four**
- Recently a application called "Paat-Mitro" lunched by government for which farmer community?
 - Sugarcane farmer
 - Jute farmer**
 - Wheat farmer
 - Cotton farmer
- How many of the following are the objectives of the International Monetary Fund (IMF)?
 - Foster global monetary cooperation
 - Secure financial stability
 - Facilitate international trade
 - Promote high employment and sustainable economic growth
 Select the correct answer using the code given below:
 - Only one
 - Only two
 - Only three
 - All four**
- Arrange the following countries in ascending order according to their Share of historical Emissions (1850-2021) record in percentage
 - USA
 - China
 - Brazil
 - India**
 Options
 - 1-2-3-4
 - 4-3-2-1**
 - 3-2-1-4
 - 2-1-3-4
- A volcano known as Fagradalsfjall recently seen in news is located in which of the following country?
 - Tanzania
 - USA
 - Italy
 - Iceland
- With reference to the Voice of Global South Summit (VOGSS), consider the following statements:
 - This summit focuses on sharing the key outcomes achieved in various G20 meetings with other countries of the Global South.
 - India will host the 2nd Voice of Global South Summit.
 - The theme for the inaugural Leaders' Session is "Global South: Together for One Future".
 How many of the statements given above are correct?
 - Only one
 - Only two**
 - All three
 - None
- Consider the following countries:
 - Egypt
 - Sudan
 - Kuwait
 - Oman
 - Jordan
 How many of the above countries share boundaries with the Red Sea?
 - Only two**
 - Only three
 - Only four
 - All five
- With reference to the ASEAN grouping, consider the following statements:
 - They don't have a separate flag.
 - India is part of the ASEAN grouping.
 - The 10th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting – Plus (ADMM-Plus) was held in Singapore.
 How many of the statements given above are correct?
 - Only one
 - Only two
 - All three
 - None**
- Consider the following pairs:

(Place)	(Location)
1. Cairns	New Zealand
2. Gansu	Mongolia
3. Sana	Yemen

 How many of the pairs given above are correctly matched?
 - Only one**
 - Only two
 - All three
 - None
- Which of the following states do not share its boundary with Myanmar?
 - Mizoram
 - Manipur
 - Assam**
 - Nagaland