Vaccine Equity

Why in news?

The Global Dashboard for Vaccine Equity has put out recent data that justifies the worrying core of the vaccine distribution programme.

What is the Global Dashboard for Vaccine Equity?

- The Global Dashboard for Vaccine Equity is a joint effort by the
  - United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
  - World Health Organization (WHO)
  - University of Oxford
- It combines the latest data on the global roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines with the most recent socio-economic information.
- It illustrates why accelerating vaccine equity is not only critical to saving lives but also to driving a faster and fairer recovery from the pandemic.
- It provides insights and possibilities for policy makers into the implications of vaccine inequity.
- **Findings** - Only one in four people has been vaccinated with at least one dose in low and middle income countries as of November 9, 2022.
- In high income countries, three in four people have got at least one dose of the vaccine.

What is vaccine equity?

- Vaccine equity is a situation where everyone in the world has the same access to vaccines.

Reasons for vaccine inequity

- **Increased demand** - In the COVID-19 pandemic, vaccine production was insufficient to meet global demand.
- **Vaccine nationalism** - Many wealthy countries procured vaccine doses through exclusive bilateral deals for their domestic populations.
- Some of the manufacturing countries, such as India, imposed temporary export bans.
- **High expenditure** - The low-income countries would need to increase their health expenditure by a staggering 30-60% to vaccinate 70% of their population under the current pricing.

Impact of global vaccine inequity

- **Vaccine Apartheid** - Widening gaps in global vaccine equity have led to a two-track pandemic with

    - Booster COVID-19 vaccinations proliferating in high-income countries
    - First doses not yet reaching all populations in low-income countries

In 2021, WHO set the target for 70% global vaccination coverage by mid-2022. As of June 2022, only 58 of WHO's 194 Member States had reached the 70% target.

What efforts were taken to reduce vaccine inequity?

- **Intellectual Property Waiver** - Affordability alone doesn't determine availability of vaccines.
- Efforts were initiated to waive the intellectual property protection for the COVID-19 range of therapeutics and vaccines.
- **COVAX initiative** - The COVID-19 Vaccine Delivery Partnership (COVAX) was launched to intensify country readiness and delivery support.
- It aimed at accelerating COVID-19 vaccination coverage in 34 low coverage countries, along with their governments.

What lies ahead?

No one is safe until everyone is safe

- World Health Organization (WHO)

- Strong leadership engagement and commitment to detailed and costed vaccination plans will be essential.
- National healthcare system capacity will need to be strengthened.
- COVID-19 vaccination services will need to be integrated with other immunization services and alongside other health interventions.
- Careful risk communication and community engagement plans need to be adapted to enhance demand for vaccination.
- There is also a need to coordinate domestic and international funding.

Quick facts

Covid-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) Program

- COVAX is the vaccines pillar of the **Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator**.
- It is led by the
    - Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations (GAVI
    - World Health Organization (WHO)

    - Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI)
- It is a collective international effort with ‘One Country Team’, ‘One Plan’, and ‘One Budget’.
- **Aim**- Equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines
- It wants to vaccinate roughly 20% of the population in the 92 Advance Market Commitment (AMC) countries, which include middle and lower-income nations that cannot afford to pay for COVID-19 vaccines.
- **Funding** - The funding is partly coming from high and middle-income countries that will also receive a share of the vaccines produced for COVAX.
- **Ghana** has become the first country in the world to receive a shipment of coronavirus vaccines under the COVAX program.

References

1. The Hindu│ Can vaccine distribution be made fairer?
2. WHO│ Vaccine Equity

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering