

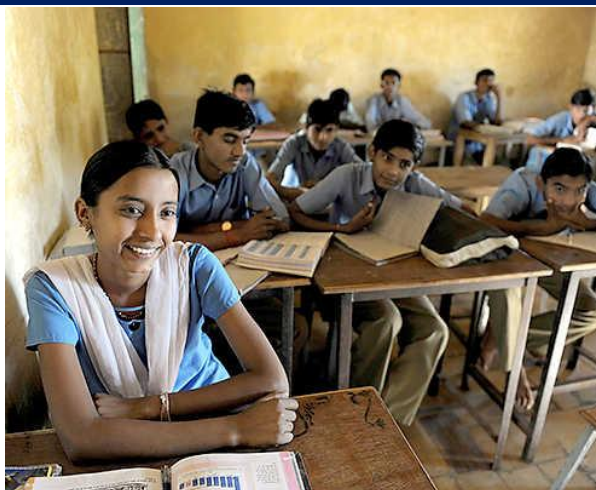


Education, the nation and the States

GS II: Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Context: The National Education Policy 2020 underestimates the problem of reconciling the three systems of education in India.

Is there a Federal balance in National Education Policy 2020



1. The NEP 1986 policy didn't fully acknowledge the variety prevailing in provincial practices and the legacies those practices are rooted in.
2. The trend has been to assume that a national system will evolve and iron out provincial variations. That is a strange assumption.
3. For education to fulfil its social role, it must respond to the specific milieu in which the young are growing up.

Evolution in the provinces and drift towards the private sector

1. Historically, the system of education evolved in the provinces.
2. The Constitution, in its original draft, treated the States as the appropriate sphere for dealing with education.
3. But unlike some other federal countries, India chose to have a Ministry of Education at the Centre. The Centre was expected to articulate aims and standards or to pave the road to nation-building and development.
4. Thus, concurrency was already a reality before the 1976 amendment formally included it in the Constitution.
5. A decade later, when the national policy was drafted under a youthful leader, it emphasised national concerns and perspective without specifically referring to provincial practices that indicated strong divergence.



6. In the meantime, a burgeoning private sector had begun to push both public policy and popular perceptions of education.
7. Throughout the 1990s, those in charge of education remained hesitant to explain publicly how exactly liberalisation would apply to this traditionally public responsibility.
8. The rapidly expanding and globalising urban middle class had already begun to secede from the public system, posing the awkward question of why education cannot be sold if there are willing buyers. Systematic chaos grew, leaving the policy behind.

The challenge of harmonizing the three systems

The Central System	The State system	Private Sector
CBSE board Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas and Kendriya Vidyalaya. Central Universities, IITs etc	State boards Schools Universities	Internationally accredited school boards and globally connected private universities

The Right to Education (RTE) Act

An explicit attempt was made under the Right to Education (RTE) Act to bridge the first two systems. The RTE is a parliamentary law, providing a set of standards for elementary education and a call to private schools to provide for social justice via the quota route.

Higher education

In higher education, such an attempt to balance private autonomy with an obligation to provide social justice is yet to be made in any palpable sense. Accreditation norms and recognition procedures create a semblance of public accountability. Coordination among the three systems has proved unmanageable, even in purely functional terms.



Public responsibility of Social Justice through Education

The least we might expect would be a reliable mechanism to reconcile the marking standards of different Boards and universities. Far harder is the coordination required in adherence to social responsibilities in a period of rapid economic change. Inequalities have become sharper with the rise in overall prosperity. Education must mediate between different social strata divided by caste and economic status.

The recent attempt made by Tamil Nadu to create a modest quota in NEET for students who attended government schools points towards an endemic problem exacerbated by centralisation.

The need for Social vision

The new policy document underestimates the problem of reconciling the three systems. The architect of many of our national-level institutions, the late J.P. Naik, used to say that we must ask what kind of human being and society we want before we draft a policy in education.

Lingering Issues

1. Apart from that philosophical question, we also need a systemic vision: both for recovery from institutional decay and for future progress. Functional uniformity is unlikely to offer any real solution.
2. That is what the new policy seems to favour. In higher education, it proposes nationally codified and administered measures to oversee institutional transformation across State capitals and district towns.
3. Sufficient indication has existed for many years now that economic policy favours greater private enterprise in higher education. How to reconcile this push with the necessity of equitable public education is a nagging question.
4. Similar is the question of autonomy; it cannot be interpreted in financial terms alone.
5. The many different ways in which the States have maintained their colleges and universities cannot all be regarded as signs of a dysfunctional or failing system.
6. At the school level too, the new policy proposes a post-RTE structural shift, ignoring the fact that the RTE itself has not yet been fully implemented. It is



useful to recall that the RTE was drafted with prolonged involvement with the States, not mere consultation.

