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Call for gender-transformative policies in water domain

Context

Achieving gender equality in the water sector would be essential to reaching both the fifth Sustainable Development Goal on gender equality and the sixth one on water and sanitation.

Background

- Gender equality remains out of reach in the water domain.
- Women play a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of water.
- Yet they make up less than 17% of the total paid workforce in the water sector and an even smaller minority in research and decision-making positions.

■ Link between Gender and Water:

- Gender defines the roles, responsibilities and opportunities of people in society, and very often, determines the potential they can achieve.
- Women and girls are disproportionately affected by the lack of access to essential water, sanitation and hygiene facilities and are largely responsible for household water, sanitation and hygiene management.
- Women and girls are responsible for fetching water in most households where a drinking water source is off-premises.

■ Impact of water crisis on Women

This practice causes following impacts leading to;

- Negative Effect on Health, hygiene and sanitation
- Unpaid domestic work
- Less time for education
- A UNICEF study described the practice as 'A colossal waste of time'. The physically demanding nature of water collection point out to excessive Calorie consumption in less productive activities
- Lack of access to safe water harms women and their babies during pregnancy and after.

■ What needs to be done?

- **Gender-Neutral Approach:** participation of both men and women are crucial to achieve goals of sustainable development.
- **Gender Mainstreaming as suggested by UNDP** refers to the process of assessing the implication of planned action on both men and women. It strives to incorporate women's experiences in design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies.
- **Women Leadership:** Involvement of Women in decision making and enabling policy frameworks are vital to developing and sustaining women's leadership in the water sector at the local, national and global level.
- **Reduce Unpaid labour:** As the women already spend 2.6 times more hours than men on unpaid activities. to reduce this we should ensure that our policies does not further contribute to the burden of unpaid work.

Conclusion

There is a need to invest in developing the next generation of water leaders, by collaborating with colleges, water utilities and districts, using experiential learning, internship and interacting with experts.

Symbolism of Inter Caste Marriages

Context

Dr Ambedkar's famous quote from **Annihilation of Caste**, wherein he stated that inter-caste marriages were "**the real remedy for breaking caste**", is often cited.

Background

- For centuries Indian society especially Hindu society has been divided on the basis of caste system and religion.
- The problem of caste system was so deep rooted that it took years for the Indians to come out of that idea.
- Even today also India is struggling to come out of this social menace.
- And when we talk about Indian marriages, which are inter-caste and interreligious, it seems like a taboo to most of the people.

Analysis

■ Features of caste system

- Segmental division of society
- Hierarchy
- Restrictions on feeding and social intercourse
- Civil and religious disabilities and privileges of different sections
- Lack of unrestricted choice of occupation
- Restrictions on marriage

■ Consequences of inter-caste marriage on society

- The Dalit person marrying outside caste, say to an upper caste, finds himself or herself duelling between the struggle of their community, and the culture of their spouses and in-laws.
- Rising incidences of 'honour killing' paint a stark picture of the present times.
- The **children of mixed-caste parents** also grow up amidst profound misunderstanding of their complicated backgrounds. They are often subjected to dominance of upper-caste parent's identity.
- The closest they come to caste is while availing caste reservations or visiting their Dalit family.
- The notion of inter-caste marriage has become a passport for those who have lived the life of oppressing Dalits directly or by virtue of their participation in anti-Dalit prejudices, to now suddenly assume the position of misrepresenting Dalits.

■ Multi-cultural Indian society and modern trends

- **Modern education, industrialization, urbanization, Indian Constitution** has led Indian multi-cultural society to start giving less consideration to the 'caste'.
- Growth of **dissociation between caste and hereditary occupations**.
- All castes have been given importance in the socio-political field.
- Change in the caste identity
- Indian society is inching towards tolerance.

Policy blindspot: Issues of Women Migrants

Context

- An estimated one billion people around the world are migrants – one in every seven people.
- But as policymakers scramble to understand how these mass movements affect societies, economies, security and sustainability, the needs of women and girls are falling through the cracks.

Analysis

■ Understanding the link between gender and migration

- Since migration impacts women and men differently and different groups of women and men during the displacement process.
- Migration is entrenching a new globalized sexual division of labour, in which there is a demand for female and migrant labour in receiving countries, specifically in domestic and care work.
- Migration may also reinforce gender stereotypes that limit women's autonomy.

■ What issues are faced by women migrants?

- **Loss of jobs and resources:** When work **stopped (during Covid-19)**, problems of food emerged. Many did not have ration cards or the ration cards were in their villages.
 - They were not transferable, and so they could not get access to the food later on.
- **Burden of Unpaid labour:** Women migrants in cities have an additional burden of unpaid work because of **poor public infrastructure, Access to toilets, drinking water and safety of children.**
- **Non-inclusion in Governmental schemes:** As a citizen of this country, a woman migrant is entitled to government schemes, hence not included under major ones.
- **Place of residence as an evidence:** For instance, when a woman is married out of her village, but goes back to her natal village to deliver for five or six months, often for those months, which are the most important, she doesn't get the services because her residence seems to be somewhere else.
- **Marriage migration in north India,** where a girl cannot be married in her own village, has led to a cultural tradition of devaluing daughters.
 - These are the areas with alarmingly low and unfavourable sex ratios.
- **Sexual Harassment at Workplace:** In brick kilns, the living area is badly made. Just to save money, the contractors make very makeshift shelters for them.
 - Women migrants are vulnerable to sexual assault at these sites.

■ Government Measures to tackle the problem

- One nation one ration card
- Affordable rental housing complex
- Equal wages for equal work
- Registration of unorganized workers- E-shram portal
- NITI Ayog's draft policy on migrant workers

Conclusion

Recognizing that women migrants have a right to equal access to employment, adequate income and social protection is primarily needed. We need to enhance vocational training programs to improve employability of women migrants and their access to support services. The political inclusion of migrants would also democratize urban governance and ensure the building of cities on the basis of gender equality.

Women in Politics

Context

While numerous political advancements have occurred throughout the world in recent decades, the most important influence has to be on **women's involvement and representation in political roles.**

■ What hinders the inclusion of women in politics?

