Use of Evidence & Role of Policy Intellectuals in Policy Making in India

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Agenda

- Policy making in India – What works and what doesn’t
- How does evidence currently inform policy process?
- What are the constraints on use of evidence in policy making?
- Can evidence be used more meaningfully? How?
- What is the role of policy intellectuals?
Policy making in India – What works and what doesn’t?

- Auction of 3G and 4G spectrum in 2010
  - Auctions successful, but rollout still not achieved

- Auction of 2G spectrum – 2012-13
  - Failure – court cases, decisions changed multiple times

- Introduction of GST
  - Process on since 2000, still not operationalized

- National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) – reasonably well implemented
  - States on board, demand pressures, dedicated administrative machinery
Policy making in India – What works and what doesn’t?

- **Policy on 100,000 telecentres** – 2007
  - Still not fully implemented - connectivity, services, lack of private sector interest

- **National e-Governance Plan** – 2006: 31 Mission Mode Projects, 23 delivering services
  - Central MMPs successful, state and integrated MMPs lagging behind

- **Framework on Mobile Governance** – 2012
  - Implemented, 530+ Govt. Depts. on Board, over 2 million transactions/day, 175 live mobile apps (mgov.gov.in)

- **National Optical Fibre Network (NOFN)** - 2012-13
  - Rollout behind schedule
Why it doesn’t work?

- Too much structural fragmentation – aligning policies with a common agenda is very difficult
  - Science and Technology is dealt with by three ministries and seven departments!

- Very poor or no pre-policy consultative process, no informed debate
  - No structural mechanisms in place

- Policy making and implementation structures overlap
  - Same officials (including secretaries) do both!
Politics can derail the policy-making process

But poor policy process may accentuate political interference!

Little role of evidence in policy making!
How does evidence currently inform policy?

- Mechanisms in place to conduct prior consultations
  - However, wide variation in quality of the process

- Long debates over major national policies – e.g., National Food Security Bill

- Recently, in many schemes pilots conducted and evaluated before national rollout

- Consultation with outside experts and industry has increased

- Efforts to adopt best practices, especially in ICT and e-governance sector
Incorporating evidence – the issues

- Little informed debate over most policies
- Little systematic analysis of costs, benefits, trade-offs among alternatives and impacts
  - Policy process does not provide good scope for inputs from outside government
  - In-house specialists are not always the best!
- Lack of availability of rigorous evidence on impacts
  - Different programs aiming at the same policy outcome can have totally different results
  - Several schemes for rural poverty alleviation, impacts are vastly different
  - How to identify what works and what does not?
Incorporating evidence – the issues

- Technical language of the evidence is a big deterrent!
  - Effective communication to the policy audience is key

- Plethora of evidence!
  - How to compare and choose? Lack of technical capacity

- Evidence may not be the only factor while choosing between alternate programs!
  - Political considerations, technical feasibility, admin capacity, funds availability, time equally relevant

- Lack of professional and well informed policy makers
Can evidence be used better? How?

- Good scope for incorporating more evidence in policy making
- Foster partnership between researchers and policy makers
- Present evidence in more accessible and understandable format
- Policymakers need to collaborate more with researchers
  - to provide them with the issues for evaluation
  - Understand the evaluations better for incorporating evidence
- Finally, encourage policy intellectuals in policymaking roles!
Role of Policy Intellectuals

- Help bridge the gap between research and practice
- Bring more evidence into policymaking
- Make the policy making process more structured and informed
- Encourage rigorous evaluations of impacts of schemes
- Present evidence in more easily understood structure to politicians and policymakers

Several examples of outstanding policy intellectuals in the Indian context
Thank you!