

Developing Professional Capacity for National Statistical System

India recognized the importance of establishing a strong statistical system for planned development of its policies and programme formulation focussed towards inclusive growth objectives in order to reach the poorest and most un-empowered with the benefits, from a very early time. Government's need for relevant data in a timely manner, towards this goal has significantly contributed towards setting up of a statistical system with adequate autonomy, transparency, beside professionally supported by a plethora of institutional and individual research activities on the data set generated by the government.

2. In commensuration with our constitution, there is a decentralised statistical system, encompassing a strong federal level National Statistical Office coordinating, in one hand, horizontally with more than 35 line ministries of the federal Government and on the other hand, vertically with 29 sub-national or state level statistics office, on most statistical activities. The statistical offices at the sub-national level cater to the statistical requirement of sub-national Governments which are completely independent from the Federal Government. Thus, though the NSO have no direct constitutional link with the sub-national statistical offices, it is however, responsible through an in-built mechanism for its capacity building and development.

3. Presently, there are around 10,000 statistical personal working in the different statistical units of various Ministries and Departments of the federal government, of which little more than 12% form the professional group responsible for policy making and managing the statistical units; around 20% are engaged in the intermediate group, responsible for data analysis and interpretation and the rest form primary statistical personal.

4. Alongside, there are little more than 35,000 statistical personnel working at the state level. The challenge of being able to have an adequate supply of trained statisticians to man these posts are met adequately by more than 200 universities in the country, where

statistics is taught as a subject both at the Graduate and PG level. This is continuing though, now, it is being felt that with the opening of economy of the country in the recent years and the increasing need for new data sets in emerging fields, especially in consultancy, demography and financial sectors, an integrated learning syllabus in statistics with more impetus on data analysis skills need to be stressed, rather than pure theoretical statistics. I believe, this is a new challenge, which most developing countries are now facing.

5. The Federal Government, with a view to have an organised cadre of statistical personnel, in the administration of official statistics in its line Ministries and the NSO, so as to maintain qualified and professionally trained statistical personnel, way back in 1952, constituted a high-powered committee. The recommendations of that committee, led to creation of a national service in 1964. Since then, from time to time, Government has been reviewing its statistical system identifying the data gaps, emerging challenges, manpower requirement and training required to maintain the technical sharpness among its officers and staff manning the system. The last comprehensive review was conducted in 2001, the bouquet recommendations of which are presently under implementation.

6. Some of the major initiatives, that the Government has taken as an off shoot of the reforms processes are as follows:

- Setting up of a non-official independent empowered body called the **National Statistical Commission (NSC)**, in 2006 comprising of eminent statisticians and economists of repute having specialization and experience in specified statistical fields. The objectives is to have a nodal body for development of all core statistical activities of the country; to evolve, monitor and enforce statistical priorities and standards and to ensure statistical coordination. The Chief Statistician of India is the Secretary to the Commission. The Commission reports to the Parliament, through an Annual Report along with a set of recommendations.
- India is a subscriber to the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) **Special Data Dissemination Standards (SDDS)** and is currently fulfilling the Standards. The Ministry maintains an 'Advance Release Calendar' for its data categories covered under the SDDS, which is disseminated on the Ministry's website as well as on the Dissemination Standards Bulletin Board (DSBB) of the IMF.

- The Government with support from the World Bank has developed a strategic plan for **strengthening of the Indian Statistical System**, with a focus/emphasis on strengthening of the sub-national level Statistical, primarily the following areas.
 - (i) Improving the coordination and management of statistical activities in the States;
 - (ii) Human Resource Development (HRD);
 - (iii) Development of Statistical Infrastructure;
- To enable the data users and general public to have an easy access to the published as well as un-published validated data from one source, Government has set up the **National Data Warehouse** at NSO's the Computer Centre. It allows users to navigate data by drilling down to lower level details, drilling up to higher-level details, and pivoting. In addition, it enables client applications to efficiently access the data in the warehouse through web.

7. The cadre of national statistical service personal is mainly controlled by the NSO, as the development of human resources of statistical personal is its responsibility. At present, there are around 800 officers at different levels. Keeping in view the requirement of professional skill set, the incumbents to this cadre are recruited with basic qualification as post graduate degree in Statistics or its allied subjects.

8. The recruitment to the cadre is through a nation wide competitive written examination followed by a personality test. Entire process of recruitment is conducted by an independent autonomous body. Over the years it has been observed that only such candidates who have the requisite professional knowledge in statistics are able to get recruited into the cadre. The recruitment process that is conducted independent of the NSO has an inbuilt mechanism to review the process. Currently, one such review is under process to examine as to how to attract more meritorious students into Government's statistical posts, as more opportunities are now available in the private sector.