7. Further progress of this role called for continued financial support for the implementation of RTE and policy guidance for the proper use of this support so that regional disparities diminish.

Mains:

1. For education to fulfil its social role, it must respond to the specific milieu in which the young are growing up. However, NEP 2020 continues the policy of centralization. Suggest reforms to address quality and inclusiveness while maintaining diversity.

Serosurveys underestimate building of herd immunity

GS III: Disaster and Disaster Management.

Bottom line: Antibody prevalence data derived from serosurveys must be interpreted with caution and correction factors.

Understanding Sero surveys

The theory behind population-based serological surveys to detect the prevalence of antibodies against COVID-19 is robust. Their purpose is

to measure the proportion of a population already infected, as evidenced by antibody positivity. When applied on a national scale, a random sample of the entire population is tested. Then, the data are extrapolated to the whole population.

Caution

Unfortunately, there are problems with the antibody tests. Antibodies are the footprints of the host's response to virus infection. Their presence in the blood-serum confirms past infection. However, test results for antibodies throw up





surprises. Antibody prevalence data derived from serosurveys must be interpreted with caution and correction factors.

1. Recent publications say that in people with asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic infections, these antibody levels decline over time, reaching 50% of the initial levels by about 36 days and become undetectable by 60 days after proven infection. Such asymptomatic and mildly symptomatic cases constitute more than 80% of those infected with the virus.
2. The virus carries several antigens, both on the surface and internally. The body responds to all of them. Four antigens selected to detect antibodies are spike protein (S1, S2), receptor-binding domain (RBD) and nucleocapsid (N). An antibody against each antigen has its own time of appearance, duration in blood and rate of decay over time. However, available test kits use only one antigen.
3. The Indian Council of Medical Research conducted two surveys. The first survey measured S1 antibody and the second survey used another antigen, rendering inter-survey comparison problematic.
4. The latent period between infection and the appearance of a detectable antibody is about four weeks. Surveys done after this period will be an underestimate of the true value.

Cautious interpretation

Evidently, serosurvey results have to be cautiously interpreted to arrive at the true level of prevalence of antibodies. If taken at face value, serosurvey results grossly underestimate true prevalence.

Conclusion:

Governments must continuously exhort citizens not to let their guard down, not only for the safety of those who celebrate but also, more importantly, their family members, particularly senior citizens. People can celebrate festivals but governments must enforce strict norms regarding crowding, especially inside buildings.

Mains:

1. Explain serological surveys. Advantages and Disadvantages.



Reinforcing RBI's accountability

GS II: Statutory, Regulatory and various Quasi-judicial Bodies.

Context: Inflation, as measured by the consumer price index (CPI), was 6.7% in the January-March quarter, 6.6% in the April-June quarter (based on imputed data) and 6.9% in the July-September quarter. At 5.8%, the average inflation rate for the October-December 2019 quarter was also within a hair's breadth of the upper tolerance limit.



It must abide by the law and answer to the Centre of why it failed to control inflation.

The law on inflation:

1. The inflation target, notified in August 2016, is 4%. The upper tolerance level was set at 6% and the lower tolerance level at 2%.
2. Average inflation overshooting the upper tolerance level or remaining below the lower tolerance level for any three consecutive quarters constitutes a failure to achieve the inflation target.
3. In such an event, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is required to send a report to the Centre, stating the reasons for the failure to achieve the inflation target, the remedial actions it proposes to initiate, and an estimate of the time period within which it expects to achieve the inflation target through the corrective steps proposed.
4. Through amendments passed by Parliament in 2016, these new provisions were written into the RBI Act. They are aimed at ensuring enhanced transparency and accountability of the central bank and are a key feature of the inflation-targeting regime agreed upon between the RBI and Finance Ministry.



Data limitations

1. The minutes of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting after its August policy review suggest that the RBI's defence for the breach of the 4% inflation target and 6% upper tolerance limit was the handicap of data limitations.
2. The normal data collection exercise of the National Statistics Office was disrupted during the lockdown imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The publication of the CPI had to be suspended for the months of April and May, leading the MPC to conclude that the improvised prints ought to be regarded as a break in the CPI series for the purpose of monetary policy decisions.

