Current National Issues and Topics of Social Relevance

1. GOI and World Bank Sign an Agreement to Improve Livelihoods In North East

- The Government of India and the World Bank on January 20, 2012 signed an IDA credit of 130 million US dollars to finance the project called **NERLP(North East Rural Livelihoods Project)**, to empower rural communities in the growth-deficient North East (NE) region to improve their livelihood opportunities.
- The North East Rural Livelihoods Project (NERLP) will enhance the livelihoods of the rural poor, especially women, unemployed youth and the severely disadvantaged in eight districts of the four participating states- Aizawl and Lunglei in **Mizoram**; Peren and Tuensang. in **Nagaland**; South, West and 15 Panchayat wards of East District in **Sikkim**; and West and North Districts in **Tripura**.
- The Project seeks to develop an institutional platform for the communities, which will help them link up with the private sector, public sector, and civil Society and to acquire the **institutional, technical, and financial capacity** needed for improving their livelihoods.
- Global development experience shows that absolute poverty can be overcome by equipping a member of the household (especially a youth) with employable skills.
- A separate activity for **skills development and job placement** has thus been included in the project to ensure that such opportunities are available to the rural poor.
- Some livelihood opportunities envisaged under the Project include **natural resource management activities** such as forest management, non-timber forest produce storage and processing, horticulture, preservation of riverine fishes, water harvesting and recharging of ground/surface water in the villages; community-based infrastructure activities like upgrading of small agricultural link roads, micro hydro-power schemes, wind-cum-solar mills, to name a few.
- The Project comprises **four main components** (i) Social Empowerment; (ii) Economic Empowerment; [iii) Partnership Development and (Iv) Project Management.
- **Social Empowerment**: The first component seeks to help rural communities to create sustainable institutions so that they can manage common activities around microfinance, livelihoods and natural resource management.

- **Economic Empowerment:** The second component will provide funds to the community institutions to undertake various livelihood activities, as well as provide self-entrepreneurship opportunities to unemployed youth.
- **Partnership Development:** To enable this, the Project with help develop partnerships with various formal financial intermediaries such as microfinance institutions, commercial banks, development financial institutions such as National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD)and Small Industries Development Bank of India(SIDBI), and specialized funding agencies such as North East Development Finance Institution (NEDFI) - and with the private sector and civil Society to allow rural communities to access technical and marketing support.
- **The project management** component facilitates the implementation, coordination, monitoring and evaluation, learning and quality enhancement efforts of the project.

2.Union Cabinet Approves National Policy on NDPS

- The Union Cabinet of India on 12 January 2012 approved the Narcotics Drugs and psychotropic Substances .(NDPS) policy, with the objective of checking illicit production of psychotropic substances, curb drug abuse and stop trafficking of such items.
- The new policy will help in controlling the proliferation of black money. The Cabinet meeting was chaired by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.
- The NDPS policy will lead to **reduction in crime** and **improvement in public health**. It aims at **social re-integration** of victims of drug abuse.
- The salient features of the policy are as follows:
  1. The policy recommends production of **Concentrate of Poppy Straw (CPS)** in India by a company or body corporate. This would enable India to retain its status of a traditional supplier of Opiate Raw Material (ORM)to the rest of world, while remaining competitive. .
  2. The consumption of poppy straw by addicts will be gradually reduced and finally stopped in a time frame decided by the States.
  3. On the **illicit cultivation of poppy and cannabis**, the policy emphasizes use of **satellite imageries** for detection of illicit crop and its subsequent eradication and development of alternate means of livelihood in respect of cultivators in pockets of traditional illicit cultivation.
  4. **The private sector** may be allowed production of **alkaloids from opium**. At present alkaloids from opium are produced only in Government Opium and Alkaloid Factories (GOAFs).
  5. Non-intrusive methods of regulating the manufacture, trade and use of such psychotropic substances will be introduced.
  6. Emphasis will be laid on adequate **access to morphine** and other opioids necessary for **palliative care**, a strategy to address street peddlers of

drugs, periodic surveys of drug abuse to gauge the extent, pattern and nature of drug abuse in the country, recognition of de-addiction centers,

7. There will be a **time bound plan of action**, detailing the steps to be taken by different Ministries/ Departments/ agencies, in response to the recommendations of the International Narcotics Control Board.