There are several factors responsible for the poor representation of women in Indian politics such as

- gender stereotypes
- lack of political network
- financial strains
- unavailability of resources
- lack of political education amongst women in the country

■ Factor responsible for Women's participation

- **Patriarchal society:** In countries like India Women are considered as the mothers and housewife and to participate in election are restricted due to patriarchal mindset of Indian society.
- **Physical ability and muscularity comparisons:** In India women are considered as the weaker sex and they are restricted only to the private sphere. .
- **Cultural factor:** Exclusion of women from religious institutions and religious leadership roles have impacted negatively on women's status and restricts them to take the opportunity to participate in the public life.
- **Economic factor:** Lack of economic resources is the biggest obstacle to participation in politics and public life.
- **Social factor:** Due to family responsibility women spend far more time at home than men so lesser time to participate in politics and public life.

■ What measures are required?

- Gender Equality
- Affirmative Action by the legislators
- Women Empowerment initiatives for health, sanitation and hygiene
- By providing education
- Enforcing property rights
- Arranging social awareness campaigns
- Taking Gender equal policies

- Social reforms like removal of Menstruation as a taboo.
- Neglecting physical and dominance based for women.

Right of daughter in father's property

Context

In a significant verdict, Supreme Court said the daughters of a male Hindu, dying intestate, would be entitled to inherit the self-acquired and other properties obtained in the partition by the father.

Background

- The judgement dealt with the property rights of Hindu women and widows under the **Hindu Succession Act**.
- The bench was dealing with the legal issue concerning the right of the daughter to inherit the self-acquired property of her father, in the absence of any other legal heir.
- This also answered the question of whether such property will devolve on to the daughter upon the death of her father, who died without a will, by inheritance or shall devolve on to father's brother's son by **survivorship**.

■ What did the verdict say?

- If a property of a male Hindu dying intestate (without a will) is a self-acquired property or obtained in the partition of a coparcenary or a family property, the same would devolve by inheritance and not by survivorship, and **a daughter of such a male Hindu** would be entitled to inherit such property in preference to other collaterals .
- **Right of a widow or daughter** to inherit the self-acquired property or share received in the partition of a **coparcenary property** of a Hindu male dying intestate is well recognized not only under the old customary Hindu Law but also by various judicial pronouncements.

■ Why do women face so many issues in Indian society?

- Prevailing Patriarchy
- Considering Women as a Liability
- Persistence of dowry tradition
- Discrimination
- Poor socio-economic status
- Lack of education

■ What are the property rights of women in India (Hindu Law)?

- The daughters have equal right of inheritance as sons to their father's property. Daughters also have a share in the mother's property in India.
- The two important laws in regard to property share are the **Hindu Succession Act, 2005** and the **Indian Succession Act, 1925**.

Legal marriage age for women in India

Context

The Union Cabinet passed a proposal to raise the legal age of **marriage for women** from **18 to 21 years** — **the same as men**.

Background

- The legal marriage age for women in India was first set to 14 years in 1929. It was defined in **Child Marriage Restraint Act**.
- **After the independence**, amendments in the existing acts increase the age of marriage and was increased to **18 and 21 for both women and men respectively in 1978**.

■ What are the reasons for early age marriages?

- Socio-cultural factor: Early marriage seems preferable due to:
 - **Ensuring bride's loyalty**: An early age in marriage may ensure a bride's loyalty to her husband's family.
 - **Voiceless**: Her low level of education, autonomy, and empowerment may also contribute to shaping her behaviour in her marital home.
 - **Easy moulding of character**
- **Sexual and physiological development**: In patriarchal societies, marriage is not strictly defined by age. They reflect the social roles expected of girls, and also the timing of sexual and physiological development.
- **Economic factor**: The economic wealth of families, which is often related to socio-cultural status, is a common factor cited in the literature on the predictors of under-age marriage.
- **Rural residence**: Also, there is geographic heterogeneity in the prevalence of early marriage.
- **Religious affair**: In India, the practice of child marriage, or Kanya Dan (gift of a daughter, in Sanskrit), and the social importance and familial pride and prestige attributed to it, is believed to originate in Hindu religious texts (Dharmasutras and Smritis) in 600 AD.
 - These scriptures warned of the social and religious consequences for parents who failed to marry their daughters soon after menarche.
- **Other factors include**:
 - Lack of education
 - Less awareness about rights
 - Lack of empowerment
 - Lack of say in decision-making

■ How does early marriage impact the 'Women'?

- Mortality due to early pregnancy
- Lack of Nutrition
- Impact on overall childhood
- Lower empowerment
- Low Social Status

■ Why women's 'marriage age' matters for public health?

- **Childbirth complications**: Pregnancy and childbirth complications are the leading cause of death among girls age 15–19 years globally.

- Thus, delaying marriage benefits babies as well.
- **High risk of infections:** Mothers age 10–19 years face higher risks of **eclampsia, puerperal endometritis** and systemic infections than **women age 20–24 years**.
- **Affected child health:** The health consequences of maternal under-age marriage also extend to their children. When the mother is under 20, there's a higher risk of preterm delivery, low birth weight and severe neonatal conditions.

■ Can raising marriage age end up backfiring instead?

- **Criminal prosecution of underage couples:** In India, parents generally arrange marriages, typically within the same religion or caste.
 - So young couples sometimes run away from home to marry, and if they're over 18, their decision to marry is legally sound and can't be disputed by parents.
- **Lack of personal decision-making:** The outcome of the law will render girls voiceless in personal decision-making for longer, with legal backing.

Need to end the evil of Dowry

Context

The Supreme Court bench told petitioners seeking guidelines to discourage dowry in India.

Background

- In India, dowry persisted despite draconian criminal law provisions introduced in the Indian Penal Code, a new law in the form of the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 and the formation of the National Commission for Women.
- In the present day, dowry is paid in over **eighty per cent** of marriages in **Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan**.

Dowry: Dowry, commonly known as '*dahej*' is any gift that the groom's side asks from bride's side directly or indirectly. If any such demand is a precondition to marriage, called Dowry.

■ Causes of dowry system

- **Social structure-** The patriarchal nature of society which treats women as subordinate sex dependent on men for social and economic needs, thus dowry is seen as compensation for it.
- **Tradition-** As people believe they are adhering to social practice as a matter of choice than being forced to.
- **Social security:** Dowry is considered as a social security by girl's parents to prevent any ill treatment to the bride.
- **Lack of awareness:** Less awareness among people about dowry related laws and regulations.

