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The crisis ahead, from learning loss to resumption (The Hindu, GS-1,2)

Context:- Covid-19 posed a threat which resulted in lockdown of society and economy. School closure led to a great loss in nutritional intake and schooling for the poorest sections of our society. This thing seems a distance apart when schools will resume?. There is a fundamental question in front of us i.e if our schools were to reopen tomorrow, are we prepared for their resumption? Will it be merely business as it was before the COVID-19?

Let's explore:-

Some facts about digital divide:-

- 95% of the children in the age group of 6-13 years are attending educational institutions (formal and informal).
- UNESCO estimates based on the 2011 Census record 38.1 million children as "out of school"
- There is a differential access to digital technology.

- According to (GSMA) estimates over 390 million women in low and middle income countries do not have Internet access.
- Only 14.9% of women were reported to be using the Internet in India.
- According to current data with the government nearly 17% more men than women have been vaccinated.
- For an example:- when families share a digital device then it will be more likely that the father or sons will be allowed to use it exclusively.
- Patriarchal mindset thinks that women's access to technology will motivate them to challenge patriarchal societies.
- In our society there is also a belief that women need to be protected.
- Most technologies that are currently available to the common man are created by men, for men, and do not necessarily meet everyone's requirements.

There is a disruption in education:-

- India has promoted online classes and connectivity as the solution because physical contact between teachers and children has not been possible.

Issues in digital Education:-

- There is a lack of connectivity as well as a lack of access to e-devices or digital devices due to this only a fraction of children has had online education of any kind.
- The quality of online education is largely abysmal.
- The percentage of teachers in the country who are capable of handling digital platforms and digital content for pedagogic purposes is very small.
- The educational material which was used in a physical classroom has been reproduced in online education as well.
- The teaching learning processes have been very poor which hurt the most disadvantaged section.

- Many studies in the last year have documented a loss of learning in children.
 - In the Netherlands along with equitable school funding and excellent broadband access because of short lockdown, researchers found that among eight to 11 year olds, “students made little or no progress while learning from home”
 - In Netherlands “learning loss was most pronounced among students from disadvantaged homes”
 - A multi-state study in the USA depicts that the pandemic “has also prompted some students to leave the public school system altogether”.
 - According to a study by the Azim Premji Foundation on children in the age group six to 11 years, 92% of children on average have lost at least one specific language ability from the previous year across all classes and 82% when it comes to mathematical ability.

What is the solution being employed to current lethargic situation of education:-

- Age appropriate enrolment, as guaranteed under the Right to Education Act, is being uniformly implemented. But this has not been ensured across India, with many States not taking up enrolment for this year as yet.

International experience

- To repeat the entire academic year in one way of addressing the learning crisis.
- Philippines allowed the extended time for classes on resumption both in duration of school hours and more calendar days of interaction.

- The other approach can be to reduce and synthesize the curriculum so that students are able to focus on a few subjects and learn them well'
- One to one tutoring or one to one teaching for the most disadvantaged learners has been taken up in many countries.
- National Tutoring Programme can be a way forward as it is in the United Kingdom for which the government has announced funding to the tune of £350 million.
- Ghana has also announced a national programme of tutoring to help it's students
- There are many such programmes in different States in the U.S at the same way In Italy the university students are volunteering to conduct one one one classes for middle school children.
- An accelerated education programme or "bridge courses" which condense several months into a few weeks or months, are another option.
- The advice is to go with exposure to age level grade level content, and plug the holes where necessary.
- **Some scientist argues:-**
 - There is nothing like learning loss" rather students have to learned a great deal about life, home economy, health as we have seen during the pandemic that cannot be measured by standardised tests.

Way forward:-

- "The curriculum should not be seen as a fixed list of content that must all be covered before the learner can leave school. If the curriculum can be seen as a map, as a landscape, there is always plenty of time to explore."

- We are racing through the syllabus to “catch up” but the Children who cannot keep up would simply be left behind. This great disaster has to be eliminated.
- The Teachers who are without preparation, handling such a new context, can only fall back on covering the syllabus, leading to the alienation of already marginalised students.
- We have to have a vast body of volunteers which will engage with small groups of children from the most disadvantaged sections, working in tandem with schools, which will need to focus on safety measures and average performance
- It is very critical that we should not reduce education to foundational literacy and numeracy; rather we should treat the children as they are, study the experiences they bring, and address their nutritional, emotional and intellectual well being as a whole.

Swarn Singh

Re- designing of partnership with Africa

GS PAPER-2, Indian Foreign Policy

Source- The Hindu

CONTEXT:

1. India has a very long history of partnership and engagement with Africa, with unity, solidarity and political affinity going back to the early 1920s when both regions were struggling against colonial rule and oppression.
2. India's freedom movement had an internationalist discourse; many Indian nationalists viewed the struggle and fight for independence as a body of the worldwide movement against imperialism.
3. As soon as India gained independence, it became a rising voice in support of African decolonisation at the United Nations General Assembly.
4. Free India, though suffering from poverty after two centuries of colonial exploitation, strived to share its very limited resources with African countries under the slogan of South-South cooperation.
5. In 1964, India launched the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme to make available technical assistance for human resource development to other developing countries, although African countries are the greatest beneficiaries of it and one of the Commonwealth African Assistance Programme (SCAAP).

