

1. The largest funding for the development of a vaccine for COVID-19 has come from the private sector. What does it tell? Is the private sector filling in the gaps created by the inherent inefficiencies of public institutions? Critically comment.

Demand of the question:

It expects students to express their views over the roles played by private as well as public health institutions while funding for the development of COVID-19 vaccine. It also expects students to analyse both aspects of whether private sector is filling the gaps created by the inherent inefficiencies of public institutions or not.

Introduction:

While the COVID-19 pandemic continues to wreak havoc, researchers worldwide are working around the clock to find a vaccine against genetic sequence of SARS-CoV-2, the virus causing the COVID-19 pandemic. With respect to funding for the development of vaccine it seems that private institutions have got the front row but it doesn't mean that public institutions are lagging in it.

Body:

Just as automakers famously shifted to make tanks and planes during World War II, today's global giants Moderna, Altimmune, BioNTech & Pfizer, GlaxoSmithKline, etc. are investing tremendous amount of money in the research for vaccine development of COVID-19.

COVID-19 pandemic has exposed lacunas in the public health institutions across the world:

- **Paucity of Resources:** Doctors work in extreme conditions ranging from overcrowded out-patient departments, inadequate staff, medicines and infrastructure.
- **Overburdened Doctors:** Owing to disproportionate Doctor Patient ratio, limited number of doctors, nurses and medical staff have to cater to a large number of patients.
- **Inadequate Funding:** Expenditure on public health funding has been consistently low in India (approximately 1.3% of GDP). As per OECD, India's total out-of-pocket expenditure is around 2.3 % of GDP.
- **Sub-optimal Public Health System:** Due to this, it is challenging to tackle Non-communicable Diseases, which is all about prevention and early detection.

It diminishes preparedness and effective management for new and emerging threats such as pandemic like Covid-19. Here, Private Health Institutions comes in to picture in terms of investment, quality of service, delivering benefits etc.

It doesn't mean that Private institutions' don't have any lacunas:

- In India most of private health institutions have presence only in the metros and other major urban centres.

- Private institutions are expensive which are not affordable to the poor and marginalised sections of the country. e.g. In New Delhi a private hospital denied admission/treatment to the COVID-19 suspect as she was not able to bear the cost of treatment.
- There is general impression prevails that private establishments are often unethical, greedy, treating medical service as a business and hospitalisation as a source of profit.

So, it can be seen that though public health institutions lack in some aspects, private institutions have their own lacunas too.

Vaccine development is a lengthy process which often takes years, with many challenges. 78 of the confirmed active vaccine candidates, 56 (72%) are being developed by private/industry developers, with the remaining 22 (28%) of projects being led by public institutions.

Hence a collaborative approach should be adopted to tackle this crisis.

There are various examples of the public institutions which are also working at a war time speed to tackle this crisis:

- Pune-based Serum Institute of India (SII), the world's largest vaccine manufacturer in terms of dosage, is one of the partner firms for AstraZeneca's and Oxford's COVID-19 vaccine candidate. The vaccine has now entered its final phase of human trials.
- Operation Warp Speed (OWS) is a collaboration of several US federal government departments and the private sector to accelerate development of drug and vaccine candidates for COVID-19 (ACTIV).
- Researchers at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies have estimated that, as of the end of April, the G20 countries alone had already committed \$6.3 trillion in fiscal spending, or about 9.3% of their combined 2019 GDP, to save lives and assist economies, at levels that exceed their responses to the 2008 global financial crisis.
- The Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) is working with global health authorities and vaccine developers to support the development of vaccines against COVID-19.
- The collaborative approach is already followed by National Institute of Health (USA), which will collaborate with the private institutions.

Conclusion:

As vaccine for the novel corona virus is unlikely to be ready for mass use before 2021, and no sign of medicine to cure is in sight; Instead of looking for the gaps filled by one sector or other we need to adopt a collaborative approach where both sectors will work together, in turn it help human kind to survive on this planet.

2. Do you think NGOs are indispensable for extending relief after natural or man-made calamities? Substantiate your views.

Demand of the question:

It expects students to write about the role played by NGO's while extending relief during natural or manmade calamities. It also expects students to substantiate their view with careful analysis.

Introduction:

Ever since independence, NGOs have played a crucial role in helping the needy in India, providing aid & elevating the socio-economic status of millions in the country. But, with respect to extending relief during calamities their role doesn't confine only providing to aid but rebuilding the destroyed landscape & providing relief while working hand-in-hand with public authorities.

Body:

The Disaster Management Act 2005 emphasizes the need for continuous and integrated process of planning, organising, coordinating and implementing policies and plans on DM in a holistic, community based, participatory, inclusive and sustainable manner. Which in turn suggest when it comes to disaster then government should adopt a holistic approach to tackle the disaster.

