

**Q .1 How have recent policy changes, such as the implementation of the National Food Security Act (NFSA) and the Ayushman Bharat scheme, affected access to basic necessities and healthcare for vulnerable groups? Critically examine.**

### Approach

Start with basic intro on both the schemes or start with recent changes and then as per demand of question provide both of the arguments.

### Introduction

The recent decision of free foodgrains to all 81 crore beneficiaries covered under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) till December 2023 and to include more health packages in Ayushman Bharat considered beneficial for poor Indian.

### Body

Advantage of recent changes:

- The beneficiaries will now get 35kg of foodgrains free for the next one year and others will get 5kg for free in a month till December 2023.
- Merger of PMGKAY: The center has also decided to discontinue the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) and it has now been merged with the NFSA.
- Unemployment remains at record levels and there is widespread hunger among vulnerable communities. The government extending PMGKAY and also universalise the public distribution system itself, so that anyone in need would receive food support regardless of whether they possessed a ration card or not.
- Ayushman bharat helps reduce catastrophic expenditure for hospitalizations, which pushes 6 crore people into poverty each year. Helps mitigate the financial risk arising out of catastrophic health episodes.
- At a time when the world was battling with the effects of Covid on its decline and insecurity due to various reasons, India has been successfully maintaining food security and health security with these schemes for its vulnerable sections while taking necessary steps to keep availability and affordability for the common man.
- Policymakers and experts concede that the extension of schemes will make a difference to food security and public health post pandemic situation.
- It has been observed that “the social safety net provided by the expansion of India’s food subsidy program and unified health scheme absorbed a major part of the pandemic shock.

Critical assessment of changes and overall schemes:

- Political-election freebies: In the months prior to the latest extension made in late September 2022, there was much debate on the relevance of freebies. Critics point out that the scheme’s extension is with an eye on the elections in 2023.

- Expensive: It's very expensive for the government to sustain and increases the need for an abundant supply health service and cheap grains. In 2022, India has had to restrict exports of wheat and rice after erratic weather hurt harvest, adding to pressure on food prices, and rattling global agricultural markets.
- Increase Fiscal Deficit: It could pose a risk to the government's target to further narrow the fiscal deficit to 6.4% of gross domestic product.
- Inadequate Health Capacities: The ill-equipped public sector health capacities calls for necessary partnerships and coalitions with private sector providers. In such circumstances, the provision of services can be ensured only if the providers are held accountable for their services.
- The Expenditure Department at the Centre did not favour it, citing a funds crunch. It also held the view that such a scheme was no longer needed "in non-pandemic times".

### Conclusion

Even in regular times, access to nutritious food and health security is essential. Pandemic or not, access to affordable and safe food and health should not be an uncertainty for any section of the society.

**2. How effective are existing legal frameworks, such as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, in preventing and punishing discrimination and violence against vulnerable groups? Is there room for improvement? If yes, what? Explain.**

### Approach

Candidates can start the answer by writing basics on PoA or its objective and also highlight the effectiveness of the act in curbing the discrimination also write the drawbacks with some suggestions to improve in the end.

### Introduction

The Act lists various offenses relating to various patterns or behaviours inflicting criminal offenses and breaking the self-respect and esteem of the scheduled castes and tribes' community, which includes denial of economic, democratic, and social rights, discrimination, exploitation, and abuse of the legal process.

### Body

PoA, was enacted to protect the marginalized communities against discrimination and atrocities:

- Awareness: The POA has improved awareness regarding different types of atrocities faced by SCs and STs = ensured the reduction in the crime rate because of resultant legal punishment.
- Change in Mindset: The act has created a positive change in the mindset of upper caste towards SCs and STs.
- Empowerment: POA has improved the political participation of Dalits. SCs and STs are now able to avail better education and health facilities without much discrimination. The act has helped Dalits economically by increasing access to grants and finances from the government without any discrimination. Thus, the act has ensured the inclusive development of the Indian economy.
- Ensuring rights: The act has increased awareness among SC/ST about various rights provided by the constitution. The act has ensured Right to Equality as guaranteed under the Fundamental Rights of Indian Constitution. The act has helped in protecting the unique identity and traditional practices of these communities.

Some of the facts that raise questions over the effectiveness of the SC/ST PoA Act:

- POA act is among the most misused laws in India. Many use this act to settle a personal score or to defame some innocent person.
- Increase in crimes: As per the NCRB report, 2019, Crimes against members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes communities increased by 7.3% and 26.5% respectively in 2019.
- State-wise: Uttar Pradesh has the most number of cases of crime against SCs – 11,829 cases, which is 25.8% of the total such cases in the country followed by Rajasthan with 6,794 cases (14.8% of all cases), Bihar (14.2%), and Madhya Pradesh (11.5%).
- Conviction rate: According to a status report on the implementation of the PoA Act, released by the National Dalit Movement for Justice (NDMJ), over the decade prior to 2018, the average conviction rate under (Prevention of Atrocities) Act for cases of atrocities against Dalits and Adivasis remained at 25.2% and 22.8% respectively.
- Legal system: Consequently, there has been a huge backlog of cases pertaining to atrocity crimes and a slow process of resolving them. The Special Courts are not adequately resourced.

Scope of improvement:

- Registration of Cases: Standard Operating Procedure (SoP) should be developed for filing and investigating cases so that there is no confusion or doubt among the investigators about the procedure to be followed.
- Training and Capacity building of judges, lawyers, and policemen is required in these types of cases
- Prosecution: Successful prosecution of genuine cases by the lawyers must be rewarded.
- Research: There is a requirement for research into the types of punishment, as an alternative to imprisonment that can prevent future crimes by individuals or communities.