Accommodative range

The range around the inflation target that the Ministry provided to the RBI is for accommodating constraints and challenges like data limitations. The whole point of the range around the target, the statement emphasised, is that it "accommodates data limitations, projection errors, short-run supply gaps and fluctuations in the agriculture production".

Conclusion:

1. The central bank should be allowed to state expressly what support by way of government policy it needs to meet the inflation target.
2. This can only strengthen the RBI's hand; it should not let go of the opportunity to reinforce the MPC framework. Transparency can enable more informed decision-making within the government, greater public scrutiny of the RBI's performance, and an improved inflation-targeting regime.
3. To slack off on it would be to compromise with the credibility, transparency and predictability of monetary policy.

Mains:

1. Describe factors which make it difficult for RBI to achieve inflation targets and monetary policy transmission.



The nutrition fallout of school closures

GS II: Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Context: COVID-19 has exacerbated the problem of child hunger and malnutrition.

Midday Meal: As many as 116 million is the number of children we are looking at when we consider the

indefinite school closure in India. The largest school-feeding programme in the world, that has undoubtedly played an extremely significant role in increasing nutrition and learning among school-going children, has been one of the casualties of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A mid-day meal in India should provide 450 Kcal of energy, a minimum of 12 grams of proteins, including adequate quantities of micronutrients like iron, folic acid, Vitamin-A, etc., according to the mid-day meal scheme (MDMS) guidelines. This is approximately one-third of the nutritional requirement of the child, with all school-going children from classes I to VIII in government and government-aided schools being eligible. However, many research reports, and even the Joint Review Mission of MDMS, 2015-16 noted that many children reach school on an empty stomach, making the school's mid-day meal a major source of nutrition for children, particularly those from vulnerable communities.

Implementation challenge

In orders in March and April 2020, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and closure of schools, the Government of India announced that the usual hot-cooked mid-day meal or an equivalent food security allowance/dry ration would be provided to all eligible school-going children even during vacation, to ensure that





their immunity and nutrition is not compromised. Nearly three months into this decision, States were still struggling to implement this.

1. According to the Food Corporation of India's (FCI) food grain bulletin, the offtake of grains under MDMS from FCI was 22% lower than the corresponding offtake during April and May 2019.
2. Data and media reports indicate that dry ration distributions in lieu of school meals are irregular.
3. The other worrying angle is the fact that there are reports of children engaging in labour to supplement the fall in family incomes in vulnerable households.

Innovative strategies

1. Local experts suggest a livelihood model that links local smallholder farmers with the mid-day meal system for the supply of cereals, vegetables, and eggs while meeting protein and hidden hunger needs, which could diversify production and farming systems, transform rural livelihoods and the local economy, and fulfil the 'Atmanirbhar Poshan' (nutritional self-sufficiency) agenda. The COVID-19 crisis has also brought home the need for such decentralised models and local supply chains.
2. There are also new initiatives such as the School Nutrition (Kitchen) Garden under MDMS to provide fresh vegetables for mid-day meals.
3. This is similar to free urban canteens or community kitchens for the elderly and others in distress in States like Odisha. Also, adequate awareness of the availability of the scheme is needed.
4. Thirdly, locally produced vegetables and fruits may be added to the MDMS, also providing an income to local farmers.
5. Most of all, the missed mid-day meal entitlement for April may be provided to children as a dry ration with retrospective effect.

Across the country and the world, innovative learning methods are being adopted to ensure children's education outcomes. With continuing uncertainty regarding the reopening of schools, innovation is similarly required to ensure that not just food, but nutrition is delivered regularly to millions of children.



Nutrition is a Pressing issue

The recent Global Hunger Index (GHI) report for 2020 ranks India at 94 out of 107 countries and in the category 'serious', behind our neighbours Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. The index is a combination of indicators of undernutrition in the population and wasting, stunting, and mortality in children below five years of age.

COVID led Child labour threatens meagre gains in Education and Nutrition made in last two decade

A report by the International Labour Organization and the UNICEF, on COVID-19 and child labour, cautions that unless school services and social security are universally strengthened, there is a risk that some children may not even return to schools when they reopen.

Mains:

1. Explain the seminal role played by MDM in Nutrition security of India. Suggest innovative measures to make Mid Day Meal COVID resilience.