Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs)

Why in news?

According to a new World Health Organization (WHO) report, Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTD) disproportionately impact the most impoverished members of the international community.

What are Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs)?

- **NTDs** – Neglected tropical diseases are diseases which occur in the tropics, usually in the low middle income countries settings.
- NTDs are neglected because they are
    - Almost absent from the global health agenda
    - Receive little funding
    - Associated with stigma and social exclusion
- **Reasons** - Uncontrolled vector proliferation and lack of access to safe and clean drinking water are the major reasons.
- **List of NTDs** - NTDs comprises of a group of 20 conditions mainly prevalent in tropical areas — caused by various pathogens, including viruses, bacteria, parasites, fungi and toxins.
- **Effects** - NTDs are known to cause permanent disabilities and impact the mental and emotional health and well-being of people.

What are the findings of the WHO report?

> *According to the official site of World Neglected Tropical Disease Day, 1 in 5 people worldwide are affected by NTDs.*

- **WHO report -** The Global report on neglected tropical diseases 2023 highlighted the advancement and challenges in delivering NTD care worldwide against a backdrop of COVID-19-related disruptions.
- **Challenges** - Globally, nearly 1.65 billion people were estimated to require treatment for at least one NTD.
- Due to the tremendous effects COVID-19, 34% fewer persons received treatment for NTDs between 2019 and 2020.
- **Accomplishments** - More than one billion people were treated for NTDs annually between 2016 and 2019, thanks to mass treatment initiatives.
- In 2021, 25% fewer people needed treatments against NTDs than in 2010.

What about India's status in NTDs?

- **Status** - Based on 2020 data, WHO states that half of the population in India has been affected by one of the NTDs
- India has the highest burden in the world for Elephantiasis (Lymphatic Filariasis).
- India has highest burden for intestinal worms (soil-transmitted helminths).
- **Accomplishments** - India was the first country to end the epidemic of Yaws in 2015.
- India also met national elimination targets for Leprosy in 2005.
- It has made progress in elimination of Kala-Azar and Lymphatic Filariasis in endemic areas.

What steps were taken by the government to control NTDs?

- The Government of India is committed to end NTDs in line with global elimination and control targets.
- India is at the cusp of eliminating Kala-Azar, with 99% Kala-Azar endemic blocks having achieved the elimination target.
- **Preventive methods** - **Mass Drug Administration (MDA)** rounds are periodically deployed in endemic areas and medicines are provided free-of-cost to at-risk communities.
- **Vector-control measures** - **Indoor Residual Spraying** rounds are undertaken in endemic areas to prevent sandfly breeding.
- **The National Center for Vector Borne Diseases Control** (NCVBDC) aims for the prevention and control of vector borne diseases namely Malaria, Japanese Encephalitis, Dengue, Chikungunya, Kala-azar and Lymphatic Filariasis.
- **Wage compensation** - The government has introduced wage compensation schemes for those suffering from Kala-Azar and Post-Kala Azar Dermal Leishmaniasis.

What are the recommendations of the report?

- Greater efforts and investments are required to reverse delays and accelerate progress towards the NTD road map targets by 2030.
- WHO urged multi-sectoral collaboration and partnerships to achieve these targets.
- WHO has launched an NTD channel with 36 training courses on 19 different topics for healthcare professionals.
- An integrated approach in improving access to quality healthcare, water, sanitation, hygiene, addressing climate change and ensuring gender equity, mental health and well-being must lie at the core of eliminating the NTDs.

References

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