■ Impact of dowry system

- Financial burden that increases with the status of groom.
- Matter of prestige as more spending means higher position of bride's family- conspicuous consumption.
- Female infanticide and undernourishment.
- Objectification of women

- Considers herself as a liability on her family.
- Psychological burden and so, not able to call off marriage in case of marital issues.
- Dowry harassment and deaths
- Suicides, domestic violence and subordinate status of women.

■ Challenges in ending dowry system

- **Socio-Economic challenges-**
 - Subordinate status of women vis-à-vis men
 - Social and Economic dependency of women on men.
 - Peer pressure on bride's family to spend higher to marry a better educated groom.
- **Legal challenges-**
 - Delayed and denied justice
 - Poor conviction rate
 - Misuse of anti-dowry laws by women

■ Reasons for Prevailing Women Issues in India:

- **Prevailing Patriarchy:** Indian Society has been a male-dominated society.
- Labelling women as a Liability
- **Discrimination against Women:** Many Indian women face discrimination throughout all stages of their life beginning at birth, continuing as an infant, child, adolescent, and adult.
- Economic factors and **Lack of education** and leadership training.

Martial rape, an indignity to women

Context

The **Chhattisgarh High Court** upheld that sexual intercourse by husband is not rape, even if it was by force or against the wife's wish.

Background

- The High Court discharged a man from facing trial for allegedly raping his wife, given that Indian law does not recognize marital rape if the wife is above **15 years of age**.
- Justice N K Chandravanshi relied upon an exception under **Section 375 of the IPC**, which states that "sexual intercourse or sexual act by a man with his own wife, the wife not being under fifteen years of age, is not rape."

■ Why has Marital Rape not been recognized?

- Historically, matrimonial jurisprudence has upheld the tradition that marriage and solemnization of marriage results in giving unconditional and lifetime consent to sexual intercourse by the wife.
- The idea that sex within marriage can never amount to rape rests upon two assumptions:
 - First, that marriage amounts to a once in a lifetime consent to sexual intercourse.
 - Second, that the criminalization of marital rape would violate the privacy of marriage; that the institution of marriage must be placed beyond the realm of constitutional scrutiny.

■ Arguments in favour of making Marital Rape a crime

- **Against Fundamental Rights:** The marital rape exception in Section 375 violates women's right to autonomy and privacy under **Article 21**.
 - It is also against **Article 14** of the Constitution, which guarantees the equal protection of laws.
 - Justice Verma Committee, set up in 2012, recommended to include marital rape under IPC, in light of India's obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.
- **Marital Rape as a ground for Divorce:**
 - The belief that the institution of marriage would wither away if marital rape were made criminal justifies questions that '**coerced sex is necessary for a long-lasting marriage**'!

■ Arguments NOT in favour of making Marital Rape a crime

- **Social Aspects:** Marriage amounts to a once, lifetime consent to sexual intercourse.
- **Legal Aspects:** The **Law Commission (172nd Report, 2000)** has opined that criminalizing marital rape may amount to excessive interference with the marital relationship.

Caste Census in the times of changing social equations

Context

The growing demands for a **caste census** from various **sections of society** have once again surfaced the issue. The 2021 Census of India, the **16th Indian Census**, will be taken.

■ Why do we need a census to be done?

- The origin of the Census in India goes back to the colonial exercise of 1881.
- Census has evolved and been used to-
 - capture the Indian population
 - access resources
 - map social change
 - delimitation exercise

■ Positive outcomes of the caste census

- Bringing the marginalized to the table
- Data for Policymaking
- Backing by the judiciary
- Caste does not marginalize further

■ Arguments against the Caste Census

- **Fear of breaching the 50% ceiling for a caste-based reservation:** It is argued that a Socio-Economic Caste Census is the only way to make a case to breach the 50% cap on the reservation.
- **Social fragmentation:** Caste identification can lead to friction amongst various classes and can result in an increased caste enmity.

- **Partial benefits:** The way reservation is practised in the country; it has invariably led to elites among castes and communities.
- **Opposition from religious groups:** communities like Dalit Muslim, the Dalit Christian and the Dalit Sikh are catching up on the fight for their rights.
- **Vulnerable open-ended categories:** There are certain open-ended categories in the lists such as orphans and destitute children.

Conclusion

The most important thing is improving existing databases and accurate and timely data is central to India's effort to tackle poverty. Poor data diminishes the efforts to design welfare programmes.

Ripple effect of gender inclusivity on India's economy

Context

Archaic age-old practices that promote Gender segregation at an early age make it increasingly difficult for women to enter the workforce.

■ Understanding inclusive growth and gender equality

- Inclusive growth means economic growth that creates jobs and helps reduce poverty.
- It means access to essential health and education services for the poor. It includes providing equal opportunities, empowering people through education and skills development.
- Gender equality will be achieved only when women and men enjoy the same opportunities, rights and obligations in all spheres of life.

■ Why India is lagging behind?

- **Burden of traditional practice:** Women remain subject to traditional practices that define their primary role as home.
- **Lack of monetary support:** As a result, women often do not receive the money needed to start or grow a business, as well as the necessary training in today's labour market.
- **Lack of participation:** The main problem is participation. Currently, only a quarter of workers in India are women.

■ How to bring women into the paid workforce?

- **Expanding reach of employment:** Employment opportunities smaller **cities and villages**, and providing special incentives to firms to hire women.
- **Boost to labour demand:** In a post-pandemic world, policymakers will need to provide fiscal stimulus to boost labour demand in India's economy.
- **Incentivizing firm to hire women:** Policies which incentivise firms to hire women can bring them into the paid workforce.
- **Progressive gender attitudes:** There is also a need for improving gender attitudes as a policy measure to increase hiring female workers.

■ Way Ahead

- Gender-positive recovery policies can help meet these challenges.

- To attain more gender-equal future of work, nations have to come up with effective mid-career reskilling policies, combined with managerial practices, which embed sound, unbiased hiring and promotion practices.

India's increasing population and associated issues

Context

In the recent past, States like **Uttar Pradesh and Assam**, and Union Territories like **Lakshadweep**, have proposed to implement a two-child norm as a pre-condition for getting government jobs or to get nominated or elected to Panchayat elections.

Background

- In recent years, a section of the political class has been stridently demanding a "population control" law.
- The argument offered in its defence by its votaries is simple: India is experiencing a population explosion.
- This imposes growing strains on economic resources and contributes to fraying the social contract that holds our society together.

