

UPSC Syllabus Topic : GS Paper 2 Social Justice – Issues related to Health.

On the Issues with the WHO Growth Standards – Growth charts

High levels of child undernutrition have remained a persistent issue in India, influenced by various factors:

Determinants of Undernutrition:

1. **Food Intake:** Adequate and diverse food consumption.
2. **Dietary Diversity:** Ensuring a varied diet with essential nutrients.
3. **Health:** General health status and access to healthcare.
4. **Sanitation:** Hygienic conditions and access to clean facilities.
5. **Women's Status:** Empowerment and social status of women.
6. **Poverty:** Economic conditions impacting food availability and access.

Measurement of Undernutrition:

Commonly used measures include:

- **Height-for-Age (Stunting):** Reflects chronic undernutrition.
- **Weight-for-Height (Wasting):** Indicates acute undernutrition.

WHO Growth Standards Basis:

The WHO Growth Standards were developed from the Multicentre Growth Reference Study (MGRS) conducted across six countries, including India. However, critiques of these standards have emerged due to methodological concerns:

1. **Potential Overestimation:** Some suggest these standards might overestimate undernutrition in India.
2. **Differences in Study Norms:** Disparities between MGRS and Indian studies, especially in feeding practices and counselling.
3. **Genetic and Maternal Influence:** Genetic growth potential differences and maternal height impact on child growth not adequately considered.
4. **Risk of Misclassification:** Inappropriately high standards might misclassify children, leading to potential overfeeding under nutrition programmes and an increase in obesity.

Steps to Address Undernutrition:

1. **Improving Meal Quality:** Enhancing nutrition schemes to provide balanced meals with diverse nutrients.
2. **Inclusion of Nutrient-Rich Foods:** Urgent action required to include items like eggs and pulses in public distribution systems.
3. **Comprehensive Interventions:** Sanitation, healthcare access, childcare services, and poverty reduction strategies are vital for better nutritional outcomes.
4. **Enhancing Livelihoods and Empowerment:** Measures focusing on education, women's empowerment, and poverty alleviation are crucial.

In response to these concerns, the Indian Council of Medical Research has initiated steps to revise India-specific growth references. However, using WHO standards allows international comparisons and tracking intra-country trends, highlighting their significance despite the need for potential improvements.

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On Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) – Making health our top priority in 2024

The concerning rise in non-elderly individuals succumbing to heart-related issues signifies a notable shift in India's health concerns. While infectious diseases remain significant, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like heart diseases, diabetes, cancer, and chronic respiratory ailments have emerged as major public health challenges.

Status of NCDs in India:

- **WHO Report Findings:** In 2019, a striking 66% of deaths in India were attributed to NCDs.
- **Diabetes and Cardiovascular Issues:** India grapples with 101 million diabetics, 136 million prediabetics, and a high incidence of cardiovascular diseases, leading the mortality charts. Cancer cases are projected to surge by 57.5% by 2040.
- **Economic Burden:** The economic impact of NCDs and mental health conditions could amount to \$4.58 trillion between 2012 and 2030, according to the WEF.

Causes of NCDs:

1. **Behavioural Risks:** Unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, tobacco, and alcohol use are rising contributors.
2. **Genetic Factors:** Genetic predisposition towards diseases like diabetes and heart conditions exacerbates the epidemic.
3. **Sedentary Lifestyle:** Factors like stress, anxiety, and depression linked to a sedentary lifestyle worsen the issue.

Government Initiatives:

- Launch of programs like the National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases, and Stroke.
- '75/25 Initiative' aims to screen and provide care for 75 million individuals with hypertension and diabetes by 2025.

Individual Preventive Measures for NCDs:

1. **Incorporating Movement:** Encouraging more natural physical activities like walking to enhance cardiovascular fitness and reduce body fat.
2. **Healthy Eating Habits:** Preferring nutritious 'slow food' over fast food prepared with suitable ingredients.
3. **Regular Health Check-ups:** Ensuring comprehensive health check-ups at regular intervals.
4. **Promoting Health Conversations:** Encouraging discussions on health with colleagues and loved ones to foster a health-conscious environment.

Individual choices wield significant influence in transforming societal health. Prioritizing personal well-being ultimately contributes to the overall welfare of society, highlighting the interconnectedness of individual and societal health.

UPSC Syllabus Topic : GS paper 2- International Relations-Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

On Shift in Global Trade Policy

Global trade policies are undergoing significant shifts, marked by unilateral measures and rising protectionism among nations.

Changing Trade Dynamics:

1. **Unilateral Policies:** The US and EU have adopted unilateral trade policies like the US's Inflation Reduction Act and the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism. These measures, such as local content rules and extending emission trading systems, challenge WTO norms and show favoritism to specific regions.
2. **Increased Protectionism:** Many nations are emulating the US and EU with protective measures. The Netherlands and Japan, for instance, have imposed restrictions in the semiconductor industry, reflecting a broader trend of heightened trade restrictions aimed at safeguarding domestic sectors.
3. **Contradictory US Approach:** Despite advocating a rules-based order, the US has had numerous trade interventions between 2017-23, including actions against China and its own protectionist policies, revealing inconsistency in its trade strategies.

Implications of These Changes:

1. **Challenges to WTO Principles:** Unilateral actions like the Inflation Reduction Act and Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism challenge the WTO's rules-based structure, compromising principles of fair competition and non-discrimination.
2. **Weakening Dispute Resolution:** The US's reluctance to engage with WTO's dispute resolution mechanisms signals a move toward uncertain bilateral settlements, threatening the predictability and stability offered by multilateral systems.

Recommendations:

1. **WTO Strengthening:** Reinforce commitment to WTO rules and principles for a fair and stable global trading system.
2. **Support Positive Trade Developments:** Acknowledge and build upon the growth and resilience of global trade, leveraging agreements like the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).
3. **Promote Multilateral Cooperation:** Utilize momentum from regional blocks to foster inclusivity and a rules-based global trade environment.
4. **Enhance Transparency:** Developed nations should lead by ensuring transparency in any new trade measures, aligning with international norms.