- The policy attempts to curb the menace of drug abuse and contains provisions for treatment, rehabilitation and social re-integration of victims of drug abuse. Implementation of the provisions of the policy will lead to reduction of crime, improvement in public health and uplifting of the social milieu.

3.Hunger and Malnutrition Survey Report 2011 Released

- This report is prepared by Hyderabad-based Naandi Foundation.
- The **HUNGaMA** (Hunger and Malnutrition) Survey conducted across **112 rural districts** of India in 2011, provides reliable estimates of child nutrition covering nearly 20%of Indian children. Of the 112 districts surveyed, 100 were selected from the bottom of a child development district index developed for UNICEF India in 2009, referred to as the 100 focus districts in this report. These 100 districts are located in 6 states.
- The HUNGaMA Survey shows that positive change for child nutrition in India is happening, including in the 100 focus districts. However, **rates of child malnutrition** are still unacceptably high particularly in these focus districts where over 40 per cent of children are underweight and almost 60 per cent are stunted, meaning their height is much lower than the median height-for-age of the reference population.
- The 100 focus districts are located across **Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh** - states which perform the worst on child nutrition.
- The survey notes that the prevalence of malnutrition is significantly higher among children from **low-income families**. It is found that children from **Muslim or SC/ST households** generally had worse nutrition Indicators, .
- **Birth weight** is an important risk-factor for child malnutrition. The prevalence of underweight in children born with a weight **below 2.5 kg is 50 per cent**, while that among children born with a weight above 2.5 kg is 34 per cent.
- The survey further found that **awareness among mothers** about nutrition is low 392 per cent mothers had never heard the word malnutrition:
- Highlighting the negligence shown towards **girl children** even in their early childhood, the report says the nutrition advantage girls have over boys in the first months of life seems to be reversed over time as they grow older.
- The last such data released in 2004, from a district level health survey had measured malnutrition only in terms of weight, and had concluded that 53 per cent children in these districts were underweight.

- Among the worst districts as per the new data are Malkangiri in Odisha with 57.75 per cent and Aurangabad in Bihar with 49.47 per cent children underweight. Shrawasti in Uttar Pradesh with 72.31 per cent, Rae Bareli with 70.40 per cent, Koraput in Odisha with 68.86 per cent and Dumka in Jharkhand with 63.65 per cent have the highest number of stunted children.

4.Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY)

- It is a monetary scheme for pregnant women and lactating mothers — on a pilot basis in 52 districts in this Five-Year Plan.
- Each pregnant and lactating woman will receive Rs. 4,000 in three instalments between the second trimester of pregnancy until the child is six months old.
- Each beneficiary has to open an individual account (if she does not have one already) in the nearest bank or the post office for cash transfer.
- The scheme, to be implemented through the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme infrastructure and personnel, will cost Rs. 1,000 crore. Some personnel will be hired on a contractual basis.
- The scheme will be **fully funded by the Centre and** Rs. 390 crore and Rs. 610 crore have been allocated for 2010-11 and 2011-12 respectively.
- Government employees and Central and State Public Sector employees have been excluded from the scheme as they are entitled to paid maternity leave.

5.Sabla' or the 'Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Adolescent Girls'

- Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram launched a special scheme for the well-being and overall empowerment of adolescent girls.
- The scheme has been launched as a pilot project in 200 most backward districts.
- 'Sabla' or the 'Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Adolescent Girls' would be launched in 22 districts of Uttar Pradesh, 15 in Madhya Pradesh, 12 each in Bihar and Sikkim, 11 in Maharashtra, and 10 in Rajasthan.
- To be based on the Integrated Child Development Services platform, the scheme would address the nutritional and special training aspects of girls aged 11-18.
- An integrated package of services will be provided to adolescent girls. It includes nutrition provision of 600 calories and 18-20 grams of protein and micronutrients, at a rate of Rs. 5 a beneficiary a day for 300 days a year.