1.Do you think decentralized planning is an effective tool to ensure inclusive growth? Substantiate your views.

Approach- Candidate can define what is decentralized planning, how it is effective for participation of stakeholders and inclusive growth. With the help of some examples in the second half, answer can be concluded.

Introduction

Decentralised planning is a kind of percolation of planning activities or process from the Centre to the sub- state levels, i.e. district, sub-division, block and village level. Since the inception of First Plan, the importance of decentralised planning was emphasised in order to achieve active people's participation in the planning process.

Body

History of decentralized planning in India
- In 1957, the Government appointed Balwant Rai Mehta Committee which recommended constitution of elected statutory local bodies with its required resources, power and authority along with a decentralised administrative system operating under its control. Accordingly, the Panchayati Raj System was introduced in India.
- Since then the process of decentralisation in the planning and developmental activities was continued. In 1969, the Planning Commission issued some guidelines on the introduction of district planning.
- Finally, in 1984, the Group on District Planning submitted its report and this was considered as the basis of proposals on decentralised planning under the Seventh Plan.
- Although in most of the states of India, the decentralised planning was extended to district level but in some states like Assam, West Bengal etc. the same plan was decentralised up to sub-division level.

Importance of decentralised planning
- Better Linkages between the Villages and Small Towns: Considering the huge size and proportion of rural population in India, it is felt that proper linkages must be established between dispersed small villages and also between such villages and adjacent small towns.
- Decentralised planning is considered as more realistic as it maintains a close coordination between locally available resources, local skills, local manpower and local requirements.
- Decentralised planning is suitable for the development of agricultural and allied activities such as animal husbandry, horticulture, fisheries, forestry along with development of village and cottage industries.

- Decentralised planning can promote active participation of local people in implementing various local plans and programmes. Thus it can enhance the involvement of local communities in such development activities.
- Under decentralised planning, wastage of resources can be reduced to a minimum level as the people participating in these developmental activities keep a close watch over the utilisation of fund as well also on the implementation of plan projects.
- Decentralised planning can show more trickle down or percolation effects in respect of poverty alleviation programmes and employment generation in rural areas as in this type of planning, various projects are selected for generating huge productive employment.
- Decentralised planning is helpful in raising the level of social services by launching various programmes of health, nutrition, drinking water, education etc. in a more effective, quicker and sustainable manner.
- Decentralised planning process is more simple and transparent and thus it has a close link with democracy, co-operation and development. It has a vast scope for the active involvement of political and social forces at the appropriate level.

Decentralised planning in India and inclusive growth
- In India, under decentralised planning, plans are formulated at the grass root level with the help of elected representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions, state administration at the district and block levels and financial institutions.
- In order to have a successful decentralised planning, the planning machinery in the country must be suitably developed both at the district, sub-division and block level.
- While the bigger states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan could not achieve much success in respect of decentralised planning and states like Punjab and Haryana did not even feel necessity but the states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, West Bengal, Assam and Karnataka have already adopted decentralised planning in a more vigorous manner.
- The effects of decentralised planning in West Bengal percolate to the village level. But the overall performance of decentralised planning in India is not at all commensurate to its expectations.

What are the reasons behind dismal performance?
1. Unsuccessful Land Reforms
2. Lack of Adequate Resource Transfer
3. Absence of Effective Organization
4. Regional Disparities
5. Use of Inferior Resource for rural areas

What can be done?
The intent behind decentralised planning was to improve participation in the development process. But this aim is far from achieved as India faces various hurdles to facilitate the process of decentralisation unless these are not addressed, the task is far from done.

Conclusion

Inclusive growth is build upon the participation of masses. In India, in western parts of Maharashtra and Gujrat where cooperative societies achieved success, we see the reflection of that in development index. So if the hurdles are addressed and effective implementation of decentralised planning is done, it can surely give positive results. We have to address the structural loopholes and build movement in masses for the inclusive growth and prosperous society.

2. Critically evaluate the performance of India in achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Approach:

Question is asking you to critically evaluate requires you to be able to exercise their sense of reasoning and provide evidence both to support and repudiate a statement and to finally reach a conclusion.

Introduction:

India along with other countries signed the declaration on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, comprising of seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the Sustainable Development Summit of the United Nations in September 2015. SDGs are comprehensive and focus on five Ps – people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership. On its current trajectory, India has already set for itself more ambitious targets for implementation of SDGs in several areas of economic progress, inclusion and sustainability.

