

1. Discuss the challenges that data collection in India faces? Examine whether the draft National Policy on official statistics addresses these challenges? (250 words)

**Answer:**

**Background:-**

- With the growing demand for statistics and increasingly challenging data collection environment, the move by Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI) towards developing a National Policy on Official Statistics is most welcome.

**Challenges faced with data collection in India :-**

• **Ethics:-**

- Data collection is increasingly being done by contractual employees and for-profit organisations. Supervising them and ensuring their honesty remains challenging.
- A report in The Guardian in 2017 noted declining trust in official statistics around the world and argued that it damages democracy by jeopardising public knowledge and public argument.

• **Employment:-**

- Absence of data on district-level employment for decentralised planning, data on circular migrant workers; the working and living conditions of women labour.

• **Official data and post-truth politics**

- According to some political analysts and scholars, post 2014, in the age of post-truth politics there has been instances of manipulating and distorting data by the government. Post truth politics is evoking public emotions and deviation from facts and details of policy.

• **Faulty sampling frames**

- Identifying respondents and sample selection is poor
- Survey designs, questionnaires are inappropriate in many instances
- For instance The RBI adopts inflation targeting approach to maintain price level-monetary policy. This approach is based on data on inflations expectations of individuals The reliability and validity of the data is a big question as ASER reports highlights extremely low mathematical skills of Indians.

• **Delay/ Sporadic nature of Release of Data:**

- There is no strict process of monitoring for release of data.
- Delay in publishing data is a persisting problem. However, there has been improvement in recent years

• **Discrepancy in data:**

- Lack of uniformity in data across government agencies is a major concern

- For instance there is data contradiction on jobs as recently EPFO estimated that 3.68 million jobs were generated till November of fiscal year 2018- much higher estimation than that of other agencies
- **Quality/ Accuracy of data is another concern**
  - In 2011, commerce secretary admitted that India's export figures for the April–October period were inflated by US\$9.4 billion due to a misclassification of certain items and data entry errors.
  - There has also been question over the accuracy of the Index of Industrial Production
  - Allegations that NSS systematically underestimated household consumption
- **Infringement of privacy by the government's data-collection machinery.**

#### **Draft national policy on official statistics:-**

- The United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics was adopted by India in 2016. The government had also committed to bring out a National Policy on Official Statistics(NPOS)
- To give furtherance to the principles, recently the GOI has placed the Draft National Policy on Official Statistics, 2018 in public domain
- **Key provisions:**
  - Dichotomise statistical products in the official statistical system into core statistics ( which are of national importance and critical to the economy)and other official statistics
  - Amendment in the Constitution to bring in censuses on subjects other than population census and statistics declared by Parliament by law to be of national importance in the Union List.
  - Production of official statistics should continue with the Government, whereas the related regulatory and advisory functions should be kept outside the Government
  - Coordination between agencies
  - Registered society under MOSPI to be set up- for all government data collection and analysis
  - Identification of statistical products through committees
- **Quality assurance:**
  - Apply National Quality Assurance Framework (NQAF) to each product of official statistics
  - evolve specific Quality Assurance Framework for the product consistent with NQAF
  - Promote compliance to NQAF through appropriate incentives/ awards
  - conduct statistical audit periodically through independent agencies on all the major statistical products
- **To assure confidentiality:**
  - Setting up standards for protecting confidentiality

- Releasing Official Statistics in accordance with a pre-specified publication calendar
- Declaring Data Production and Management Policy for each agency responsible for producing official statistics
- Implementation of the Code of Statistical Practice is made mandatory
- Publishing details of sharable and non-sharable official statistical datasets from time to time along with reasons
- Collaboration with other countries and UN and other international agencies on statistical matters
- It notes increasing data needs, lays down the groundwork for ethical data collection, highlights the importance of data quality and addresses the need for documentation and durable data storage.

**Criticism:-**

- It chooses to follow the report of the C. Rangarajan-led National Statistical Commission (NSC) submitted in 2001 and focusses largely on coordination within different ministries at the Centre and between State governments and the Centre. A tendency to centralise authority and decision-making within well-defined structures such as the NSC forms the core of the policy statement.
- It also recommends that a registered society under the oversight of MOSPI be set up with 2,000 crore endowment that will be tasked with all government data collection and statistical analyses. This tendency towards centralisation may well isolate official statistical systems.
- The collaboration between academics and the NSS has weakened substantially in recent years. The proposed move would lead to even further alienation of official statistical systems from the academic and research infrastructure of the nation.

**Way forward:-**

- Harness diverse energies from academic and research institutions such as the ISI, the Indian Agricultural Statistics Research Institute etc.
- **Include private sector as well:-**
  - Smaller, technology-savvy private sector organisations may also make important contributions in technology-driven data collection.
  - Around the world, in diverse countries such as China, South Africa, Brazil, the U.K. and the U.S., statistical ecosystems consist of universities, research institutions and government agencies working synergistically.
- Creative thinking about building synergies with diverse communities such as academic and research institutions would strengthen it and reduce the burden on the NSC, leaving it free to devote greater attention to developing quality control parameters and to play an oversight and coordination role.
  - Scholars from different disciplines should be incorporated for framing samples and questionnaires

- Include takeaways from experiments designed by cognitive anthropologists, and survey design specialists
- Robust survey management structure to ensure quality and honesty in data collection

**Conclusion:-**

- The draft National Policy on Official Statistics offers a great start for fostering trust in statistics but enhancing its inclusiveness will go a long way towards encouraging competence, reliability and honesty in public statistics.

**PRACTICE QUESTIONS**

**Answer the following Questions**

1. Critically examine the implications of providing energy-dense, factory-made nutrient packets as take-home ration under Anganwadi Services Scheme. (250 words)
2. Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana requires an urgent fix. Discuss. (250 words)