



US Halts its WHO Funding

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Why in News

The **United States** (US) has decided to cut off US payments to the **World Health Organisation** (WHO) during the **Covid-19** pandemic.

Key Points

- **Reasons:** The US has accused WHO for **failing to curb the early spread of the coronavirus.**
 - It has been claimed by the US that the **outbreak could have been contained at its source** and lives could have been saved if the **United Nations** (UN) health agency (i.e. WHO) has done a better job.
 - The US has criticised the **WHO for being China-centric** and has alleged that earlier WHO had criticized US's ban on travel from and to China.
 - This comes when the **global case load approaches 2 million**, including **over 1 lakh deaths**. The **US has seen the most cases** (over 6 lakh) and deaths (over 26,000) **despite being the highest contributor** (almost 15%) to the WHO.
 - However, the US has made it clear that it would **continue to engage with the WHO in pursuit of meaningful reforms.**
- **Other Criticisms:** Most countries closed down air travel at the first stage but the **WHO took a stand against travel and trade restrictions on China.**
 - The **International Health Regulations Emergency Committee** urged countries to be prepared, but **did not recommend any travel or trade restriction.**
 - According to the **National Centre for Disease Control** (a US body), **WHO officials rejected Indian concerns saying that there was no human to human transmission.**
- **Impact:** For the WHO, the **loss of about 15% of its total funding is bound to have an impact the world over.**

However, unless other countries do the same as the US, the move may not severely hamper WHO operations.

- **Criticism of US Stand:** The **UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres** has held that WHO is absolutely critical in the global fight to combat Covid-19 and **this is not the time to end support and reduce resources** for the operations.
- **India's Stand:** India has **reacted cautiously** to this announcement, **avoiding an official response** and maintaining the country's focus now is containment and management of the outbreak.

Source of WHO's Funds

- It is **funded** by **countries, philanthropic organisations, other UN organisations** etc.
 - **Voluntary donations** from member states contribute 35.41%, **assessed contributions** are 15.66%, **philanthropic organisations account** for 9.33%, **UN organisations contribute** about 8.1% and the rest comes from **myriad sources**.
 - The **US contributes almost 15%** of the WHO's total funding and almost **31% of the member states' donations**, the **largest chunk in both cases**.
 - **India contributes 1% of member states' donations**.
- **Countries** decide **how much they pay** and **may also choose not to**.

Spending of WHO's Funds

The WHO is **involved in various programmes**.

- In 2018-19, 19.36% (about \$1 bn) was spent on **polio eradication**, 8.77% on increasing **access to essential health and nutrition services**, 7% on **vaccine preventable diseases** and about 4.36% on **prevention and control of outbreaks**.
- The **American continent** received \$62.2 mn for WHO projects. That is where most of WHO funding comes from and the least of it goes.
- The **African countries** received \$1.6 bn for WHO projects and **South East Asian countries** (including India) received \$375 mn.

India is a member state of the WHO South East Asia Region.

Spending Priorities of WHO

- The **annual programme of work** is passed by WHO's decision-making body, the **World Health Assembly**.
 - It is held **annually in Geneva**.
 - It is attended by **delegates from all member states** and focuses on a specific health agenda prepared by the Executive Board.
 - **Functions:** To determine WHO policies, appoint the Director-General, supervise financial policies, and review and approve the proposed programme budget.

- The decision on which country gets how much depends on the situation in the countries.
- The **WHO's 13th General Programme of Work (2019-23)** lays down: "**Unequal development in different countries in the promotion of health and control of diseases, especially communicable diseases, is a common danger.**"

WHO's Involvement in India

- **India** became a party to the **WHO Constitution on 12th January, 1948** and the **first session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia was held on 4th-5th October 1948**, in India.
- The **WHO India Country Cooperation Strategy (CCS) 2019-2023** has been developed jointly by the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW)** and the **WHO India country office**.
The CCS's **strategic priorities** are to accelerate progress on Universal Health Coverage, promote health and wellness by addressing determinants of health, better protect the population against health emergencies and enhance India's global leadership in health.
- On the ground, WHO has been a key partner in the **immunisation programme (Mission Indradhanush)**, **tackling Tuberculosis (TB)** and **neglected diseases such as leprosy and kala azar** and nutrition programmes across states.

WHO and India During Covid-19

- WHO has been **working closely with the MoHFW and various state governments on preparedness and response measures for Covid-19**, including surveillance and contact tracing; laboratory and research protocols; risk communications; hospital preparedness; training on infection prevention and control and cluster containment plan.
- However, **India has largely built its own strategy** covering its reluctance to test, the early travel restrictions to and from China and the lockdown.
 - India imposed a **lockdown** when cases were just 341 (on 22nd March 2020).
 - India **showed resistance to mass testing** which is akin to the US's strategy.
 - India has also **taken a call on universal use of masks** when the WHO maintained that masks protect others rather than the wearer and need not be mandatory.

Source: IE