■ Cause of Overpopulation

- **The Decline in the Death Rate**
 - If the number of children born each year equals the number of adults that die, then the population will stabilize.
- **Agricultural Advancements**
 - Agricultural advancements have increased food production using fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides and yields further. This allowed humans with more access to food that leads to subsequent population explosions.
- **Better Medical Facilities**
 - Advancement in technology and medicinal access, leads to less mortality.
- **More Hands to Overcome Poverty**
 - The children being seen as a source of income by impoverished families begin work too young and also lose the educational opportunities reflected, particularly when it comes to birth control.
- Lack of Family Planning
 - Most developing nations have a large number of people who are illiterate, live below the poverty line, and have little or no knowledge about family planning

■ Effects of Overpopulation

- Conflicts and Wars
- Rise in Unemployment
- High Cost of Living
- Malnutrition, Starvation and Famine
- Extinction of Resources
- Degradation on environment

Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 2021

Context

The Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill (MTP), 2020 received the President's assent and has become law. This is viewed as a concern for Indian Culture and said to harm some of the religious sentiments.

■ Need for Amendment

- A large **number of cases filed before courts** seeking permission for aborting pregnancies beyond the 20-weeks on the grounds of foetal abnormalities or pregnancies due to rape.
- With the **advancement in medical technology**, pregnancies now can be safely terminated well beyond the existing limit of 20 weeks. So, there is a scope to increase the upper limit for terminating pregnancies.

■ Where do the issues lie?

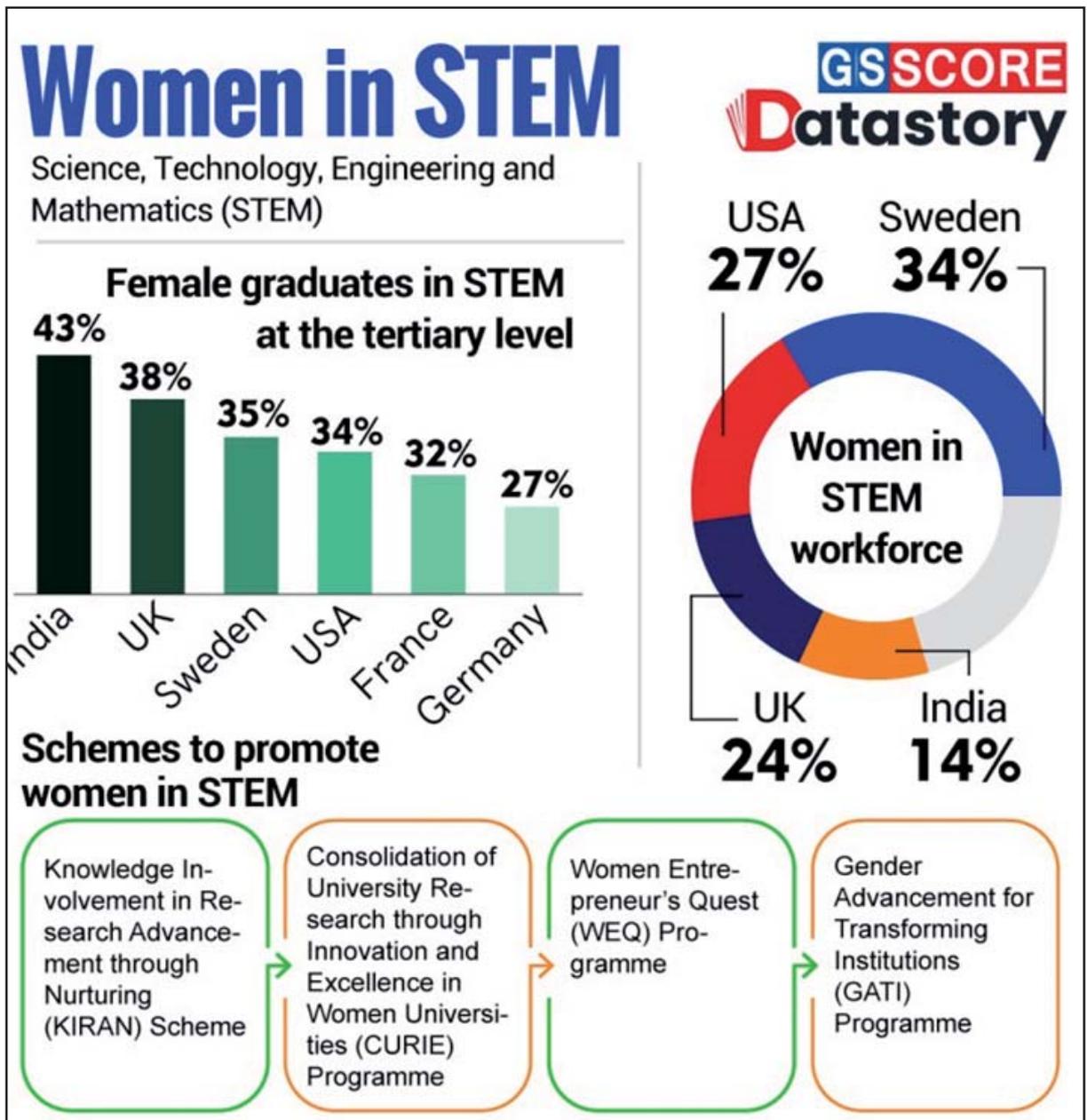
- Though, India has legalized abortions as opposed to many other countries. However, even after all these efforts for liberalizing abortions, the subject has often been viewed and subsequently critiqued from various perspectives. These issues vary from:
 - **lack of access to safe abortions**
 - Act's overlap with other acts such as the **Pre-Conception and Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act 1994**.

■ Key concerns regarding the Act

- Conditions for termination of pregnancies
 - There are two differing opinions with regard to allowing abortions.
- **Terminating a pregnancy is the choice of the pregnant woman** and a part of her reproductive rights.
 - The state has an obligation to protect life and hence should provide for the **protection of the foetus**.
- Medical Board to decide termination after 24 weeks
 - Time frame for Medical Board's decision not specified
 - Invades privacy of woman involved
- Categories of women who can terminate a pregnancy between 20-24 weeks not specified.
- It is unclear that if transgender persons will be covered
- Unavailability of qualified **medical professionals** to terminate pregnancies
- Fear of judgment from medical practitioners in case of unmarried women seeking termination of pregnancy becomes a major hurdle that deters these women from visiting a professional.