Body:

CRITICAL EVALUATION THE PERFORMANCE OF INDIA IN ACHIEVING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)
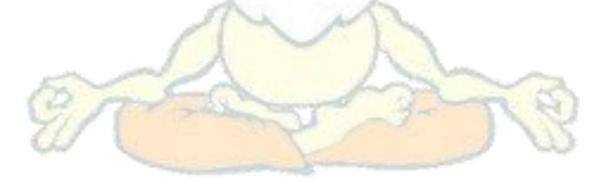
- India has played an important role in shaping the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This has meant that the country's national development goals are mirrored in the SDGs. As such, India has been effectively committed to achieving the SDGs even before they were fully crystallized. As one of the forty countries that have volunteered to take part in the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2017, India appreciates the focus on 'Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world'.
- Reinforcing India's commitment to the national development agenda and SDGs, the country's Parliament has organized several forums to develop policy and action perspectives on elimination of poverty, promoting gender equality and addressing climate change.
- While India has improved its score and made notable progress on a number of indicators including health, water and sanitation, more needs to be done on the poverty, hunger, gender and climate fronts.
- The SDG India Index 2019 also helps highlight crucial gaps related to monitoring SDGs and the need for improving statistical systems at the National/State/UT levels. Further, the Index highlights the need for improvements in data collection, reporting and methodology.
- There should be proper monitoring measure and each district, taluk and gram panchayats should have an SDG plan.
- NITI Aayog is also exploring partnerships for disaggregating data and developing capacity for real-time monitoring and measuring incremental

progress. There are many schemes to achieve those goals which the central and state governments are running.

- There is a need to train and motivate people to achieve the goals. The SDGs still remain outside of the system. We are not mainstreaming many of the concerns. There is a lot of overlap. India has 40% food wastage which impact SDG goal 2. The growth which has taken in technology is very critical in achieving our targets.
- If we use cutting edge technology in the monitoring and evaluation in a correct way in achieving SDGs it will give results. Interconnectivity between the goal is very critical and important.
- Although COVID-19 could push over one billion people into extreme poverty by 2030, a recent UN study conducted with the Pardee Centre for International Futures, shows that with integrated SDG interventions – in the areas of social protection, governance, green economy and digitalisation – we could still achieve and even exceed the developmental goals.

Conclusion:

With India representing one seventh of the world's population, the world cannot achieve its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) without India's support. Thus, an ambitious, 10-year plan commencing in 2020 focuses on helping India accelerate progress towards achieving its SDG targets by 2030. However, this development agenda needs to be pursued in a holistic, sustainable manner, in keeping with the needs of the environment we exist in. And now, we have the resources at our disposal to achieve exactly that. But to do so will require all of us to work in tandem and take action on the things that matter most to people everywhere. Thanks to millions of people taking action and a massive global effort, real progress has been made, with India following a holistic approach towards achieving its 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by launching various schemes.

3. How does social structure and hierarchy create conditions for poverty? Illustrate in the Indian context.

Approach

The student is expected to write the impact of social structure and social hierarchy on the poverty. It is a very simple forward question and the student is expected to give examples in Indian context.

Introduction:

Poverty is too much with us and its presence across vast stretches of our country disturbs our conscience. In the post-second world war years when 'Development Economics' was respectable, sociologists, anthropologists and political analysts went into poverty issues in inter-disciplinary ways to suggest remedial policies. Gunnar Myrdal, the Swedish Nobel Laureate, was one of the earliest to make such a study. He pursued an institutional approach in which poverty issues were not to be studied not in isolation but in their mutual relationships such as caste stratification.

Body:

There is close correlation between poverty and the persistence of caste-based hierarchy of occupations in rural India.

Since Independence, the middle class aversion to populist policies, especially their view that the poorer masses force populist policies on politicians. Despite declaration of inclusion of the poor, they have faced marginalisation and exclusion in the urban settings at the same time.

Agricultural stagnancy and social structure: There was stagnation in agriculture and the Dalits and adivasis who are still engaged as agricultural labourers have the highest incidence of poverty.

Apart from the demographic transition which increases the number of the aged, especially women, other factors deepen their vulnerability. The increase in labour supply depresses wages and wage reduction pushes families to send more into the labour market, in particular the elderly. Children are unable to complete education beyond the fifth class. Aged people are driven to take up jobs in service sectors such as hospitality and security. "Contrary to received wisdom, the flow of income, assets, and labour is more often down the generations than up."

