

Role of Statistics in Public Policy formulation

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ABSTRACT: “Without good statistics, the development process is blind: policy-makers cannot learn from their mistakes and the public cannot hold them accountable.”(World Bank, 2000).

Statistics are simply defined as the study of the collection, analysis, classification and interpretation of data. It is a subset of many sciences including political science and a very significant one at that. In the sense that, it deals with quantitative data i.e. the number of people who cast votes, how many females, male, age groups, social classes, ethnicity, geographical location, electoral college, etc. These data compiled can also be used to formulate policies and to enact legislation. So this paper is an attempt to find out the contribution of statistics in the policy making process. This paper attempts to show that proper and efficient use of Statistics leads to better policy and development outcomes. In this paper researcher also tries to find out how the misuse and wrong interpretation of data affects the policy making process. In this research paper secondary data will be used (relevant books, Reports, journals and online surveys will be used accordingly).

KEYWORDS: Public Policy, Factual based Policy Making Process, NSDS

INTRODUCTION

The Indian statistical system had its beginning almost 400 years ago. Our statistical system rests on the Constitutional framework and mandated by several legal provisions; important among ones being the CS Act, 1953 Amended in 2008; PC Act 1948; Factories Act Registration of Births and Deaths Act, Workmen’s Compensation Act, Payment of Wages Act, etc., that enabling the collection of data in all social and economic sectors. Though the framers of our constitution envisioned the importance of official statistics and its important role in the development of the modern India that’s why they enlisted collection of data in the Concurrent list of the Constitution. India is federal state that’s why the authority and responsibility for the collection, compilation and dissemination of statistics relating to a particular subject is determined by allocation of the responsibility between the Federal and the sub-national Governments, as per the Constitution. For this purpose Central Statistical Organization (CSO) is come in existence to facilitates the users to use the Statistics efficiently for informed decision, in all environments; - By Government agency, Trade/Business/Private Organisations/ Associations, Academicians/Researchers, Individual Users/Public at large, etc. The Indian National Data warehouse on official statistics enables all data users to have an easy access to the published and unpublished validated data from a single source, on electronic mode, provides remote access facilities to end users through a network. It facilitates availability of historical data set and statistical tools to help plan for the future. A central tenet of democracy is that civil servants should be accountable to the ministers, and that ministers should be accountable to the public. The availability of information to citizens allows them to monitor whether the policy made is effective or not. In a democracy, citizens have the right to know how and why decisions are taken which affect their lives. Factual-based policy-making enhances the accountability of policy-makers. Such factual information is an essential part of good governance. In recent years, the world community has increasingly focused on monitoring and evaluating the areas where statistics should be used in support of policy-making.

However, it is important to realize that policy outcomes are crucially affected by the use of statistics and statistical procedures in ‘upstream’ stages of policy-making, such as issue recognition, program design, policy choice and accurate forecasting as well as monitoring and evaluation. Sound and transparent statistics are essential for effective policy-making – a necessary part of the enabling environment for improving development outcomes. There are rarely a simple link between statistics and the adoption of a particular policy. Why factual-based policy-making is considered so much important. The answer is that it is the only way of making public policy decisions which is fully consistent with a democratic political process characterized by transparency and accountability.

Methodology:

The research paper is based on secondary data. The researcher collects the data from the relevant books, Reports, Journals and online surveys.

Hypothesis:

The researcher believes that proper and efficient use of Statistics leads to better policy and development outcomes and it is very important to understand the sound or correct interpretation of data.

Objectives of the study :

1. To investigate that how the statistics help in effective policy making
2. To find out how the misuse of statistical data affects decision making

3.To find out the causes of mismatch or wrong presentation of statistical data

Literature review:

Nutley, S., Davies, H. And Walter I. (2002) investigates the problem of factual policy making process on the paper entitled as **Evidence Based Policy and Practice: Cross Sector Lessons.**

By using the secondary data researcher tries to find out what is factual based policy making process and how much the information or statistical data is reliable that is provided in the forms of reports, journal, and newspapers.

Thomas, R. (2010) conducts research on the topic **Statistics and policy making** published in Radstat journals. By using primary data the researcher tries to find out how much statistical facts or information is required in substantial development of the society. The finding of the study are that the Statistical Confidentiality and a Quality Assurance Framework and reliable sources of information is the most basic requirement for the substantial development of the society.