STEM career Opportunities for Women in India

Context



- Recently, India-Israel Women in **Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)** conference was held.
- The **need for introducing flexible work times** and **gender-neutral pays** to enhance women participation in STEM was highlighted.

■ Significance:

- A robust STEM education creates critical thinkers, problem-solvers, and next-generation innovators.

- According to the National Science Foundation, it is predicted that 80% of the jobs created in the next decade will require some form of math and science skills.

■ Reasons for the Low Participation:

- **Stereotypes:** The paucity of women in STEM is **not merely due to skill inadequacy**, but also a result of **assigned stereotypical gender roles**.
- **Patriarchy:** There are **patriarchal attitudes in hiring practices** or awarding fellowships and grants etc.
- **Society:** Lack of role models, pressures to conform to societal norms and trappings of domesticity.
- **Stress:** Stressors related to marriage, childbirth etc.
- **Household Responsibility:** Responsibility **related to running of households and elder care**.
- **Physical Safety:** Physical safety during the commute to work.
- **Harassment:** Sexual and other types of harassment in workplaces, etc.

■ Way Forward

- The problem needs to be addressed **at two levels** – at **societal level** which requires long term effort and the **policy and institutional level, which can be started with immediate effect**.
- **Investment in supporting infrastructure**, incentivising institutions to promote gender equity, transparency in decision making etc. to bridge the persisting gender imbalance in STEM majors.
- As a first step, however, schools need to break the '**gendered notions of intelligence**' and encourage girls not only to take science at secondary and higher secondary level but also to pursue their career in STEM.

Internal Migrants

Context

The Supreme Court of India took *suo motu* cognisance of the plight of the migrant workers at the height of the exodus of the migrants in recent years.

■ Internal Migration in India

- Internal migration is defined as changes of usual residence within countries. Migration in India is primarily of two types.
- A person is considered as migrant by place of last residence, if the place in which he is enumerated during the census is other than his place of immediate last residence.
- **The Economic Survey (2017)** estimated leading to an **inter-state migrant population** of "about 60 million" and an **inter-district migrant** population "**as high as 80 million**".

■ Reasons for Migration

- Marriage
- Employment
- Education
- Disaster like Flood, drought, cyclones etc
- Poverty

■ Challenges faced by Migrants

- **Documentation and Identity:** Identity documentation that is authenticated by the state ensures that a person has a secure citizenship status and can benefit from the rights and protections that the state provides.
- **Housing:** Unaffordable rents in slums force migrants to live at their workplaces (such as construction sites), shop pavements or in open areas in the city.
- **Limited Access to Formal Financial Services:** They are unable to open bank accounts in cities which have implications on the savings and remittance behaviours of migrant workers.
- **Political Exclusion:** As migrants are not entitled **to vote outside of their place of origin**, some are simply **unable to cast their votes**.

■ Steps taken further

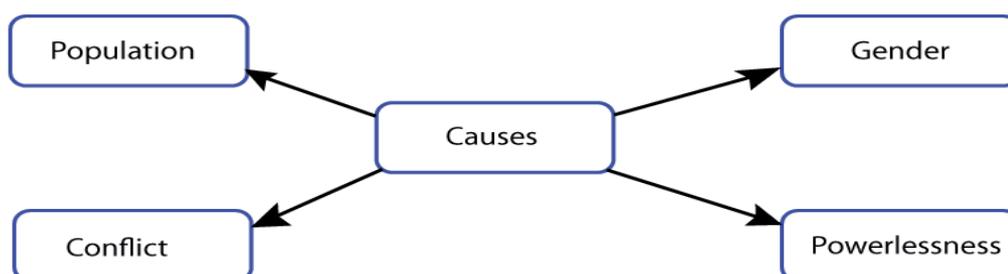
- Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act of 1979.
- Enhancing livelihood opportunities for rural population
- **Infrastructure development** in rural areas.

Global Hunger Index 2021

Context

In recently published the **Global Hunger Index (GHI)**, India has slid down, falling behind its South Asian neighbours to **rank 101 out of 116 countries**.

- The government has dismissed the **report's 'unscientific' methodology**.



■ Reason for Hunger and Malnourishment in India

- **Poor maternal health:** Mothers are too young, too short, too thin and too undernourished themselves, before they get pregnant, during pregnancy, and then after giving birth, during breast-feeding.
- **Poor sanitation:** Poor sanitation, leading to diarrhoea, is another major cause of child wasting and stunting.
- **Food insecurity:** Low dietary diversity in India is also a key factor in child malnutrition.
- **Poverty:** Almost 50 million households in India are dependent on these small and marginal holdings.

- **Livelihood loss:** The rural livelihoods loss after COVID and lack of income opportunities other than the farm sector had contributed heavily to the growing joblessness in rural areas.

■ Initiatives by Government to fight against Hunger in India

1. National Nutrition Mission (NNM), Poshan Abhiyan
2. National Food Security mission
3. Zero Hunger Programme
4. Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana
5. National Food Security Act, 2013

■ Way Forward

- **Linking of Schemes:** Agriculture-Nutrition linkage schemes have the potential for greater impact in dealing with malnutrition and thus, needs greater emphasis.
- **Early fund disbursement:** The government needs to ensure early disbursement of funds and optimum utilisation of funds in schemes linked to nutrition.
- **Underutilisation of Resources:** It has been pointed out many times that expenditure made under many nutrition-based schemes is considerably lower than what was allocated under them. Thus, emphasis needs to be on implementation.
- **Convergence with other Schemes:** Nutrition goes beyond just food, with economic, health, water, sanitation, gender perspectives and social norms contributing to better nutrition.

Paternalty Leave

Context

Companies including **Meesho, Twilio, Flipkart, Razorpay** and **Okcredit** have been taking the lead in terms of giving more time off to new fathers, sometimes as much **as 30 weeks**.

What is Paternalty Leave?

The paternalty leave is about giving fathers the right to take paid time off work following the birth (or adoption) of a child. It is mentioned period of time, where a father working as an employee under the sector is granted leave from work to take care of the new born child.

■ Why Paternalty Leave is Important?

- **For reducing Gender Gap in Labour Laws:** Gender defined roles in the society will be reduced and gender equality will be seen in labour laws in offices and workplaces.
- **Patriarchal Society:** Indian society continues to see men as the 'breadwinner' and women as the 'homemaker'. Hence, the culture of toxic masculinity that prevails in Indian society results in hesitancy and some amount of ridicule in doing what Indian men think is '**women's work**'.