Model of Governance: States like Tamil Nadu rub political salt in the wound by expanding the state-owned outlets for alcohol into rural villages." Expenditure on freebies is met out of excise revenues, which drives more and more families into debt and deeper into the poverty pit.

Social Norms and the structure: Social mores that prevent children from getting higher education. Girls become liabilities in the marriage market and educated boys become

unemployable in agriculture. It is distressing to be told that "without the guarantee of viable economic returns, people living in rural poverty will remain reluctant to invest in schooling beyond Class 5.

Conclusion:

In fact, poverty and other social miseries are in large part due to social structure, which is how society functions at a macro level. Some societal issues, such as racism, sexism and segregation, constantly cause disparities in education, employment and income for marginalized groups. The majority group naturally has a head start, relative to groups that deal with a wide range of societal barriers on a daily basis. If one believes that poverty is related to historical and environmental events and not just to an individual, we should be careful about blaming the poor for their fates. I believe all our lives could be improved if we considered the structural influences as root causes of social problems such as poverty and inequality. Perhaps then, we could more easily agree on solutions.

4. Examine the factors that have contributed to the monopoly of China with respect to rare earth metals. What are its strategic implications? Discuss.

Approach

The candidate should address the question in two parts where the first part should examine the factors responsible for China's monopoly with regards to rare earth metals while the second part should discuss the strategic implications of the same.

Introduction

The global pandemic has exposed the utter dependence of the world on China for critical equipment and raw materials. That's especially the case with the supply of rare earth metals, which are required in numerous commercial products and defence systems where China produces more than 70% of global output, and this dominance of the market puts it in a powerful bargaining position.

Body

Rare earth metals are a group of seventeen elements used in the manufacture of semiconductors, batteries, and defence systems, etc. Although deposits of rare earth metals exist all over the world, the majority of both mining and refining occurs in China. In this regard, the factors that have contributed to this monopoly of China include –

1. China has dominated the production of rare earth metals since the 1990s, driven largely by two factors by low prices and state-backed investment in infrastructure and technology.
2. China's industrial policy prioritized the support and development of its rare earth industry as a national economic and security initiative. It included three aims: control the REE supply chain, capture western intellectual property, and embed its materials into commercial and defence systems.
3. China's national strategy provided small-business subsidies to vertically integrate the high-tech supply chain. The country's Belt and Road Initiative started purchasing in-country REE mines to offset country export quotas, supporting local technology, and targeting IP through collaboration with foreign academia and research institutions.
4. In addition to low labour costs, China achieved effective price controls by subsidizing small-market REE organizations, manipulating local and world events through restrictions on exports, idling domestic plants, and securing overseas sources via acquisitions, the Belt and Road Initiative, and political influencing, etc.

Consequently, "rare earth metals" are at the risk of being leveraged by the People's Republic of China (PRC) in a crisis. China's position in the rare earths market constitutes a significant security and strategic risk for India and the world in the following manner –

- Neodymium-iron boron (NdFeB) magnets are among "the smallest, lightest, and most powerful magnets currently known to science". Due to their wide ranging and versatile applications, they are perhaps the single most vital rare earth metal derived component for the defence industry.
- The applications of permanent magnets range from even the crudest of electrical motors to fin actuators for guided missiles, munitions, unmanned aerial vehicles etc. This clearly demonstrates the grave strategic implications if a single adversarial country controls the metals supply.
- Recent strategic studies have concluded that China values its dominance of the rare earth elements market more for geopolitical reasons than commercial ones, and thus poses a strategic threat to the rest of the world.
- In 2006, China implemented export quotas and controls for rare earths. In 2010, those controls – and their aggressive application vis-à-vis Japan in the Senkaku islands dispute clearly showed China's intentions to use its dominance for coercive purposes.
- In 2015, the PRC integrated the rare earth industry, increasing state-owned control of the strategic resources. Further, there are clear stipulations that special licenses are required for the export of all rare earths from China.
- Further, the shock to global supply chains in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic brought the concerns over china's dominance to the fore once again, as China was forced to shut down many major manufacturing hubs to slow the spread of COVID-19.

India has rich deposits of rare earths, which remain largely untapped. India's reserves of rare earths, nearly 6.9 million tonnes, are the fifth largest in the world. Thus, Government of India should consider the following measures to leverage its position in the future –

- Create a new Department for Rare Earths (DRE), which would play the role of a regulator and enabler for businesses in this space.
- Allow private sector companies to participate in upstream and downstream processing of rare earth elements.
- Provide enabling infrastructure close to ports, implement Ease of Doing Business Measures, and create a whitelist of international suppliers for businesses in downstream processing.
- Build a rare earths reserve along with partners such as the Quad as a geostrategic move to ensure India can compete in the manufacturing of high-tech products in the coming decades.

