



A safety net

Context: The Union Education Ministry's directive to the States to launch a mission to avoid large-scale dropouts in schools in the coming year, partly by relaxing the detention policy, should end the anxiety of millions of students about their academic prospects.

The Disruption:

1. Managing schooling during COVID-19 has been a challenge, with UNESCO estimating that at the end of 2020, about 320 million students were locked out of schools globally.
2. South and West Asia are among the regions where students are at highest risk of not returning to schools and tertiary institutions, along with sub-Saharan Africa.
3. Assessing the problem is key to planning for 2021. They must prioritise the door-to-door surveys needed to identify students who are not in a position to return to classes when schools reopen, and whose economic circumstances have changed due to the pandemic's impact on their families.
4. Clearly, the priority should be to draw up a database, to plan incentives that will prevent dropouts.

The Examination and Inequity:

1. The irrevocable role played by examinations in determining the fate of students, who come from varied backgrounds and preparation, has long been criticized for its rigidity.
2. In the year of the virus, asymmetries among groups of students stand aggravated, and any detention would be illogical and unjustified.
3. Particular mention should be made of the situation for girls, whose enrolment in higher numbers has been achieved over the years with considerable effort, as well as children in less-urbanized States where access to schools is weak.
4. Among the reasons for children remaining out-of-school or dropping out were poverty, economic reasons, and ill-health. The economic factors have, over the past dozen months, been exacerbated by COVID-19, while the digital divide witnessed in online education became an unprecedented cause of deprivation.
5. This is the time to create a safety net for education, letting no student fall through.



Mains: Case Study

Q1. You are DM of a district in the backward district of Madhya Pradesh. The region is considered a hotbed of poverty, social and educational backwardness. In recent years, however, there was some improvement in the social and economic condition of people leading to higher enrollment in education particularly for girls and tribals of the area. All this development is suddenly endangered by Lockdown due to COVID-19, there are reports of child labour, child marriage in the district as distress led actions and perception that school dropouts will immensely increase. There is a directive from the Centre government to relax detention norms and to take all necessary actions to ensure that advances in education are not compromised by lockdown led disruptions.

1. What will be your immediate and long term response to the situation in your district?

Dialogues for democracy, lessons from Rajasthan

Bottom line: Federalism and good governance need engagement between people and officials, as the MGNREGA programme shows. If a government is committed to constitutional principles, then paying attention to multiple points of view and listening to the voices of the marginalised is a prerequisite.

Disregard of dialogues leading to Disruption of cooperation (The Farm Laws)

1. Many are aggrieved about the process of the promulgation of the laws as it lacked any consultation with those that the laws are purportedly meant to serve.
2. Very often, policymakers ignore the need for dialogue and deliberation with beneficiaries.
3. Consultations are needed during the initial stages of law-making of a government programme as much as a continuous dialogic exercise must be the norm for effective programme implementation.
4. In particular, redistributive, people-facing welfare policies need constant feedback.

The MGNREGA Point

In the case of MGNREGA, engagement with civil society organisations had been institutionalised in the MGNREGA samvads; some of which were attended by the Chief Minister of Rajasthan.



Benefits of cooperation with Beneficiaries

1. Smooth implementation of MGNREGA in Rajasthan with Social audits and Grievance redressal.
2. The Right to Information (RTI) Act that had its origins in people's movements in Rajasthan
3. The JSP is a single platform in the public domain providing information across 60 departments of over 104 schemes was a result of consultation with people

Mains:

Q1. "Deliberation and debate is the way you stir the soul of our democracy. Federalism and good governance require constant constructive engagement between people and officials." Discuss in the context of protest against various central legislations.

A step back in gender equality

Bottom line: Paying women for domestic and care work is a recognition of their efforts but may not reduce and redistribute their burden. This is because paying monetary benefits carries with it the possible danger of formally endorsing the social norm that domestic and care work are 'women's work', for which they are being paid. Also, no money can replace women's foregone career and aspirations.

A disproportionate burden of work

1. Women bear a disproportionately high burden of unpaid domestic work and care work in India.
2. The all-India Time Use Survey (2019) says that 81% of females (six years and above) and 26% of males participate in unpaid domestic work.
3. The data suggest that females bear more than 83% of the burden of domestic and care work both in Tamil Nadu and India.

The feminist economist Diane Elson

The insights offered by the feminist economist Diane Elson are pertinent. The gist of her argument is this: public policy should aim at closing the huge gender gap in unpaid domestic and care work through '**recognition, reduction and redistribution**' (Triple-R).



Wage: A Formal Recognition

1. The Kamal Hasan party's proposal only satisfies the first component of Triple-R, that is 'recognition'. Paying a wage is a formal recognition of the fact that unpaid domestic and care work is no less important than paid market work, as the latter is parasitic on the former.
2. Since it is women who predominantly carry out unpaid domestic and care activities, often at the expense of their employment prospects and health, the monetary reward is a recognition of their contribution to the well-being of the household and the opportunities forgone by women.
3. The proposal appears progressive, for this reason, and to that measure.

Failing on the other two aspects

1. The broader aim of a progressive public policy is to close the gender gap in unpaid domestic and care work by reducing and redistributing it.
2. The proposal not only fails miserably in this aspect but also has the potential to increase women's burden.
3. This is because paying monetary benefits carries with it the possible danger of formally endorsing the social norm that domestic and care work are 'women's work', for which they are being paid.
4. The purportedly progressive proposal thus has the risk of furthering the gender disparity in unpaid work within homes.

Conclusion:

The proposal cannot possibly address the 'strategic' gender needs of reducing and redistributing women's burden. The electoral promise, therefore, lacks the transformative potential of achieving gender equality in sharing unpaid work.