**Conclusion**

Laws alone cannot realize the vision of our constitution-makers it requires the educational and economic advancement of the backward communities like SCs and STs in India and educational reforms all over the country so that root cause of the discrimination can be dealt with.

**Q-3-What measures can be taken to improve accountability and transparency of welfare schemes for vulnerable populations. And ensure that resources allocated for these schemes reach their intended beneficiaries? Share your thoughts.**

### **Approach**

In this question candidates need to write their thoughts on what measures can be taken to improve accountability and transparency for welfare schemes for vulnerable population and ensure that schemes reach their intended beneficiaries .

### **Introduction**

India is considered to be a welfare state and government bring schemes that play a crucial role in solving many socioeconomic problems in Indian society, however measures need to taken to improve accountability and transparency in these schemes and ensuring that these schemes reached to intended beneficiaries.

### **Body**

Measures taken to improve unacceptability and transparency of welfare schemes -

- Transparency and accountability in governance may lead to significant changes in work culture, resulting in more concern for society.
- Information: Accountability and transparency provide a new method of giving real-time information through an online dashboard. This not only answers people's issues, but it also improves service quality.

Initiatives To Enhance Transparency In India

- Right to Information Act, Right to Public Service Legislation, Citizens Charters, e-Governance, and e-procurement are some of India's major initiatives to improve transparency.

Right to Information (RTI) Act:

- It is an act of the Indian Parliament that establishes the laws and procedures for citizens' access to information. It took the place of the previous Freedom of Information Act of 2002.
- Under the RTI Act, any Indian citizen may seek information from a "public authority" (a government entity or "state instrumentality"), which is supposed to respond promptly or within thirty days.

Right to Public Services legislation:

- It consists of statutory laws that ensure timely delivery of services for a variety of government services provided to citizens, as well as a system for disciplining errant public servants who fail to provide the service required by the statute.

Citizen's Charter:

- A Citizens' Charter represents the commitment of the Organization towards standard, quality, and time frame of service delivery, grievance redress mechanism, transparency, and accountability.

E-Governance:

- It is defined as the use of information and communication technology (ICT) at all levels of government to provide citizens with services, interact with businesses, and communicate and exchange information between different government departments in a timely, efficient, and transparent manner.

E-Procurement:

- Central Public Procurement Portal is a robust and secured platform offering full transparency in public procurement for the Government of India, most States, and Local Governments across India.

Initiatives To Enhance Accountability In India

- Lokpal and Lokayukta
- In the Republic of India, a Lokpal is an anti-corruption authority or ombudsman agency that represents the public interest.
- Lokayukta, is appointed by and for each of India's State Governments.
- Lokpal has jurisdiction over the central government to investigate charges of corruption against its public officials and other corruption-related matters.
- Lokayukta comes into action in a state after the state legislature passes the Lokayukta Act and a person with a good reputation is nominated for the position and demonstrating the availability of justice to socially disadvantaged parties

Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS):

- Public Problems Redressal is one of the hallmark efforts for governance reform launched by the Indian central government by addressing the grievances of the general public.
- The Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances established CPGRAMS in June 2007.
- Any citizen of India can use the public grievance process to bring their problems, grievances, or requests to the attention of national and state government Ministries and Departments.

Initiatives for ensuring schemes reached to intended beneficiaries -

Persons with Disabilities

Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan:

- Accessible India Campaign or Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan is a program that is launched by the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) to serve the differently-able community of the country.
- The program comes with an index to measure the design of disabled-friendly buildings and human resource policies.

Women-

- Swadhar Greh Scheme:
- Implemented by the Ministry of Women and Child Development
- For rehabilitation of women in difficult circumstances.

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- The scheme covers women who are deserted and without any social and economic support, women victims of domestic violence, family tension, and natural disaster

### MGNREGA:

- The major objective of MGNREGS is to enhance employment opportunities and increase wage rates to provide livelihood security for the poor, vulnerable and marginalized leading to a reduction of poverty in rural areas.

### Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana:

- The financial inclusion program of the Government of India open to Indian citizens, which aims to expand affordable access to financial services such as bank accounts, remittances, credit, insurance, and pensions.

### Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana:

- Flagship scheme of the Government of India to extend affordable credit to micro and small enterprises.

### Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana:

- To provide free access to healthcare for 40% of people in the country.
- PMJAY aims to provide healthcare to 10.74 crore poor families.
- Aims to help economically vulnerable Indians who require healthcare facilities

### Street vendors-

- PM Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi):
- To empower street vendors by not only extending loans to them but also for their holistic development and economic upliftment.

### Homeless-

- Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana:
- Aims to provide houses for the homeless.
- It also offers an interest subsidy for home loans for first-time buyers in urban areas.

### National Social Assistance Programme:

- It is a welfare program being administered by the Ministry of Rural Development.
- Provides financial assistance to the elderly, widows, and persons with disabilities in the form of social pensions.

### PM-KISAN Scheme:

- PM Kisan is a Central Sector Scheme with 100% funding from the Government of India.
- Under the scheme, income support of 6,000/- per year in three equal installments will be provided to small and marginal farmer families having combined landholding/ownership of up to 2 hectares.
- The fund will be directly transferred to the bank accounts of the beneficiaries.

### Conclusion-

The poor implementation of social schemes in the State have resulted in wasteful government expenditure and limited access to beneficiaries, government entitlements should reach all intended beneficiaries, without leaving anyone out. But the government will have to bridge two major gaps in the country's social protection delivery in order to achieve it: information and accountability.

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