9. I may mention here the Universities and the Research institutions that make available the rightful candidates provide mostly theoretical training in statistics. In order to bridge the knowledge set with regards to job requirements in the government departments, the new entrants are trained for two years. This training is devoted to providing

professional statistical knowledge in the area of sample surveys, index numbers, national and sub-national accounts, poverty estimation, IT, gender, basics of micro and macro economics, public policy, and the general managerial skills. The new entrants are also exposed to the entire gamut of official statistical systems, prevalent at the national and international level. The content of the training is reviewed every year.

10. For imparting training, NSO has a state of the art Training Academy, called the National Academy of Statistical Administration, which is responsible for both induction as well as in-service trainings. The Academy caters to training of all statistical personnel, working in the federal as well as sub-national level. Annually, on an average, more than 1000 statistical personnel of various levels are trained in the Academy, on various subjects, identified by a Committee under the head of NSO and senior managers of the statistical system. In imparting training, national research institutions and reputed universities are also engaged.

11. The Academy is building an academic network with Universities, based on a well defined plan of engaging the university teachers in raising awareness among their students about official statistics. The Academy also conducts training for the senior University teachers of Statistics on official statistics. The objective is to create a pool of teachers who can promote inclusion of official statistics and required skills of statistical system into the curriculum contents at the college and university level and also be able to impart teaching.

12. For manning primary level statistical activities, the federal Government created a strong cadre of junior level posts, comprising of a little more than 3500 officials. Basic entry level qualification to these posts is Graduation in statistics or economics, Commerce with a paper in statistics. An induction training of 8 weeks is given to all new entrants. Again, recruitment is based on national level written test followed by personality test, conducted by an independent agency. Having spent around 5 years in the system, all staff is encouraged to undertake in-service training, beside constant upgradation of knowledge whenever any new scheme of sampling or methodology is introduced in their work programme.

13. In order maintain the professional capabilities and to equip the statistical personnel with latest developments, suiting the requirement, all statistical personnel is required to undergo in-service training. The training programmes conducted by the NSOs are funded by the national government.

14. In-service training framework consists of two strategies- the first strategy is to impart such training that develops skill sets in subjects like survey methodology and implementation, preparation of national accounts, economic statistics, IT, unit level data analysis and data interpretation skills. These are mandatory training programmes which are required to be taken by all. The second strategy is to have a set of such training courses that contain advanced topics in the emerging field. People are encouraged to nominate themselves in to these courses so that they can develop expertise in their chosen area.

15. The selection of personnel for the training is done through a participatory mechanism. While there is no coercion or inducements of any kind – like linkage to any future promotions, there is however, an overall direction from the cadre controlling authority to attend atleast 4 weeks of training in two years, for all officers, at all levels. As a result, at the beginning of the year, all are invited to nominate themselves to participate in the identified list training programmes conducted by the Academy, to both mandatory as well as domain specific advanced training courses.

16. Training is seen as an integral part of staff development strategy, mostly keeping in view the requirement of the system. Because of the importance attached, training strategy is guided by a high powered committee, called the Training Programme Approval Committee. The committee is composed very senior managers of the system as well as senior professors from Universities and other research institutions, representing outside government component. The mandate of the committee is not only to review the usefulness of training programmes conducted in the previous year and but also approves the training plan for the current year, based on detailed review of the training requirement. Though, at the moment there is no long term training strategy framework, the constant review process is some kind of a sentinel to keep the capacity of the system in readiness.

17. The training need is mainly guided by competences required at various level and as such the kind of courses/training is to be conducted as well as the content are purely based on requirement of the job at that level.

18. As I said earlier, we are observing in recent years a new challenge. Students are more inclined to work in private sector statistical entities rather than in the Government. We feel that this more because of their lack of awareness about the challenges of statistical system. To raise awareness, students are being encouraged to work in government's statistical offices as a part of an internship programme.

19. Statistical personnel joining the federal Government has a fixed career path. There are well defined promotional avenues, which accrue to them, based on merit cum seniority basis selection process. The cadre structure is pyramidal with wider base at the junior level.

20. Thus in India, we understand that maintaining professional capability of any system as large as ours is a complex process. Though it is a challenge, there is no alternative but to endeavour. Professional capability cannot be achieved by skill development only. The increasing demand on the system to deliver professionally and in time will be the driving force. Special strategies are required to be innovated to keep the staff motivated. Though we started early in the development of a strong statistical system, we are not complacent. In our endeavour, we would look for partners and support from SIAP and at the same time, extend our co-operation to all.
