WHO’s Policy Shift Against Tobacco Harm Reduction

Prelims: *Current Events of National and International Importance*

Why in News?

WHO’s recent shift opposes tobacco harm reduction, deviating from earlier endorsements of safer alternatives, not only contradicts decades of evidence but ‘disproportionately harms countries like India.

- **Earlier framework -** The World Health Organization (WHO) had previously balanced *prevention, cessation, and harm reduction*, recognizing benefits from alternatives like e-cigarettes.
- **Present WHO recommendation** - The WHO now strongly prioritizes a "*cessation-only" approach,* urging that people quit all forms of tobacco and nicotine use rather than transition to safer alternatives.
- **CAPHRA Objection -** The Coalition of Asia Pacific Tobacco Harm Reduction Advocates (CAPHRA) flags the significant risks, especially in the Indian context.

CHAPRA
• It is an alliance between the Tobacco Harm Reduction Advocates and their respective organizations in the Asia Pacific Region. • **Aim** – To educate, advocate and represent the right of adult alternative nicotine consumers to access and use of products that reduce harm from tobacco use.

- CHAPRA recently released a “white paper” noting that *Nicotine is not what causes cancer or heart disease.* It’s the ***toxic smoke from burning tobacco that kills.***
- **Disproportionate impact -** CAPHRA argues that a prohibitionist approach will disproportionately harm countries like India, with high smoking rates and diverse tobacco use.
- **E-cigarettes and other ENDS -** WHO's stance on electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) is a major point of contention.
- While some studies suggest they are less harmful than smoking, WHO remains cautious and concerned about their potential risks.
- **Gateway effect -** The concern that e-cigarettes may lead to smoking remains a significant factor in the WHO's approach.
- **Industry influence -** Some critics suggest that the tobacco industry has exploited the concept of harm reduction to promote its products.

Concerns

- **Usage diversity -** Over 200 million use smokeless tobacco, and millions smoke bidis; informal networks dominate the market.
- **Economic lifeline -** The tobacco sector maintains around 45 million jobs, many belonging to farmers, small businesses, and rural women.
- **Vulnerable Groups -** The policy shift risks harming the most economically and socially vulnerable populations.

Reference

The Hindu| WHO’s Policy Shift Against Tobacco Harm Reduction