India's engagement with the African continent:

1. Historical unity is today a new partnership. Critical to its foreign policy, India's engagement with the African continent has been multifaceted and multi-phased, with projects implemented under Indian lines of credit, capacity-building initiatives, skill development and cooperation in a range of sectors.
2. As an importer of fruits, vegetables, nuts, grains and pulses from the continent, Indian congruence with African countries in the agriculture sector is expanding and spreading.
3. With 65% of the world's uncultivated arable land, employing over 60% of the manpower, and accounting for almost 20% of Sub-Saharan Africa's GDP, agriculture is critical to Africa's economy and growth.
4. The African Continental Free Trade Area agreement is expected to emerge as cost-competitive by removing tariffs.
5. As this relationship enters the after covid world, it is important to prioritise and channel resources into growing partnerships in agriculture.
6. This is crucial given its improved unexplored potential, centrality to global food security, skill development, business prospects and to provide credible alternatives to the increasing involvement of Chinese partnership in the sector.

India-Africa continent: Economic Relations:

1. India is currently Africa's fourth-largest trading partner globally and Africa's third-largest export source.
2. Indian government programmes like Focus Africa (2002), TEAM-9 (2004), Duty-Free Tariff Preference Scheme for Least Developed Countries (2008), and the institution of the India Africa Forum Summit (held in 2008, 2011, 2015), became very successful in lifting bilateral trade and investment flows to new horizons of the sky.
3. After South Asian nation, Africa is the second-largest recipient of Indian overseas assistance with Lines of Credit (LOC) which is nearly \$10 billion (42 per cent of the total) spread over 100 projects in 41 countries globally.
4. It is an economic cooperation treaty between India and Japan that envisages closer engagement and dialogue between Asia and Africa for "sustainable and innovative development" and will be administered by these pillars.

Analysing Chinese engagement:

1. Evaluating and analysing the approaches that Chinese corporations, small and medium-sized enterprises and entrepreneurs adopt has provided a layered and structured perspective of the socio-political, economic, cultural and environmental impact of Chinese engagement.
2. Today, China is among Africa's largest growing trading partners. It is also Africa's one of the biggest creditors.
3. Its corporations dominate the region's infrastructure and manufacturing market and are now entering the agri-infra sector.

4. Increasingly critical to China's global aspirations and dream, its engagement in African agriculture is taking on strategic quality measures.
5. Therefore, dismissing China's engagement in African agriculture as inconsequential and irrelevant for India would not be wise.

Chinese Engagements in Africa:

1. Many Chinese entities have been very active in Africa's agricultural land for decades now, the nature, form and actors involved have achieved substantial change.
2. In Zambia, Chinese firms are introducing and engaging agri-tech to combat and control traditional challenges, such as using drone technology to control the fall of armyworm infestation.
3. They have set up over 20 Agricultural Technology Demonstration and testing Centers (ATDCS) in the continent where Chinese agronomists work on developing new high yielding crop varieties and increasing crop yields.
4. These ATDCs partner with these local universities, conduct workshops, seminars and classes for officials and provide training and lease equipment to smallholder farmers.
5. Chinese companies and firms with no prior experience in agriculture are setting out to build futuristic ecological parks while others are purchasing large-scale commercial farms.
6. Furthermore, African agriculture experts, officials, scientists and farmers are granted the opportunities to augment skills and be trained in China.

Takeaways for India:

- India-Africa agricultural cooperation currently includes institutional, organisational and individual capacity-building initiatives such as the India-Africa Institute of Agriculture and Rural Development in Africa, an extension of soft loans, supply of machinery, acquisition of farmlands and the presence of Indian entrepreneurs in the African agricultural ecosystem and many more.
- Indian farmers have purchased over 6,00,000 hectares of agricultural land for commercial farming in Africa.
- Sub-national actors and stakeholders are providing another model of cooperation in agriculture.

How Africa engagement will help India:

1. Strengthening the India-South Africa partnership is important in the context of Africa's development, especially to provide many alternatives to the China model.
2. The fast-growing and fast prospering population of Africa will present them as a major opportunity for the whole of the world.
3. India has historic and cultural ties with several countries of the continent, such as the nearly 1.5 million people of Indian origin in South Africa, which would help India make good on that front.
4. Their problems and aspirations put India and a variety of African countries on the same side of multinational attempts to tackle various global challenges such as climate change, keeping trade open and avoiding superpower domination.
5. India and South Africa give these efforts an institutional and organisational framework through forums such as the G20, the Indian Ocean Rim Association, BRICS and IBSA.
6. Robust maritime security in the Indian Ocean is not of just bilateral significance.

7. The defence relationship, having a larger focus on joint production as well as maritime security, is also going to be a priority and very important in the future.

Conclusion:

- India has a vital interest in helping Africa achieve progress. The spirit of “developing together as equals” defines this bilateral partnership.
- A resurging Africa and a rising India can present a strong impetus to South-South Cooperation, especially when it comes to tackling challenges in areas like clean-green technology, climate-resilient agriculture, maritime security, connectivity, and Blue economy.
- China’s model, if successful here, could be stated as a replica of the larger global south.
- It is important to understand, however, that prominent African voices have put emphasis that their own agency is often overlooked and analysed in the global discourse on the subject.
- In that sense, India has already chosen well to underline and emphasise the development partnership to be in line with African priorities.
- It is pertinent and very important, therefore, that we collectively craft a unique modern partnership with the African nations.

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