■ Paternalty Leave Policy Associated Benefits

- **Debunk the Patriarchy** – A proper rule or law for Paternalty leaves will be the first steps towards achieving a more egalitarian view in society and debunking patriarchy.
- **Improve father's role in child's life:** Paternalty leave can promote parent-child bonding, improve outcomes for children, and even increase gender equity at home.

- **Reducing burden on men:** The paternity benefit bill will bring great comfort to male employees across all sectors, the organised sector, the unorganized sector as well as the self-employed, reducing the percentile of unemployment.

■ Consequences

- **Dual Burden on Women:** The indirect implications are that women are supposed to not only juggle both work and home life but also return to home life for fulfilling the '**nurturing**' role.
- **Can lead to family conflicts:** Indian society is based on patriarchal norms and hence working fathers at home is seen as a bad thing for men.

Conclusion

Rules for Paternity leave in India and the enactment of the bill will be one of the better welfare legislation of recent times. It will align India with global employment regulations and best practices. Also, the idea of official paternity leave in India if endorsed by governments and private companies will be a minimum first step enabling society to acknowledge that parenting and childcare is the shared responsibility of both men and women.

State of the world's Indigenous people

Context

Recently, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) released its report on Indigenous people.

■ About Indigenous people

- Indigenous Peoples are distinct **social and cultural groups** that share collective ancestral ties to the lands and natural resources where they live, occupy or from which they have been displaced.
- Indigenous Peoples hold internationally recognised rights for the preservation of their food systems through the **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)**.

PVTGs in India: Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) are more vulnerable among the tribal groups.

- Government of India follows the following **criteria for identification of PVTGs**.
 - ▶ Pre-agricultural level of technology
 - ▶ Low level of literacy
 - ▶ Economic backwardness
 - ▶ A declining or stagnant population

■ Vulnerability of Indigenous people in India

- **Health concerns:** The health condition of indigenous people is very critical due to lack of proper health services.
 - Malnutrition is the cause of death of community members, particularly women and children.
- **Unemployment:** As a result of increased land grabbing by corporates, the natural resources are depleting creating havoc for the tribal without any alternative livelihood option.

- The issue of unemployment among the indigenous/tribal youth is a cause of concern.
- **Militarization of tribal lands:** The on-going conflict situations and heavy militarization in the indigenous/tribal areas particularly in the North-eastern part of India and Central India, the imposition of Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA) that give impunity to human rights violations, limited access to healthcare and social services etc. are some of the contributing factors to the deterioration of social, economic and health conditions of the indigenous/tribal peoples in India.
- **Women:** In the conflict situation, Indigenous/tribal children and women are the most vulnerable to **violence both at home and outside.**
- **Consumption of Tobacco and Alcohol:** Consumption of tobacco or alcohol in any form has negative implications on health causing diseases such as **cancer and tuberculosis.**
- **Unsafe Drinking Water and Poor Sanitation:** Census 2011 of India shows that just about **11 per cent of tribal households** in the country have access to tap water and **only three per cent** households have tap water from treated source.
- **Maternal and Child Health Care:** The coverage of new born care is about 34 per cent for tribal children, whereas it is slightly above 50 per cent among non-tribe children. The condition in rural areas is much worse.

■ Way forward

- **National policies on health and Indigenous/tribal people:** The Constitution of India makes health in India the responsibility of state governments, rather than the central federal government. It makes every state responsible for "raising the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health as among its primary duties".
- **The international legal framework regarding indigenous peoples and the right to health:** It acknowledges the relationship between health and well-being and its link with other rights, such as the right to food and the right to housing, as well as medical and social services.
- Protection and Promotion of indigenous health system and traditional herbal medicines.
- Indigenous women's right to health must be considered from a gender perspective.
- **Information, Education and Communication** activities should be focused for better implementation of policies.

Elderly in India: Asset or Liability?

Context

The data from the **NFHS-5** shows that **Life expectancy in India** has increased **from 50 (1970-75) to 70 years (2014-18).**

- Thus, there is a need to **relook at problems** of the elderly, and their contribution to the society.

■ Why Elderly should be considered assets?

- **Economic aspects-** Many private and government companies retain retired person to harness their knowledge and experience. Similarly, government retains civil servants and many politicians continue to serve and get re-elected for long time beyond retirement age.
- **Personal life experience-** Elder people have faced many aspects of life in comparison to children and adults. It has benefitted adults to understand the social change, become more Emotionally Intelligent to tackle problems of life, and understand the significance of many aspects like health and fitness.

- **Traditional knowledge-** Technology has given new aspects to life and brought many socio-economic benefits. But it is also important to realise the importance the traditional and cultural values that elderly possess.
- **Focus on balanced and sustainable life-** The greater focus on industrialisation has neglected the environmental aspects and thus leads to loss of biodiversity. Elderly has measures to make it sustainable.

■ Challenges in utilising the full potential of elderly

- **Economic problems-** It includes problems such as loss of employment, income deficiency and economic insecurity.
- **Psychological problems-** It includes problems related with their psychological and social maladjustment as well as the problem of elder abuse.
 - The social isolation and alienation, felling of restlessness and absence of a daily schedule after retirement further accentuates this problem.
- **Physical and physiological problems-** It includes health and medical problems, nutritional deficiency, and the problem of adequate housing etc. It can be further seen in following aspects-
 - **Poor Health infrastructure-** The challenge is to provide a quality, affordable and accessible health care facility. They need at home services like tele or home counselling, physiotherapy and rehabilitation services as well as mental health counselling.
 - **Lack of health insurance-** Health care for the elderly, unfortunately, has been greatly neglected. Further, the inability to earn and unaffordability of health services leads to a vicious life cycle of poor health and poverty. The government schemes that cover the elderly are largely inadequate.
- **Change in social value system-** The changing institution of family, rise in nuclear families has made them more vulnerable, dependent on themselves and government.
- **Greater focus on young population-** Due to large demographic dividend, the focus of government schemes is more on young population like promoting entrepreneurs, unemployment and poverty.

■ Suggestive measures

- **Strengthened pension system:** The need of the hour is to strengthen the pension systems through better funding and coverage.
- **Holistic health infrastructure-** Affordable and accessible health care with special health facilities for elderly at district level. Use of technology in preventive healthcare and counselling through telemedicine facilities can be of great use.
- **Inclusion in economic development-** There can be increase in retirement age based of performance and willingness can make them economically dependent and productive. It will also remove social isolation and alienation for the elderly.
- **Social inclusion:** Social inclusion through recognising their contribution in their respective fields and the society in general, can result in moral boosting and psychological **benefits to** the elderly.
- **Awareness:** Increasing awareness about laws, regulations and government schemes.