Conclusion

India has a rare opportunity today to leverage its natural reserves of rare earth elements to build a prosperous economy. Global geo-economic and geopolitical trends offer a chance that India could seize, which should be capitalised to ensure that its resources are put to good use and offer a secure foundation for developing a competitive and high-value rare earths sector.

5. Should OTT platforms be regulated by the government? Critically comment.

Approach

Candidates are expected to explain what are the OTT platforms. And then critically comment whether government should regulate OTT platforms in light of recent regulations rules.

Introduction

For the first time, the government, under the ambit of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021, has brought in detailed guidelines for digital content on both digital media and Over The Top (OTT) platforms.

Body

Over-The-Top Platforms: OTT platforms are audio and video hosting and streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Hotstar etc, which started out as content hosting platforms but soon branched out into the production and release of short movies, feature films, documentaries and web series themselves.
OTT platforms in India:

- India is currently the world's fastest growing OTT (over-the-top streaming) market, and is all set to emerge as the world's sixth-largest by 2024. At present, the OTT platform's valuation stands at 35 billion INR, with nearly 500 million internet users, expected to grow at 8% per year.

There was no law or autonomous body to monitor and manage the digital contents provided on these OTT platforms and it was made available to the public at large without any filter or screening. Therefore government tightened its control over digital news media and OTT introducing a "soft-touch regulatory architecture."

- The idea is to create a level-playing field for all media, since print and television already worked under certain restriction.
- The new IT rules will lead to the empowerment of citizens. Since there is a mechanism for redressal and timely resolution of their grievances.
- It will ensure that social media platforms have to keep better checks and balances over their platforms. This will ensure the data is not shared unlawfully. This will ensure adherence to the rule of law.
- OTT platforms has to come up with a code of self-regulation, last draft of code of self regulation had not allowed for a third-party intervention. Government has taken care of freedom of the press with certain responsibility and reasonable restrictions.
- The new IT rules enhance government regulation over social and digital media. This will enhance accountability and prevent arbitrary actions by digital platforms like the recent one by Twitter.
- These guidelines are on expected lines and are really quite mild compared to the kind of pre-censorship of content many were fearing,". The rules, had

stemmed from the industry's failure in formulating a code of self-regulation that the government found satisfactory.

- Platforms will be required to implement parental locks for content classified as U/A 13+ or higher, and reliable age verification mechanisms for content classified as "A". This move will lead to consolidation in the OTT industry or shutting down of niche apps which have relied on obscene content.
- Disinformation (Fake and wrong information) of data can be controlled. Since there is proper regulatory mechanism, disinformation can be removed easily. This will reduce instances of fake news, violence, the spread of defamatory content and disruption of public order.
- Publishers of news on digital media will have to observe the norms of journalistic conduct of the Press Council of India and the Programme Code under the Cable Television Networks Regulation Act.
- Giving due notice before removing content will prevent arbitrary removal of content. The imposition of print and electronic code of conduct on digital news media would ensure a level playing field for every media.

The legal architecture and new rules for OTT raise important concerns for free speech and fair regulation such as:

- The players and creators will have to probably re-look at the kind of content they want to make since these ratings will directly impact the storytelling and the commercials involved.
- The IT Act doesn't cover content authors and creators like news media. But rules have included them. This provides discretionary powers to the government.
- There are various categories of ratings now which may become more cumbersome for the content creator as well as the platform. Except animated films or series, all content currently on OTT platforms may fall into the U/A 16+ or the A category.
- Also, there will be ambiguity regarding certain films which may have already received CBFC certification. It is unclear whether the platform would need to incorporate the same certification or re-determine it based on these rules, which would lead to increasing compliance procedures.
- The rules allow the government to enforce a traceability mechanism. This simply means a threat to the user's privacy. It will hamper the end-to-end encryption of platforms like WhatsApp.
- As the new rules curtail free speech on digital platforms, there will be a sense of fear among the creators and hamper creativity.

Conclusion

Regulations are necessary to ensure that the content that gets featured on online streaming platforms remains within the scope of Article 19(2) of the constitution. A fine balance between freedom of speech and the need to curb the misuse in digital platforms have to be maintained. Both the government and the digital platforms will have to work together and fulfil this responsibility.