Learning Poverty Reduction

What is the issue?

- The World Bank (WB) introduced a new Learning Target, which aims to cut by at least half the global rate of Learning Poverty by 2030.
- Learning Poverty is defined as the percentage of 10-year-olds who cannot read and understand a simple story.

What is the current situation?

- More than half of all 10 year olds in low-income and middle-income countries cannot read and understand a simple story.
- **Learning Crisis** - We are in the middle of a global learning crisis.
- This stifles opportunities and aspirations of hundreds of millions of children which is unacceptable.
- It wastes the children's potential and also hurts entire economies.
- It will impact the future workforces and economic competitiveness negatively.

Why learning poverty should be eliminated?

- **Importance of Learning** - Learning to read is an especially critical skill which opens a world of possibilities.
- It is the foundation on which other essential learning is built.
- Wiping out learning poverty is an urgent matter.
- It is a key for eliminating poverty and boosting shared prosperity.
- **Stagnation** - But over the last several years, progress in reducing learning poverty has been stagnant.
- Between 2000 and 2017, there has only been a 10% improvement in learning outcomes for primary school-aged children globally.
- If this pace continues, 43% of 10-year-olds will not be able to read in 2030.

How this WB target is an ambitious but still an achievable one?

- The children who will turn 10 in 2030 will be born only in 2020 (next year), which is good news.
- If we work urgently, there is an opportunity to reverse this trend.
- The target set is ambitious but achievable and should galvanise action toward achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG4).

- SDG4 is ensuring quality education for all.
- It will require nearly **tripling the rate of progress worldwide**.
- This can be done if every country can match the performance of the countries that made the most progress between 2000 and 2015.
- Several countries are showing that it is possible.

What are some examples?

- **In India**, the Right-to-Education Act has been successful in increasing coverage and access to school education.
- But now there is an urgent need to shift the focus to quality.
- The decision of India to join the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the merger of schemes under Samagra Shiksha are encouraging signs that India is moving in this direction.
- **In Kenya**, the national reading programme has more than tripled the percentage of grade two students reading at an appropriate level.
- This was accomplished through technology-enabled teacher coaching, teacher guides, and delivering one book per child.

What are the challenges?

- The challenges of reducing learning poverty will differ between countries and regions.
- In some countries, access to school remains an enormous problem.
- In other countries, children are in classrooms but are not learning.

What are the steps taken to overcome these challenges?

- By setting a global target, the WB can work with countries to define their own national learning targets.
- Cutting learning poverty in half by 2030 is only an intermediate goal.
- The WB's ambition is to bring that number to zero.
- As the WB is the largest financier of education in low-and middle-income countries, it will work with countries to promote reading proficiency in primary schools.
- Policies include providing detailed guidance and practical training for teachers, ensuring access to more and better age-appropriate texts, and teaching children in the language they use at home.
- The WB is working with governments and development partners to improve entire education systems.
- So, advancements in literacy can be sustained and scaled up.
- An ambitious measurement and research agenda supports these efforts and includes,

1. Measurement of learning outcomes and their drivers,
2. Continued research and innovation, and
3. Smart use of new technologies on how to build foundation skills.

Source: The Hindu

