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G.S PAPER I

1. SOCIETY

In what ways the patents hurdle can be avoided ensuring social justice and improvising the battle against pandemic. Elaborate

KEY POINTS

- In order to achieve global herd immunity and prevent new strains of COVID-19, vaccines need to be affordable.
- This can happen through patent owners voluntarily licensing their products to other companies, especially Indian producers who are experienced at mass-producing low-cost medications.
- This can also be done by temporarily suspending patent rights for COVID vaccines, an option that is being pursued by India and South Africa through the World Trade Organization (WTO).
- Decades of struggles over patent rights and access to medications for HIV/AIDS demonstrate that it is possible to navigate patent restrictions using something called “voluntary licenses” where a patent holder decides to license a product to other producers.
- While TRIPS alarmed public health experts because of its potential to raise the price of essential medicines, voluntary licensing agreements between pharmaceutical producers were able to bring down the price of AIDS medications despite the TRIPS regulations.
- The Doha addendum, Section 5c, offers AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis as examples of what qualifies as a health emergency. By this standard, COVID-19 should easily qualify.
- Some favour ensuring access to COVID-19 vaccines through the COVAX programme, which was established to purchase vaccine doses and donate them to low-income countries but does not involve modifying patent rights.

The pandemic has highlighted that to handle any social problem there is a need for a collective action that coordinates the aspirations of several groups of stakeholders. Explain

KEY POINTS

- Community actions enabled society to overcome the failure of the state and market.
- The empowered group of secretaries has also identified the role of civil society during this period of crisis.
- The task for the NITI Aayog should be to address specific issues involving the pandemic without losing much time.
- NITI should create mechanisms for facilitating the creation of a required space for community initiatives that are already playing an important role.
- NITI should partner with willing state governments to explore the launch of platforms that promote cross-learning and experience-sharing to reduce the cost of operations and to avoid reinventing the wheel.
- The scope for the usual bureaucratic hassles should be minimised and opportunities for participation of communities in decision making and their implementation at local levels may be explored.