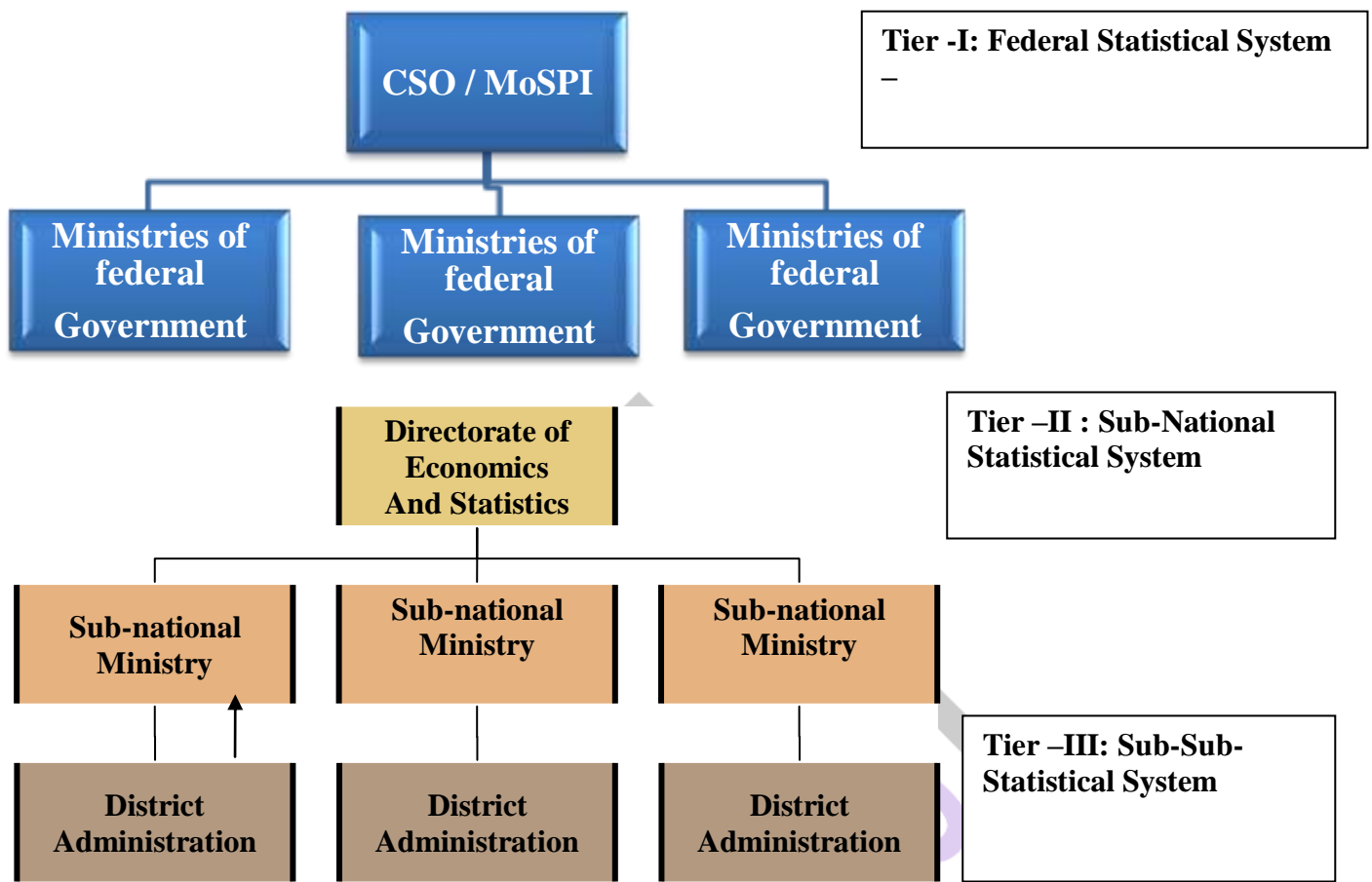
Vadnais, Daniel (2008) conducted the primary research on the topic **The role of statistics in evidence-based policy making.** The aim of the study was to find out how the statistical data contributes in effective policy making. By using the survey method the researcher finds out that a continues monitoring and sound statistics are required for the development.

Defining The Concept

Policy-making has been defined as the process by which governments translate their political vision into programs and actions to deliver 'outcomes' – desired change in the real world. It ranges from various areas such as agriculture, health, and the arts to housing. Public policy is generally regarded as a product of government or the administrative system. It is often not seen by the layman as the expression of a democratic process, expressed through the political system and democratic institutions. Policy is often seen as something delivered to the public rather than emanated from the public.