Role played by NGO's while extending relief in Natural and man-made calamities:

- A Natural or manmade calamity is a result of natural or man-made causes that leads to sudden disruption of normal life, causing severe damage to life and property to an extent that available social and economic protection mechanisms are inadequate to cope.
- Replicate micro-level initiatives: The community-focussed approach, which is the main strength of NGOs.
- Optimum use of resources. In Asian countries, where limited resources, logistic and infrastructure facilities pose challenges, optimal use of available financial and human resources, support systems is a must for timely calamity response and effective calamity reduction measures.
- Check Overlapping, Duplication, & Confusion. Timely response to natural calamities remains a difficult task in South Asian countries, where a majority of people live in dispersed rural settlements with inadequate communication facilities.
- Supplement Govt's Response with Sector-focused Initiatives. Experience in Orissa and in other parts of India shows that NGO focus on sector-specific issues such as livelihood, community organisation, community asset creation, women group formation, etc.
- Strengthen Community-Based Disaster Preparedness. In South-Asia poverty and low awareness explain higher human casualty and deeper adverse impact of disasters.

Hence it seems imperative to include NGO's while tackling Natural or manmade calamity. But there are some issues with respect to some NGO's too:

- Accreditation remains a big challenge as it is very difficult to distinguish whether an organization wants to work for the cause or has been set up only for the purpose of receiving government grants.
- NGOs have acted as a cover for organized crime in past and are often seen as fronts for fundamentalist causes. So, during a calamity it may happen that NGO may use the organisation as cover to expedite the crisis.

But We cannot ignore some of the fantastic works done by some NGO's during this COVID-19 crisis:

- The Akshaya Patra Foundation is an NGO in India headquartered in Bengaluru. Since the COVID-19 crisis, The Akshaya Patra Foundation, in close coordination with State Governments and District Administration, has stepped in to provide relief by providing food to thousands of people across the country.
- Waste pickers are the communities most vulnerable to infections. Pune-based Kashtakari Panchayat (NGO) has organised a fundraiser to support nearly 7,000 workers in Pune. The funds will be used to provide safety kits, consisting of gloves, masks, soaps and sanitizers, and a month's supply of essentials, like grains, pulses, oil, sugar and tea.

Conclusion:

As we know that the Natural or Man-made calamities test the humankind's will to win over the adversities. Hence, when we want to tackle the natural or manmade calamities then NGO's role seems indispensable but it should be made sure that the NGO works in consonance with the objective and not against it so that help & relief can reach up to the last person the ladder.

3. The undergraduate admission season is close. Lakhs of students will apply to different colleges and universities. Do you think, too much emphasis on marks as the entry criteria creates mediocrity and stifles talent? Comment.

Demand of the question:

It expects students to express their views on whether marks should be the criteria or the talent for the assessment. It also expects students to analyse both aspects of whether having a mark based evaluation is good or talent based.

Introduction:

Except the Primary school admissions, rest of the admission world over works on the system of marks/grades. Here, arises the Talent vs. Marks debate, where marks as admission criteria are questioned but answer stumbles on what should be the alternative.

Body:

In India the British introduced education systems to create clerks and civil servants. They now prepare to become engineers or doctors. We have not deviated much from that pattern till today.

- To get admission in to higher educational institutes the set criteria is more the marks higher the chances to get admission.
- Mostly, the society thinks that becoming an engineer or a medical professional, are the only reputed and well earning professions. Which leads to humongous competition for few hundreds of seats.
- Hence students do marks oriented study, This is one of the fundamental flaws of our education system.
- The current system of examination assesses student on the set criteria and hence, too much focus is given to evaluation of student with respect to those criteria.

Here, the rat race begins to get more marks by sidelining and without realising the true potential of student.

Mediocrity and Stifling of talent:

- When there is smoke there is fire! The fire we are concerned about is the unproductive, fruitless education being provided in educational institutes.
- Students study only to score marks in exams, and sometimes to crack exams like IIT-JEE, AIIMS or CLAT and NEET.
- Students learning in an environment where their marks define who they are and where do they stand in the crowd.
- There is less focus on achieving excellence.
- Knowledge is largely forgotten after the semester exam is over. Still, year after year Indian students focus on cramming information. The best crammers are rewarded by the system.
- But, there is one positive side of having a marks oriented approach of studying i.e. it promotes a healthy competition if not exaggerated so.

We should realise that getting higher marks is not the only criteria through which a person's talent can be assessed. One such example of fine talent is the Sachin Tendulkar who was failed in 10th standard examination but still known as Master blaster in the history of cricket.

Way forward:

- Giving a sound career counselling to students especially to the parents. And generating a wide scale awareness in society are the primary steps.
- A person is more valuable human resource because of its vivid qualities, skills and talents. Hence, giving justice to its skills, talents and knowledge should be the way. Which will eventually help the person to realise his/her true self.
- Humanities, art, law, accountancy, music, drama etc. these streams also provide bright career options. e.g Shahrugh khan who is known as Baadshah of Bollywood Industry, opted out of MBA to focus on career in acting.
- Evaluation of students should not be centred around their marks in exams. Shifting to grading system based on classroom participation, project work, communication and leadership skills and extracurricular performance.
- Sooner than later personalizing and customizing learning in our education system will be more better option.

Conclusion:

As we know every human being is unique in its characteristic we should not adopt One size fits all approach. Hence, adopting a more holistic approach to assess the true talent of student combined with marks will be the better way so that we can utilize our this large demographic dividend to taste the fruits of development.

