



Equitable Development

This editorial is based on [“To Develop Equitably, Address Five Priorities”](#) which was published in Hindustan Times on 07/04/2022. It talks about challenges to equitable development.

For Prelims: Sustainable Development, World Health Organisation, WHO’s New Air Quality Guidelines, Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), Antimicrobial Resistance, WHO WASH Strategy, Climate Change, Right to Health, Renewable Energy, Labour Force Participation, Unemployment.

For Mains: Government Policies & Interventions in Various Sectors - health, gender, education, poverty, economy, Employment - causes of lack of employment, Inclusive Growth - about, elements and need.

The [Covid-19 pandemic](#) has exposed the **inequitable and unsustainable systems** in which people across the world live and work, consume and exist. The pandemic, on the other hand, also highlighted that if **decision-making is transparent**, evidence-based and inclusive, people will support bold and far-reaching policies that protect their health, families and livelihoods.

The world is at a pivotal moment right now; the decisions we make now can either “lock in” development patterns that do permanent and escalating damage to the ecological systems, or they can **promote a healthier, fairer, and greener world**. The need is to collectively raise our voice and **proactively respond to protect our planet, health, and future**.

How is Equitable Development being Compromised?

- **Poor Air Quality:** Globally, over [90% of people breathe unhealthy air](#), resulting in around **seven million deaths every year**.
 - Globally, **two-thirds of exposure** to outdoor air pollution results from the burning of the same **fossil fuels that are driving climate change**, which between 2030 and 2050 is expected to cause an **additional 250,000 deaths annually**.
- **Unsustainable Food Systems:** Food systems that are **unsafe, unhealthy and unsustainable cause** millions of **premature deaths annually**, primarily from [Non-Communicable Diseases \(NCDs\)](#), and are a leading contributor to climate change and [antimicrobial resistance](#) – two of the greatest health risks facing humanity.
- **Inadequate Water and Sanitation Facilities:** In 2020, around **one in four people globally lacked safely managed drinking water** in their homes, and just 50% of health care facilities in least-developed countries provided basic water services.
 - Poor quality drinking water can lead to **acute waterborne disease** and risks exposure to **toxic chemicals such as arsenic**.
 - Inadequate access to [water, sanitation and hygiene \(WASH\)](#) in health care facilities makes health care less effective and has a disproportionate impact **on women and girls**.
- **Environmental Concerns:** In total, the [World Health Organisation \(WHO\)](#) estimates that more than **13 million deaths each year are due to avoidable environmental causes** – a

figure that we cannot and must not accept.

- This includes the **climate crisis** which is the **single biggest health threat facing humanity**.
- **Poverty and Unemployment:** The present design of the economy leads to **inequitable distribution of income**, wealth and power, with too many people still living in poverty, unemployment and instability.
 - According to data from the **Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE)**, [India's unemployment rate reached as high as 7.9%](#) in December 2021.

How can We Ensure Equitable and Sustainable Development?

- **Prioritising Health:** Prioritising **equitable health now and for future generations** – including through long-term investments, **well-being budgets, social protection, legal and fiscal strategies** – we can build “well-being societies” that facilitate human flourishing, and fulfil every person’s **right to health** and development, **without breaching ecological limits**.
 - The target should be to achieve a region and world in which **clean air, water and food are available to all**, where **economies promote physical and mental health** and well-being, where **cities are liveable**, and where people have control over their own health and that of the planet.
- **Protect and Preserve Nature:** Policies that **reduce deforestation, promote afforestation**, and **end intensive and polluting agricultural practices** can improve air quality, strengthen food systems, and promote sustainable farming and forest management.
 - They **reduce the risk of emerging infectious diseases**, over 60% of which originate from animals.
- **Investments in Essential Services:** The countries must continue to protect drinking water supplies by **implementing multi-sectoral water safety plans** and including **WASH in relevant health policies**, strategies and programmes, with a focus on increasing **access at the primary health care level**.
 - The countries must continue to build **climate-resilient health facilities** that not only respond to and withstand environmental health threats, but also **promote environmentally sustainable practices**.
- **Investments in Education:** A **healthy demand for skilled workers and high-tech jobs** will offer great opportunities for India’s growth, but India can only take advantage of this opportunity if Indians have the **required knowledge and skills**.
 - The country has made phenomenal progress in **enrolment in basic education** but there is **work to be done to improve the quality of teaching** and ensure students are learning necessary skills.
- **Energy Transition:** While the countries are making commendable efforts to expand **renewable energy sources**, increased action is needed, and must be accompanied by **rigorous enforcement of air quality standards**, as well as increased **investments in public transportation** infrastructure.
- **Promote Healthy and Sustainable Food Systems:** Diseases caused by a lack of access to food, or consumption of unhealthy, high calorie diets, are a major contributor to NCDs.
 - The WHO and the associated intergovernmental bodies and the countries together shall identify and implement **high-impact and cost-effective “best buys”** that **transform the food environment**, from food reformulation and labelling, to **increased taxation of unhealthy foods** and beverages, and its **strengthened restrictions on marketing**, especially to children.
- **Build Healthy, Liveable Cities:** In this regard, the **WHO Urban Governance for Health and Well-Being initiative**, which aims to strengthen country capacities to promote health and address health inequities, can assist in doing the needful.
 - The policymakers can **expand cycleways** and increase the **provision of green and healthy spaces** to reduce **greenhouse emissions** and road traffic injuries, increase physical activity, and **promote mental health**.
- **Bringing Social Change - Gender Equality:** Indian women are healthier and better educated than they have ever been before, but because of gender norms, their **rate of labour force participation** is among the **lowest in the world** (about 25%), and it is actually dropping.
 - Gender inequality is keeping educated, energetic women from building the Indian economy. Reversing this trend by providing them **job opportunities**, better and safer

transportation facilities will not only **empower individual women** but also unlock huge opportunities for the country.

Drishti Mains Question

“The world is at a pivotal moment right now; we can make decisions that either cause permanent damage to our ecology or promote a healthier, fairer, and greener world. It is us who will have to proactively respond to protect our planet, health, and future”. Comment.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs):

Q. What is Rio+20 Conference, often mentioned in the news? (2015)

- (a) It is the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.
- (b) It is a Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organisation.
- (c) It is a Conference of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.
- (d) It is a Conference of the Member Countries of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Ans: (a)

Q. The Partnership for Action on Green Economy (PAGE), a UN mechanism to assist countries transition towards greener and more inclusive economies, emerged at (2018)

- (a) The Earth Summit on Sustainable Development 2002, Johannesburg.
- (b) The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development 2012, Rio de Janeiro.
- (c) The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change 2015, Paris.
- (d) The World Sustainable Development Summit 2016, New Delhi.

Ans: (b)

Q. Consider the following statements: (2016)

1. The Sustainable Development Goals were first proposed in 1972 by a global think tank called the 'Club of Rome'.
2. The Sustainable Development Goals have to be achieved by 2030.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans: (b)