

5. Getting Organ Donation to Tick Again

Prelims level: Governance Institutional Reforms

Mains level: GS-II Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector relating to Health.

Context:

- Indian organ donation day is observed by the Government of India on **November 30**.
- It is observed with the primary objective of promoting organ donation and transplantation so that a number of persons suffering from organ failure, such as the kidneys and liver, can get a new lease of life using organs gifted by others who have lost their lives (such as in road accidents or other reasons).

Recent issues in the Transplant Sector:

- It has been recently alleged that International Patients were given priority in transplants, bypassing long list of Indian Patients.
- Recent drop in transplant count among various states. E.g. The number of donations in Kerala in 2015 is 76, whereas in 2018 it is just 8.
- Hearts and lungs harvested from brain-dead patients were given to foreign nationals admitted to Corporate Hospitals.

Existing Problems in India's Current Transplant Policy:

- Rampant commercialisation of the transplantation process due to the greed of the hospitals. The organ trade has led to the exploitation of the poverty-stricken people by tempting them with the financial gains.
- Various allegations that organs were harvested without the consent of a brain-dead patient's family to meet the needs of foreign nationals.
- India's organ allocation program currently lacks transparency.
- Rampant privatisation has led to a profit-oriented approach to health and has thereby financially skewed organ transplants to the rich.
- Recently, the controversy has heated up due to a leaked communication from the head of the "National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation".

Way Ahead:

- One of the usual approaches is to regulate hospitals through acts and rules. It is time to revisit its effectiveness of Transplantation of Human Organs Act, 1994, since it has been 25 years of its inception.

- Substitution of bureaucratic procedures for hospital and transplant approval by self-declaration and mandatory sample verification involving civil society will improve compliance.
- Further amendment is needed to ensure full State autonomy in this area, avoiding the Central government's interference in organ distribution, which is now demotivating many hospitals.
- All State organ distribution agencies must make their operations fully transparent. Steps such as making online organ distribution norms and the full details on every organ donation will help build public confidence in the system.
- We will have to ensure that organs will go to those who need them the most rather than to those who can pay for them.
- Subsidising transplantation cost (in private) and quota-based organ allocation to public hospitals are some options that can be considered to ensure fairness.

About NOTTO:

National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organization (NOTTO)

- NOTTO functions as the apex centre for All India activities of coordination and networking for procurement and distribution of Organs and Tissues and registry of Organs and Tissues Donation and Transplantation in the country.
- It functions under the aegis of Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India.