Effective decision/policy making, be it for an individual or a business or any national Government or an International agency, is increasingly using statistical methods to improve the quality of information/decision. Decisions based on sound statistical findings are scientific, and hence enhances desirable outcomes. Many statistical methods are based on random samples to protect against personal or environmental biases. Both graphical and numerical statistics reveal the facts that are often unavailable in the mess of data. The hidden gold in the data is exposed by using appropriate statistical methods for the benefit of mankind. It is like scanning of the data to rescue apparently unavailable valuables spread around us. Statistics puts information in the right perspective so that it is ready to be used in a decision making. For achieving the goal of effective decision/policy making India has 3-tier System (National, State and District) that is highly de-centralized and enjoys constitutionally mandated independence in its working. Whereas CSO works for planned improvement of the overall Statistical system in the country, each of the Ministries at the Federal level have a Statistical Unit, independently collecting, collating and disseminating their statistical products. And at the sub-national level, a Directorate of Economics and Statistics (DES) exists in all the 29 states and 6 Union Territories heading their respective statistical system; each of the DESs is functionally independent (in terms of budget and supervisory control) from the CSO. In all State Governments, line Ministries collect, compile and disseminate statistics relating to their allocated jobs, as per their requirements

The Three Tier (Policy making Process) Decentralised System of India



National Statistical Commission (NSC) is an Independent body which is out of the political domain, responsible for overall supervision and a guiding force of the National System. Majority of national statistics are built up from the administrative records, statistical returns, reports of surveys received from States / Districts. A nationwide sample surveys on socioeconomic indicators e.g., Employment-Unemployment, Formal & Informal sectors, health, poverty, prices, labor, Industries, etc are carried out by the Federal Government on a regular basis. States also participate in these surveys with different set of independent samples called state samples on population, agriculture, livestock etc. conducted by the Federal Governments.

Misuse of Data

Nowadays, in a democracy, power means nothing without explanation and the ability to control the record. It is true that power is obtained by convincing people, through techniques of determination and seduction. But to stay in power, politicians have to justify themselves, explain their actions and document the results. Hence the importance of the message, media and documentation, which ought to aim at being objective. Which brings us back to the major role of statistical information for politicians: to be used, overused – and sometimes abused – to support policies and arguments. Unfortunately, abuse of statistics is not few and far between. Some people abuse statistics because they are neither willing nor prepared to face the reality and truth exposed by statistics. Seriously, this is not a problem of statistics as such; rather it's a problem of the ill motive of the users of statistics. A knife can be utilized to a good effect if it is used by a surgeon, but it could very well be killing equipment if abused by a murderer. There are several cases of mismatch of factual data that is provided by government or other institutions whether it is the facts of honor killing, poverty level of society or educational standards, living standard (per capita income) etc. the first thing that creeps into our mind is that what data or information is reliable that is provided on the same subjects, but the facts are interpreted differently and provided by the different department of the same government. So the question that arises is that what type of data should be available and if available whether it is reliable or not. Correct statistics are innocent, and, hence do not deserve any wrong labelling. Blames must go to the ones who abuse it, particularly, to those who do so knowingly, selectively or deliberately to mislead the common people. There are several reasons of misuse of data as like:

- Pressures to publish, produce results, or obtain grants
- Career ambitions or aspirations
- Data seen as too technical/specialized
- Key audiences have no time

- Conflicts of interest and economic motives
- Misunderstanding of how the data can benefit policy makers
- Key findings not translated into local languages
- Limited, or no resources, for simplified materials
- Data not recognized by the government

Findings & Future Challenges:

Factual-based approaches have a key part to play at two points. Firstly, there is a growing public demand for analysis before policy is implemented. Without sound analysis, research and modeling, policy development will be in the dark and unaware of the impact that the policies are facing. In addition, the general public wants to see the facts and figures and the bodies that were consulted in respect of new policy initiatives or legislative proposals. Factual-based approaches support transparency and comprehensiveness. Secondly, in whatever form our initiatives are, for example, grant schemes or regulations, we need to ensure they are systematically reviewed to check that they are achieving their desired outcomes or not.

Making the transition to factual-based policy-making can best be achieved through formulating a national strategy for the development of statistics, which is fully integrated into the system of national policy making. The added value of an NSDS (National Strategies for the Development of Statistics) is that it provides strategic planning and priority setting within the context of the entire statistical system, covering all data sectors and users as well as essential organizational and institutional issues. There is basic requirement to setting up of a Quality Assurance Framework (Consensus Policy and Implementation Strategies to enhance coordination between CSO (central statistical organization) and sub-national statistical system and to enhancing the capacity at the sub National and below levels through infrastructure development and training. There is also need to enhancing analysis and research in Official Statistics national level for developing the appropriate methods for filling the data gaps and use modern ICT tools for quicker dissemination. Having an institutionalized review mechanism is still needed for feedback and use of Media For Promoting use of statistical data, as it influence the way the people perceive and understand the information is required.

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