Trafficking of Humans: Care, Protection and Rehabilitation

Context

Ministry of Women and Child Development has invited suggestions from all the stakeholders on the draft '**Trafficking in Persons (Prevention, Care and Rehabilitation) Bill, 2021**' (**TIP Bill**).

About Human Trafficking

- Human trafficking is the **trade of humans**, most commonly for the purpose of **forced labour, sexual slavery, or commercial sexual exploitation for the trafficker or others**.
- People can be forced into trafficking by many means such as physical force being used upon them, or false promises made by traffickers.

■ Reasons for Human Trafficking

- **Poverty:** When someone living in poverty, such as a widow or single mother who struggles to provide for her children, is desperate to meet a basic need, she is in a vulnerable position.
- **Unemployment:** Traffickers target unemployed individuals and often use deception to persuade them to leave home and take a job in another city or country.
- **Displacement:** War, political instability, and natural disasters can displace individuals or entire families. When people are forced to flee their homes and communities, they can experience financial hardship, homelessness, and culture shock.
- **Lack of knowledge and experience:** Inexperience may lead individuals down a path that ends in exploitation. A teenager who is approached by a trafficker may accept an attractive job offer, seeing it as a great opportunity at such a young age. An immigrant who arrives in a foreign country may not understand his or her rights, may be unfamiliar with the nation's laws, or may not know the national language.
- **Broken families:** Individuals who are cast out of their homes, abandoned, or placed into the child welfare system are highly vulnerable to human trafficking. Runaways, youth experiencing homelessness, and those who live in isolation are often targeted. When someone feels alone or unloved or has been abused in the past, they may be willing to take great risks.
- **Cultural practices:** In some societies, it's widely accepted to devalue and abuse women and children. This outlook is ingrained into the minds of men and women in certain cultures, which creates a huge opportunity for traffickers. A parent may be willing to sell a daughter and send her into a world of exploitation.

■ Effects of human trafficking

- Mental Trauma
- Ostracism
- Lack of independent living
- Sexual Abuse
- Mortality or death of the victim

■ What can be done further?

- Bring awareness to your social circles so your friends and family know more about trafficking.
- Volunteer with a **local counter-trafficking organization**
- Host a fundraiser
- Call **the National Human Trafficking Helpline** if you notice suspicious activity
- Be a friend to someone **who is alone and vulnerable**
- Donate to an organization that works on the front lines.

Manual Scavenging

Context

Recently the Union **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment** has told Parliament that no death was reported due to manual scavenging.

■ Who is a 'manual scavenger'?

- Any person who has been employed to **handle un-decomposed human waste** from an **insanitary latrine, open drain or pit or railway track is a manual scavenger**.

■ Causes of manual scavenging

- **Lack of proper disposal infrastructure especially in rural areas:** The major latrine used in urban areas is the dry latrines which are a major cause of manual scavenging.
- **Lack of incomplete rehabilitation and employment opportunities:** Lack of employment opportunities is a major concern and a crucial player in the inclusion program. Also, Lack of schemes that would help the families whose bread winners are manual scavengers contributes to its existence.
- **Lack of liberation strategies:** There are no proper strategies put forward to liberate manual scavengers psychologically. This pushes those in the practice to get even deeper and deeper into the practice of manual scavenging.
- **Social stigmatization:** People regard the manual scavengers as untouchable because of their work. Therefore, the society is not ready to accept and include them in community activities.
- **Denial of the existence of manual scavengers:** The government and other major private institutions deny the existence of scavenging despite the deaths reported especially in India.

■ Effects of manual scavenging

- Health related problems
- Structural violence against manual scavengers
- Caste and gender discrimination
- Social discrimination

■ Solutions to the problem

- **Involvement of different officials and community in initiatives:** In order to tackle the problem through initiatives such as **Namma toilets in India**, it would be necessary to involve all the major stake holders involved.
- **Creating Awareness:** District Nodal Officers, NGOs and health officers should educate the community on devastating effect caused by dry latrines. They should also educate the mass on health issues, hygiene practices, and sanitation.
- **Rehabilitation and reintegration of Manual Scavengers:** Creation of more employment is one of the most important rehabilitation processes. The jobs created would aim to offer equal opportunities to the locals.
- **Low-Cost Latrine Model:** The same old model of pit latrine used by the community can be used to construct small pit toilets in a cost-effective manner. In order to ensure that the villagers fully participate in the activity, they can be provided with building materials and shown how to construct the latrines.
- **Training the locals:** The training can be organized by the various organizations with the help of experienced masons.
- **Enforcement of law:** The government should enforce the law that prohibits scavenging. The law

in a country such as India was enacted in 1993 and changes have been made in 2013.

- **Individual responsibility:** Every person in countries that scavenging still exists should realize they are equally guilty and responsible. Therefore, every individual in the society has a **moral obligation** in curbing this problem.
- **Education:** Children whose families are involved in scavenging experience a lot of social stigmatization that may affect their education. In addition, the scavenging work generates little money that is not enough to **educate a child**.
- **Investing in proper human waste management equipment**

Fight to Malnutrition in India

Context

Recently, the Union Minister for Women and Child Development has informed Rajya Sabha that there were **927,606 severely acute malnourished children in India**.

■ About

- **Malnutrition**, in all its forms, includes **undernutrition** (wasting, stunting, underweight), **inadequate vitamins or minerals**, **overweight**, **obesity**, and resulting diet-related non-communicable diseases.
- The term malnutrition **addresses 3 broad groups of conditions:**
 - **Under nutrition**, which includes **wasting** (low weight-for-height), **stunting** (low height-for-age) and **underweight** (low weight-for-age)
 - Together, the stunted and wasted children are considered to be **underweight**, indicating a **lack of proper nutritional intake and inadequate care post-childbirth**.
 - **Micronutrient-related malnutrition**, which includes micronutrient deficiencies (a lack of important vitamins and minerals) or micronutrient excess; and
 - **Overweight, obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases** (such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and some cancers).

