Rejig the Education System - WEF

Why in news?

Two reports of the World Economic Forum (WEF) - "Markets of Tomorrow" and "Jobs of Tomorrow" - throw light on different investment priorities for the government.

What is Indian government's priority areas for investments?

- Going by what the government of India is currently doing, the most important priority area for investments is to build infrastructure.
- In the next year's Budget, there will be no difference in its priorities than the ones which have preceded it the last few years.
- It is likely to be devoted to basically delivering minimum social welfare to the widest possible target group, while a lot of what is left will be used for building physical infrastructure like roads, railways, power networks.
- There will be a lot of noise about other critical areas - healthcare, education and research and development.
- But the real spend will be about enough to keep the show going, without creating appreciable change.

What does the WEF say?

- The World Economic Forum (WEF) thinks that the governments' priority needs a change.
- Two reports of the WEF - on the separate but interlinked topics of "Markets of Tomorrow" and "Jobs of Tomorrow" - throw up surprisingly different priorities and needs.

What does the "Markets of Tomorrow" report reveal?

- In "Markets of Tomorrow", the WEF surveyed 12,000 business leaders across 120 economies, and posed a question: "Which technologies are of strategic importance for your country in the next 10 years?"
- The answers were quite different from what government spending priorities would appear to indicate.
- According to the business leaders, the one sector which is likely to be strategically the most important, and likely to yield the highest dividends in terms of development, turned out to be agriculture.
- Globally, across developed, developing and low-income economies, **agricultural technologies** were viewed as the most important strategic priority.
- This was followed by **education and workforce development technologies**, and then power storage and generation.'

New market creation

- When asked which sectors where technological innovation might create new markets, the CEOs picked **IT and services** first.
- **Agriculture** was the second pick, followed by energy, particularly green and renewable energy generation and storage technologies.

Agricultural productivity

- The backdrop for agriculture is particularly challenging, given that global hunger reached record levels in 2021 in the wake of the Covid pandemic.
- Noting this backdrop, the report notes that an estimated increase of 28% in global agricultural productivity over the next decade is needed,
    - To achieve the UN's SDG-2 objective of zero hunger, and
    - To meet the Paris Agreement emissions targets.
- This is more than triple the productivity increase the world actually managed over the past decade.

What does the "Jobs of Tomorrow" report reveal?

- On the jobs front, WEF looked at 10 major economies - Australia, Brazil, China, Germany, India, Japan, South Africa, Spain, the UK and the US.
- It looked at these economies to see the kind and quantum of jobs which need to be created in order to deliver inclusive, equitable and sustainable development.
- It classified these needed jobs into two broad categories
    - "social" jobs (from education to healthcare and the like) and
    - "green" jobs (agriculture, forestry, fisheries, environmental management and the like).
- The report concluded that these 10 economies alone will have to create more than 68 million jobs in these sectors over the next decade.
- Even in basic agriculture work - agricultural, forestry and fishery workers and labourers - the current level of employment will have to increase by 52% over the next decade.

What is the status of jobs in India?

- In India, the 'unmet need' over the next decade in 'forestry and agricultural professionals and advisers, and life science technicians' would be 162% of current actual employment in these areas.
- Over the next decade, India would need 68% more 'production managers in agriculture, forestry and fisheries' than it has now.
- This might sound counter-intuitive in a country like India where
    - Nearly two-thirds of the population depends on agriculture, and
    - The principal challenge is to create enough jobs in manufacturing and services to move a large portion of this agriculture-dependent population into more "productive" and remunerative occupations.
- But the reality is that the huge pool which is living off **agriculture lacks the skills and the technological support** to actually be both productive and efficient at this.

What does India need?

- India is witnessing a boom in agri-tech innovation at the moment, which is both
  - Private sector driven - the mushrooming agri-tech start-ups and
  - Government driven - the government working on building an "agri-stack" of digital technologies to drive innovation as well as funding advance technologies like "Krishi drones" and the like.
- But at the user end - where these innovations will have to be implemented and used - we lack the skills to make this happen.
- This dovetails with the gaps in our education investment as well.
- It is all very well to talk of using technology to transform Indian agriculture, but first the Indian farmer needs to transform herself too.
- Indian farmer can transform through acquiring a much higher order of skills and education than what our underfunded and under-equipped basic education infrastructure is capable of delivering.

Reference

1. The Hindu Business Line | Education system needs a rejig

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