International Relations · GS - II

Critically examine the role of WHO in providing global health security during the COVID-19 pandemic.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2020	GS - II	International Relations

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
10	~150 words

Answer Hint

World Health Organization; International Health Regulations; disease surveillance; information sharing; technical guidance; vaccine coordination; pandemic preparedness; funding constraints; political pressures; institutional reforms

Model Answer

Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) coordinates international public health efforts and provides technical guidance during health emergencies. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated both its importance and the limitations of global health governance.

Positive contributions

- **International coordination:** WHO facilitated information exchange and cooperation among countries.
- **Technical guidance:** It issued guidance on surveillance, testing, infection prevention and clinical management as scientific evidence evolved.
- **Emergency response:** The organisation declared COVID-19 a Public Health Emergency of International Concern in January 2020 and characterised it as a pandemic in March 2020.
- **Research and vaccine access:** WHO supported international research coordination and initiatives aimed at improving access to vaccines and medical supplies.

- **Capacity-building:** It provided technical assistance and guidance to countries with weaker public health systems.

Limitations and criticism

- **Early-response concerns:** Questions arose about the speed and clarity of early information and international risk communication.
- **Dependence on member states:** WHO relies on countries for timely information, access and implementation of recommendations.
- **Political pressures:** Geopolitical rivalries complicated cooperation and affected perceptions of institutional impartiality.
- **Resource constraints:** Dependence on assessed and voluntary contributions limited flexibility.
- **Unequal access:** Vaccine nationalism and supply inequalities exposed weaknesses in global solidarity.

Way forward

Strengthen independent evaluation, sustainable financing, transparent emergency communication, surveillance capacity and equitable access to vaccines and essential medicines.

Conclusion

WHO remains indispensable to global health security, but its effectiveness depends on stronger institutional capacity and member-state cooperation. The pandemic highlighted the need for a more transparent, adequately funded and equitable global health system.

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