■ Causes

- **Agriculture Output:** The agriculture output from small and marginal holdings are either stagnant or declining due to reasons such as reduced soil fertility, fragmented lands or fluctuating market price of farm produce.
- **Low Income:** Relative income of one section of people has been on the decline.
- This has adverse effects on their capacity to buy adequate food, especially when food prices have been on the rise.
- The kind of work a section of people have been doing are less remunerative or there is less opportunity to get remunerative work.
- **Public Distribution System:** The public distribution system of the state is not functioning well or is not accessible to everyone.
- **Rural Unemployment:** The emaciated rural livelihoods sector and lack of income opportunities other than the farm sector have contributed heavily to the growing joblessness in rural areas.

■ Measures Taken to Tackle Malnutrition

- **Multi-sectoral approach:** Substantial improvements across malnutrition indicators in the states of India would require an integrated nutrition policy.

- These improvements include providing clean drinking water, reducing rates of open defecation, improving women's status, enhancing agricultural productivity and food security, promoting nutrition-sensitive agriculture.
- **Integrated nutrition policy** can be brought by harmonization of efforts across ministries, political will and good governance.
 - Such coordinated efforts will ensure that essential nutrition services reach the most deprived communities.
- **National Nutrition Mission** (POSHAN Abhiyaan) seeks to ensure a "malnutrition free India" by 2022.
 - **POSHAN Abhiyaan** which is India's flagship programme envisages improving nutritional outcomes for children, adolescents, pregnant women and lactating mothers, is a step in the right direction.
 - However, it would require long-term investments in health, sanitation and nutrition in preventing deaths due to severe acute malnutrition.
- **Decentralisation**: Panchayats should be allowed to have a bigger say in running welfare schemes.
- **Diversification**: Public Distribution System should be diversified, to include millets.

Digital Divide in education sector

Context

The Supreme Court has flagged the consequences of **growing digital divide**.

- It observed that the digital divide caused by online classes is affecting the fundamental right of **every child to education**.

■ What is digital divide?

- It means discrepancy between people who have access to and the resources to use new information and communication tools, such as the Internet, and people who do not have the resources and access to the technology.

■ How have online classes impacted children?

- Little children whose parents are too poor to afford laptops, tablets or an "optimum" Internet package at home for online classes during the pandemic have dropped out of school and even run the danger of being drawn into child labour or worse, child trafficking.
- Even, the right to education has now hinged on who could afford "gadgets" for online classes and who could not.

■ Impacts of digital divide

- **Low female representation**: Due to huge digital divide in gender, thousands of Indian girls in these far-flung areas are refused access to Information and Communications Technology (ICTs), which is a primary cause of low female representation in jobs.
- **Denial to information/knowledge**: This lack of equal opportunities to access online services and information deprive people of higher/quality education and skill training that could help them contribute to the economy and become leaders on a global level.
- **Non delivery of welfare schemes**: As many schemes have started using ICT in their delivery, at the same time due to digital divide it will create more problems.

■ Challenges

- **Lack of Infrastructure:** Being a densely populated country, India needs well established infrastructure to deliver e-services. But still there are some rural disconnected regions which are not connected to Internet.
- **Population:** It is a challenge for a developing country to serve a population of 1.30 billion uniformly.
- **Geographical Diversity:** Rural India is still deprived of the facilities of urban India because of its geographical location.
- It is poorly connected in terms of roads and infrastructural facilities.
- **Illiteracy & Poverty:** A large part of population is fighting for its daily basic needs. They do not bother about high speed devices and digitization. They are more worried about food and shelter.
- **Gender Divide:** In India, there is huge discrimination among male and female.
- **Corruption:** Corruption is a termite for government. At each tier of government structure, politicians and stakeholders try to draw illegal benefits for themselves.
- **Lack of Participation:** It is observed that often the rural people are not very much attracted towards the web-based E-Governance services for various reasons.
 - Many-a-times they are afraid of the technologies and at times they are even ignorant about the availability of technologies which can help in dealing with their problems.

■ Suggestive measures

- The government must employ strong measures to arrange for free and affordable internet to maximize participation in digital India.
- What India needs is a contextually relevant digital education system that integrates the knowledge of digital into all aspects of life.
- For education, last-mile connectivity is the need of the hour in rural India.
- India needs a public institution system that leverages the opportunities provided by digital technology.
- There is an urgent need to formulate a digital crisis response plan under the Digital India scheme to focus on unintended exclusions of the unconnected by providing free bandwidth to the vulnerable.
- Internet Service Providers should provide cheaper data plans or bundle a data plan along with the device.

Unpaid labour

Context

The election manifestos of state governments had promised various forms of payment to homemakers, thus putting the spotlight on the **unpaid domestic work done by women**.

■ What is unpaid care work?

According to the OECD, it refers to all unpaid services provided within a household for its members, including care of persons, housework and voluntary community work. These activities are considered work because theoretically one could pay a third person to perform them.

■ Implications for India:

- India has slipped 28 places to rank 140th among 156 countries in **the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2021**.
 - Among the drivers of this decline is a decrease in women's labour force participation rate, which fell from 24.8 per cent to 22.3 per cent.
 - Earned income of women in India is only one-fifth of men's, which puts the country among the bottom 10 globally on this indicator.

■ What needs to be done?

- Policies should address the rising need for care and tackle the huge disparity between women's and men's care responsibilities.
- More data will make more unpaid care work visible and help frame targeted policies and enable better monitoring of the impact of policies and investments.
- Reduce unpaid care work by investment in physical infrastructure like clean water and sanitation, energy and public transport, and in social infrastructure such as care and health services and education.
- Redistribution of care work between men and women, and between families and the state will encourage positive social norms and economic development.

■ Benefits of recognition of unpaid work

- Recognition of unpaid work done by women can lead to women empowerment and will provide a sense of equality among women in the patriarchal social setup.
- It will lead to a more holistic understanding of the value of labour which is not only tied to the exchange value of service in the market but also recognises the importance of labour in keeping the family intact and functional.
- Recognition of unpaid work which is almost dominated by women can help them in claiming some degree of parity in terms of the time and energy expended on it.

■ Challenges

- It will be a difficult task to measure the amount of unpaid work done because they cannot be separately identified as activities in an economic sense.
- It would not enhance women's economic independence in the long run, because it would discourage labour-market participation and investments in education and vocational training of women.
- It would contribute to maintaining the traditional division of work between women and men instead of eradicating it.
- It will make the relationship of women with the family a relationship of master-slave which is contrary to the very idea of family in society.
