



Challenges to UN System

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This article is based on **“The UN cannot lead us out of this crisis”** which was published in The Hindubusinessline on 17/04/2020. It talks about current challenges pertaining to the UN System.

Recently, the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** held that the economic slump due to the **Covid-19 pandemic**, could be the **worst economic fallout since the Great Depression 1929**. It also held that the global growth will turn sharply negative in 2020, with almost all members of the IMF experiencing a decline in per capita income.

Countries are adopting **neoliberal** measures like already a combined **\$8 trillion of stimulus package** has been announced, advocacy of **Universal Basic Income**, etc. However, the **current crisis requires a holistic-coordinated approach** by the global players, rather than just trying to save their respective economies.

On the contrary, **multilateralism is on a decline and protectionism is on rise**. This can be reflected in issues relating to the **United Nations (UN)** and its allied institutions.

Hence, if the global community has to come out stronger in the face of current crisis, there is a need to establish a **multilateral global order** based on inclusivity and sustainability.

Challenges pertaining to UN

Since its inception 75 years ago, the UN has remained the world's most important multilateral forum.

Today, the world faces global threats, **both conventional (violent conflict, nuclear proliferation, and infectious disease) and non-conventional (climate change, terrorism, and cyberwar, among others)**.

However, the UN system is enmeshed in serious budgetary difficulties and subject to endless reforms. These lacunae can be reflected in the following:

- **United Nations General Assembly: Prominent Stage, Limited Powers**
 - Every year, the opening session of the **United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)** becomes the stage where presidents and prime ministers give speeches.
 - The event offers plenty of star power, but critics contend that it is little more than a glorified gabfest.
 - Also, UNGA has no control over veto power exercised by UNSC and it cannot take any decisive action against permanent members of UNSC.
- **United Nations Security Council: Powerful but Often Paralyzed**
 - The 15-member Security Council is by far the most powerful arm of the United Nations. It can **impose sanctions**, as it did against Iran over its nuclear program, and authorize military intervention, as it did against Libya in 2011.
 - However, the **veto power** is used by **permanent five countries** to serve the strategic interest of themselves and their allies.
 - Since 1990, the United States has cast a veto on Council resolutions 16 times, concerning Israeli-Palestinian relations. Russia has done so 17 times, including eight times over Syria.
 - Also, the current composition of UNSC does not represent contemporary realities, as permanent members of UNSC, as it has not been reformed since its inception.
- **United Nations Secretary General: Global Reach, Vague Role**
 - The UN charter is **vague in defining the duties of the secretary general**, the United Nations' top official.
 - He or she is expected to show no favoritism to any particular country, but as the office is largely dependent on the funding and the good will of the most powerful nations, it hampers the working of the said office.
- **World Health Organisation: Arm Twisting By Rich Countries**
 - WHO was mandated to control the spread of contagious diseases, backstop public health programmes, formulate standards on nutrition and hygiene and establish a centre for comparative health data.
 - However, recently, the World Health Organization (WHO) has been criticised by the US on account of mishandling of the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequently suspended its financial contribution to WHO.
 - Also, WHO has been under pressure from the US government to adopt an approach that favours interests of US pharma companies, rather than a global advocate of public health policy.

- **World Trade Organisation: Stalled Negotiations**

- The World Trade Organization is mandated to **expand the free trade agenda and a standard bearer for open and efficient global markets.**
- However, the advanced countries are determined to promote the kind of corporate-friendly rules that align with their own economic interests and are indifferent to the **Doha Development Agenda.**

Conclusion

The greatest challenge that the world faces today is in prediction of the imminent disasters that can be catastrophic. The Covid-19 pandemic is one such; others may include severe climate shocks.

With growing environmental and health stress, such disastrous events are likely to occur more often. This can only be tackled through collective actions. Thus, there is a need for a new world order based on the ethos of multilateralism and shared responsibility. In this context, **democratising the UN system** can be a step in this direction.

Drishti Mains Question

Discuss the challenges faced by multilateral world order, especially in the context of the United Nation system.