ASHA Workers

Why in news?

The WHO has recognised India's 10.4 lakh Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) as 'Global Health Leaders'.

Who are ASHA workers?

> *The ASHA programme was based on Chhattisgarh's successful Mitanin programme, in which a Community Worker looks after 50 households.*

- ASHA workers are volunteers from within the community who are trained to provide information and aid people in accessing benefits of various healthcare schemes of the government.
- They act as a bridge connecting marginalised communities with facilities such as primary health centres, sub-centres and district hospitals.
- **Role -** The role of these community health volunteers under the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) was first established in 2005.
- **Eligibility**- ASHAs are
    - primarily married, widowed, or divorced women between the ages of 25 and 45 years from within the community
    - must have good communication and leadership skills
    - should be literate with formal education up to Class 8, as per the programme guidelines
- **Aim**- The aim is to have one ASHA for every 1,000 persons or per habitation in hilly, tribal or other sparsely populated areas.
- **Presence**- There are around 10.4 lakh ASHA workers across the country, with the largest workforces in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh.
- Goa is the only state with no such workers, as per the latest National Health Mission data available from September 2019.
- **Salary**- Since ASHA workers are considered volunteers, governments are not obligated to pay them a salary and most states don't.
- Their income depends on incentives under various schemes and all this adds up between Rs 6,000 to Rs 8,000 a month.

What is the role of ASHA workers?

- Go door-to-door in their designated areas creating awareness about basic nutrition, hygiene practices, and the health services available
- Focus primarily on ensuring that women undergo ante-natal check-up, maintain nutrition during pregnancy, deliver at a healthcare facility, and provide post-birth training on breast-feeding and complementary nutrition of children
- Counsel women about contraceptives and sexually transmitted infections

- Motivate children to get immunized
- Provide medicines daily to TB patients under directly observed treatment of the national programme
- Screen for infections like malaria during the season
- Provide basic medicines and therapies to people under their jurisdiction such as oral rehydration solution, chloroquine for malaria, iron folic acid tablets to prevent anaemia, and contraceptive pills
- Get people tested and get their reports for non-communicable diseases
- Tasked with informing their respective primary health centre about any births or deaths in their designated areas

How did the ASHA network help in pandemic response?

- During the pandemic, when everyone was scared of the infection, ASHA workers had to perform a myriad of functions.
    - Check people for Covid-19 symptoms
    - Inform the authorities and help the people reach the quarantine centres
    - Explain the quarantine procedure to the people
    - Provide the patients with medicines and pulse-oximeters
    - Motivate people to get their vaccination shots
    - Collect data on how many people are yet to get vaccinated

What are the issues of concern?

- They get performance-based payments, not a fixed salary like government servants.
- In many states, the payout is low, and often delayed.
- They do not get any benefits like pension or health insurance.
- There have been agitations demanding employee status for ASHA workers.
- There is a strong argument to grant permanence to some of these positions with a reasonable compensation as sustaining motivation.

References

1. https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/asha-public-health-experiment-village-community-7932457/
2. https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-who-asha-workers-women-healthcare-volunteers-who-7932479/

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering