A STUDY OF ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN PUBLIC HEALTH STATUS

Proff. V. R. RATHOD

Assistant Professor
Arts-Commerce College, Yeoda Dist Amravati

Abstract :

The new agenda for Public Health in India encompasses several key components, including the epidemiological transition, demographical transition, environmental changes, and social determinants of health. To address these challenges effectively, there is a pressing need to revive primary health care based on the principles established at Alma-Ata in 1978. The government plays a pivotal role in shaping population health, not only within the healthcare sector but also through its influence on various other sectors. This article serves as a literature review, examining the existing governmental infrastructure for addressing public health needs in India, its achievements, limitations, and prospects for the future.

Within the healthcare sector, critical areas that require attention include health system strengthening, human resource development, capacity building, and regulation in public health. However, it is essential to recognize that the overall health of a population is also influenced by social determinants, such as living conditions, nutrition, access to safe drinking water, sanitation, education, early child development, and social security measures. Additionally, addressing population stabilization, gender mainstreaming and empowerment, mitigating the impact of climate change and disasters on health, enhancing community participation, and addressing governance issues are essential components of comprehensive public health action.

One of the challenges in this endeavor is making public health a shared value across various sectors. This is a politically demanding strategy, but it is indispensable for achieving collective action and addressing the multifaceted challenges to public health in India.

Keywords: Healthsector,intersectoralissues,publichealth,roleofgovernment

Introduction

The field of public health in India has undergone significant changes and encountered various challenges while striving to improve the well-being of its citizens. Since gaining independence, India has made concerted efforts to tackle major public health issues such as malaria, tuberculosis, leprosy, high maternal and child mortality rates, and more recently, the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). These efforts have been primarily orchestrated by the government, and they have been instrumental in bringing about positive changes in healthcare outcomes. The synergy of social development, scientific advancements, and healthcare initiatives has contributed to a notable reduction in both mortality and birth rates.

This article aims to provide a comprehensive review of the government's current infrastructure and initiatives for addressing public health needs in India. It delves into the successes achieved, the limitations faced, and outlines potential areas for future improvement and expansion.

ChallengesConfrontingPublicHealth

The new public health agenda in India encompasses several key factors, including the epidemiological transition (which involves a growing burden of chronic non-communicable diseases), demographic transition (with an increasing elderly population), and environmental changes. Furthermore, there are persistent challenges related to maternal and child mortality, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and other communicable diseases, all of which continue to strain the already overburdened healthcare systems.

There are also "silent epidemics" in India that often go unnoticed. For example, tobacco-related deaths range from 800,000 to 900,000 annually, resulting in substantial social and economic losses. Mental health issues, neurological disorders, and substance use disorders also contribute significantly to the overall burden of disease and disability. Additionally, the rising number of road deaths and injuries, with 2–5 million hospitalizations and over 100,000 deaths reported in 2005, constitutes another hidden epidemic. These statistics represent real human suffering behind the numbers.

India's healthcare systems are struggling not only with existing communicable and non-communicable diseases but also with the increasing burden of emerging and re-emerging diseases, such as drug-resistant TB, malaria, SARS, avian flu, and the ongoing H1N1 pandemic. Inadequate financial resources allocated to the health sector, coupled with inefficient utilization, contribute to health inequalities. Debates in international forums about issues like Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights add new pressures to healthcare systems.

The root causes of health inequalities can be traced back to social, economic, and political mechanisms that lead to the stratification of society based on factors such as income, education, occupation, gender, and race or ethnicity. The lack of substantial progress in addressing these underlying social determinants of health represents a significant failure in the field of public health.

In today's era of globalization, various global political, economic, and social events have far-reaching effects on the prices of food and fuel in all countries. We continue to grapple with the consequences of the global recession of 2008, which has had a profound impact on the world's economies and populations.

AddressingPublicHealthIssues

TheStrategyAndStakeholders

To address the significant challenges mentioned earlier, there is an urgent need to revitalize primary healthcare based on the principles established at the Alma-Ata conference in 1978. These principles include universal access and coverage, equity, community participation in defining and implementing health agendas, and intersectoral approaches to health. While these principles remain relevant, they must be adapted to reflect the profound changes in the healthcare landscape over the past three decades. The pursuit of "Health For All" has continued through initiatives like the Millennium Development Goals.

Public health focuses on disease prevention and control at the population level, achieved through organized efforts and informed decisions made by society, organizations, public and private entities, communities, and individuals. However, it's essential to recognize the crucial role of government in addressing these challenges and ensuring health equity. India's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW) plays a central role in guiding the country's public health system.

The contribution to the health of a population extends beyond the formal healthcare system and encompasses contributions from various sectors outside of healthcare. This recognition of the potential for intersectoral contributions to community health is a growing global awareness. Therefore, the government's role in influencing population health extends beyond the healthcare sector to encompass various sectors outside the traditional healthcare system.

RoleofGovernmentWithinTheHealthSector

Health System

There are several critical challenges that health systems must address, including a shortage of financial and material resources, workforce-related concerns, and the complex task of implementing equitable health policies in a pluralistic healthcare landscape. The Government of India's National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) represents a significant step toward achieving improved integration and convergence of healthcare services and making structural improvements in India's healthcare delivery system.

Health information system

The Integrated Disease Surveillance Project (IDSP) was established with the goal of creating a dedicated channel for gathering information on disease occurrence, which is crucial for preventing and containing diseases at the community level. However, the slow progress in implementing this project can be attributed to inadequate efforts to engage key stakeholders outside the public sector.

Government-published health profiles should serve as valuable resources for communities to prioritize their health concerns and guide local decision-making. Additionally, public health laboratories possess the capacity to effectively support the government's diagnostic and research efforts concerning health risks and threats, but their potential remains underutilized.

There is a need to establish mechanisms for monitoring various epidemiological challenges, including mental health, occupational health, and other environmental risks. As of now, these mechanisms are yet to be fully developed and put in place.

Health research system

There is a necessity to enhance the research infrastructure within community medicine departments across various institutes and encourage collaboration with state health services.

Regulation and enforcement in public health

A robust regulatory system is essential for achieving successful public health outcomes. This system plays a crucial role in reducing disease exposure by enforcing sanitary codes, such as monitoring water quality, ensuring slaughterhouse hygiene, and maintaining food safety

standards. Unfortunately, there are significant gaps in the enforcement, monitoring, and evaluation of these regulations, which weaken the overall public health system. This issue can be attributed in part to inadequate funding for public health, a lack of leadership and commitment among public health officials, and limited community involvement.

To address these challenges and revitalize public health regulation, the government can take concerted actions. These actions may include updating and implementing public health laws, engaging with stakeholders for input and collaboration, and enhancing public awareness of existing laws and their enforcement procedures.

Health Promotion :

Preventing the transmission of STDs and HIV/AIDS, raising awareness among young individuals about the risks associated with tobacco smoking, and encouraging physical activity are just a few instances of behavior change communication that aim to inspire individuals to adopt healthier lifestyles. To enhance the impact of health promotion efforts, there is a need to bolster the development of community-wide educational programs and other health promotion initiatives. Furthermore, it is crucial to extend these efforts to rural areas. Organizing events like "Diabetes Day" and "Heart Day" even in remote villages can significantly contribute to raising awareness at the grassroots level.

Human resource development and capacity building :

Several deficiencies must be addressed in the development of human resources for public health services. It is crucial to establish training facilities dedicated to public health specialists and to define the scope of their contributions in this field. The creation of institutions like the Public Health Foundation of India represents a positive step toward addressing the limited institutional capacity in India, as it focuses on enhancing training, research, and policy development in public health.

Preservice training is fundamental for equipping the medical workforce with public health leadership skills and the necessary competencies for practicing public health. To build capacity in addressing emerging issues such as geriatric care, adolescent health, and mental health, revisions to the undergraduate curriculum are imperative. In-service training for medical officers is equally essential for imparting management skills and leadership qualities.

Additionally, there is a pressing need to increase the number of paramedical workers and establish more training institutes in India.

Public Health Policy :

Setting health objectives and targets is a prominent strategy for guiding the activities within the healthcare sector. For instance, in the United States, the Healthy People 2010 initiative presents a straightforward yet impactful approach by outlining health objectives in a format that encourages diverse groups to collaborate and function as a cohesive team. Similarly, in India, there is a pressing need for a comprehensive plan aimed at achieving "better health for all." Such a roadmap could be utilized by states, communities, professional organizations, and all sectors involved in healthcare. This approach would not only facilitate shifts in resource allocation for

public health interventions but also serve as a platform for coordinated intersectoral efforts, promoting policy coherence.

Scope of farther action in the health sector

In India's healthcare system, several areas such as school health, mental health, referral systems, and urban health continue to pose significant challenges, despite their inclusion in the national health policy. School health programs have largely become ineffective due to a range of administrative, managerial, and logistical issues. Mental health services have proven to be elusive, even with the implementation of the National Mental Health Program.

However, there are promising developments in the form of innovative initiatives through public-private partnerships being experimented with in various regions of the country to enhance the effectiveness of referral systems. Furthermore, the eagerly awaited National Urban Health Mission holds the potential to provide solutions and improvements in the realm of urban health.

RoleofGovernmentCoordinationTowardPublicHealthIssues

The Ministry of Health should strengthen collaborations with other entities engaged in public health, as numerous factors influencing health outcomes lie beyond their immediate control. Transforming public health into a shared priority across different sectors represents a politically complex approach, but such collective efforts are indispensable.

Social determinants of health

Kerala is frequently cited as a model in global discussions for its success in achieving a high level of public health by addressing the foundational factors influencing health, which include investments in elementary education, public health, and primary healthcare.

Living Condition

Access to safe drinking water and sanitation plays a crucial role in determining overall health outcomes, leading to a potential 70-80% decrease in the prevalence of communicable diseases. Ensuring universal access to clean water and sanitation services in both rural and urban regions is both feasible and cost-effective within existing programs.

Urban planning

The delivery of essential urban services such as water supply, sewerage, and solid waste management requires dedicated focus. The Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission, which operates in 35 cities, aims to create financially self-sustaining urban centers aligned with the Millennium Development Goals. It is essential to consider expanding this initiative to encompass the entire nation. Additionally, challenges related to housing and alleviating urban poverty must also be addressed.

Revival of rural infrastructure and livelihood :

There is a need for action in the following domains: Advancing agricultural mechanization, enhancing the effectiveness of investments, streamlining subsidies, and broadening access to land, credit, and skills.

Education :

Elementary education has witnessed significant progress due to the implementation of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. To build upon these achievements, it is imperative to establish a mission dedicated to secondary education. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Bill 2009 aims to offer education to children aged 6 to 14 years, representing a positive stride towards enhancing the literacy rates of the Indian populace.

Nutritionandearlychilddevelopment

Recent advancements such as the expansion of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) to reach a wider audience and the establishment of mini-Anganwadi centers in underprivileged areas exemplify inclusive growth during the eleventh 5-year plan. To further strengthen these initiatives, the government should draw from successful models like Tamil Nadu. This can involve enhancing ICDS in states with poor performance, learning from strategies such as upgrading kitchens with LPG connections, stoves, and pressure cookers, as well as electrification. Additionally, the use of iron-fortified salt to combat anemia has been effective.

Efforts to address micronutrient deficiencies require coordinated actions across various departments such as Women and Child Development, Health, Agriculture, Rural, and Urban development. This coordination should encompass strategies like dietary diversification, horticultural interventions, food fortification, nutritional supplementation, and other public health measures.

Socialsecuritymeasures

The Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MREGS) holds the promise of transforming rural India both socially and economically. What sets it apart from other poverty alleviation initiatives is its emphasis on the principles of citizenship and entitlement. However, the primary focus has often been on employment opportunities and wages, leaving behind the development of essential infrastructure and community assets.

This scheme possesses a significant workforce capable of executing intersectoral projects, such as road construction, water pipeline installation, social forestry, horticultural initiatives, anti-erosion efforts, and rainwater harvesting. To harness the abundant potential of social capital effectively, it is imperative for the government to take appropriate measures.

Foodsecuritymeasures

There is a need for innovative approaches to enhance the public distribution system. This involves addressing issues related to both inclusion and exclusion errors and expanding the variety of essential commodities available to those in severe poverty. It is crucial for the government to formulate action plans aimed at boosting domestic food grain production, increasing the purchasing power of consumers to afford food, and ensuring that agriculture becomes a financially rewarding endeavor.

Othersocialassistanceprograms

The Rashtriya Swasthiya Bima Yojana and Aam Admi Bhima Yojana serve as crucial social security initiatives designed for the unorganized sector, which constitutes approximately 91% of India's workforce. Additionally, the National Old Age Pension scheme has effectively offered both social and income security to the increasing elderly population in India.

Population stabilization :

There is a widespread consensus regarding the necessity of population stabilization to ensure a high quality of life for all citizens. The formulation of a National Policy and the establishment of a National Commission on Population, along with the creation of the Janasankhya Sthiratha Kosh, demonstrate the government's profound dedication to this cause. Nevertheless, concurrent progress in women's empowerment, the promotion of institutional deliveries, and the enhancement of healthcare services and infrastructure are pivotal factors that will shape population control in the future.

Gender mainstreaming and empowerment :

Efforts should be made to introduce women-specific interventions across all policies, programs, and systems. The government must take proactive measures to sensitize service providers across various departments to address women's issues effectively. The Department of Women and Child Development should take concrete steps to implement the provisions of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act of 2005. This should include training for protection officers, establishing counseling centers to assist women facing violence, and creating awareness within the community. Strengthening poverty eradication programs and microcredit schemes is also crucial for the economic and social empowerment of women.

Climate change poses several public health risks, such as thermal extremes, weather-related disasters, the spread of vector-borne, food-borne, and water-borne infections, food security issues, malnutrition, and air quality concerns with associated health risks. Additionally, the depletion of non-renewable energy and water sources, soil and water quality deterioration, and the potential extinction of various habitats and species are significant consequences.

India's "National Action Plan on Climate Change" outlines eight core "national missions" spanning different ministries, with a focus on understanding climate change, improving energy efficiency, promoting renewable energy sources, and conserving natural resources. Despite various challenges related to India's position under the UNFCCC, it has committed to limiting its per capita greenhouse gas emissions to the average per capita emissions of developed countries while pursuing its social and economic development goals.

The Ministry of Health, in collaboration with other ministries, should offer technical support for the implementation of disaster management and emergency preparedness measures. Areas that require improvement include conducting rapid needs assessments, disseminating health-related information, ensuring food safety, and addressing environmental health concerns following disasters. Transparency and efficiency in the administration of aid after disasters are critical.

It is imperative to implement the Disaster Management Act of 2005 to establish institutional mechanisms for disaster management, foster an intersectoral approach to mitigation, and facilitate a comprehensive, coordinated, and swift response to disaster situations.

Community participation:

Community participation plays a vital role in garnering public support for policies and programs, ensuring compliance with regulations, and fostering positive changes in personal health behaviors. A key strategic initiative within the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) focuses on enhancing accountability and transparency through community involvement, exemplified by the establishment of Rogi Kalyan Samitis. The Ministry of Health should establish a well-defined policy on social participation and practical approaches for facilitating community-based healthcare initiatives. There are various opportunities for community participation, including encouraging lifestyle modifications for chronic diseases through activities like physical fitness and dietary improvements. Additionally, active community-based methods, such as raising awareness and implementing behavioral interventions, can be instrumental in primary prevention efforts against alcohol dependence.

Effectively addressing public health challenges requires innovative collaboration with various stakeholders, including private sectors through public-private partnerships, civil societies, national healthcare leaders, health workers, local communities, and international health agencies like the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the World Bank. These collaborative efforts are essential for tackling complex health issues comprehensively and efficiently.

Governance issues:

To ensure that social security measures reach their intended beneficiaries, it is essential to conduct a thorough enumeration of families falling Below the Poverty Line and other eligible sections of society. It is imperative to implement mechanisms that prevent the misappropriation of government funds and establish vigilant measures to combat corruption. Addressing governance issues is crucial in this regard.

The government must take decisive action in cases involving the diversion of funds and goods from social security schemes. This includes deploying law enforcement agencies, raising community awareness, and establishing expedited redressal mechanisms. Initiatives like social audits, as seen in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MREGS) in Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan through the Directorate of Social Audit, represent initial steps in highlighting governance issues. To bolster this process, there should be dedicated budgets, provisions for transparently sharing audit results, and the authority to take corrective actions. Similar social auditing programs can be replicated in other states and extended to government programs such as the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). This approach will enhance accountability and community participation, ultimately leading to more effective service delivery.

CONCLUSIONS

The well-being of a nation's people forms the bedrock upon which their happiness and collective strength as a state are built. In a world marked by rapid change and unique challenges that threaten the health and prosperity of the population, it is imperative for both the government and the community to come together, addressing these challenges inclusively and sustainably. This requires a consensus on ethical principles such as universalism, justice, dignity, security, and human rights, particularly when addressing social determinants of health and economic issues. Such an approach is essential for humanity to realize the fundamental Right to Health, and its success can be measured by the transformative experience of every Indian, whether in a remote Bihar hamlet or the bustling city of Mumbai.

While significant milestones in public health have been achieved in the past, such as the launch of the Expanded Program of Immunization in 1974, the proclamation of Primary Health Care at Alma Ata in 1978, the eradication of Smallpox in 1979, the initiation of polio eradication efforts in 1988, the ratification of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) in 2004, and the enactment of the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA) in 2005, the future of a healthy India hinges on integrating the public health agenda into the framework of sustainable development. The ultimate aspiration for a great nation should be one where the divide between rural and urban areas narrows significantly, ensuring widespread access to clean energy and safe water, universally accessible top-quality healthcare, responsive and transparent governance free from corruption, eradication of poverty and illiteracy, and the elimination of crimes against women and children. This vision represents a healthy nation and one of the most desirable places to live.

Bibliography :

- GovernmentofIndia.NationalHealthPolicy.MinistryofHealthandFamilyWelfare, Government of India, NewDelhi: 2002.
- Kishore J. National Health Programs of India. New Delhi: CenturyPublications; 2009.
- ReportoftheCommissiononSocialDeterminantsofHealth.Geneva:World Health Organisation;2008.
- RevitalizingPrimaryHealthCare.RegionalConferenceproceedingsat Djakarta, Indonesia: 2008.
- Park,TextbookofPreventiveandSocialMedicine.Jabalpur:Banarsidas Bhanot Publishers; 2007.
- NationalCommissiononMacroeconomicsandHealth.ReportoftheNationalCommissionon MacroeconomicsandHealth2005.MOHFW, GOI; 2005.
- PlanningCommission.EleventhFiveyearplan(2007-2012).PlanningCommission, GOI, New Delhi.
- Government of Tamil Nadu; Social Welfare and Nutritious MealProgrammeDepartment.Availablefrom:http://www.tn.gov.in/gosdb/deptorders.php. [Last cited on 2010Aug 10].
- The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act;MinistryofruralDevelopment,GovernmentofIndia.

Availablefrom:http://nrega.nic.in/netnrega/home.aspx.[Lastcitedon2010Aug 10].

- National Population Policy. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare,Government of India, New Delhi: 2000.
- Government of India. National ActionPlan on Climate Change.Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change, Government of India,NewDelhi; 2008.