

USE OF ADMINISTRATIVE RECORDS FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS IN NEPAL

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1 Background

Nepal has a decentralised official statistical system in practice. This system encompasses Central Bureau of Statistics, Government ministries and agencies, Nepal Rastra Bank, semi-government agencies and autonomous bodies that produce statistics.

Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) is the major statistical agency of Nepal and has the important responsibility for the improvement in the national statistical system of the country. It conducts periodic censuses and surveys, and compiles several estimates and indicators from the secondary data. Further, the Bureau is mandated to serve as a coordinator of the statistical activities in the country.

Ministries and other government agencies in Nepal produce statistics related to their fields of work. Only a few of these ministries and agencies have established statistical units and they conduct surveys and compile statistics on specific subject areas. Several other ministries and agencies compile statistics mainly as a by-product of the administrative functions of their organizations but they have no statistical units established within the organization.

This paper¹ highlights the sources of education statistics in Nepal, along with the problems of using “administrative records” in compiling indicators of education sector. The paper also covers some of the issues “addressing the challenges of using

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administrative data” for various purposes including “indicators for monitoring and reporting of progress on achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)”.

2 Sources of Education Statistics in Nepal

Education statistics primarily come from: (a) administrative records of the Ministry of Education (MoE) and other related institutions, (b) censuses and surveys conducted by Central Bureau Statistics (CBS), and (c) surveys conducted by other ministries.

MoE collects data from the central level agencies and other educational institutions and publishes them. Besides, different institutions under the ministry publish education statistics on their own. These institutions include: Department of Education, Office of the Controller of Examination, School Teachers’ Record Office, Regional Education Directorates, and District Education Offices.

Autonomous institutions like University Grant Commission, Universities, Centre for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT), and Higher Secondary Education Board also compile and publish education statistics as per their own requirements.

Censuses and surveys conducted by the CBS and surveys conducted by some other Government institutions constitute the important sources of educational statistics in Nepal. Besides periodic censuses and surveys, household surveys (such as, Nepal Living Standards Survey, Nepal Demographic and Health Survey and Nepal Labour Force Survey) provide data on education sector of Nepal.

3 Education Statistics based on Administrative Data

Ministry of Education (MoE), inter alia, is responsible for the functions relating to “educational survey, statistics and research”. The MoE compiles and publishes education statistics in its publications such as, “Nepal in Educational Figures”.

Department of Education (DoE) provides school level educational statistics annually. The DoE also focuses its activities for strengthening education management information system (EMIS) at different levels: school, resource centre, district, region and centre. It

compiles data in a prescribed format and forwards it to the Ministry of Finance for its annual economic survey.

School level data are also available through the flash reports collected and published by the DoE. Flash reports are prepared twice a year based on the reporting of schools in each district.

Office of the Controller of Examination compiles and disseminates statistics of school leaving certificate (SLC) results and maintains individual records of the examinees.

School Teacher Records Office maintains and updates personal records of permanent teachers. Regional Education Directorate collects and analyses statistical reports on schools. University Grant Commission keeps the record of all constituent and affiliated campuses of different universities. Similarly, the Centre for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT), inter alia, maintains education database.

Administrative records of MoE are used for compiling the following MDG indicators: net enrolment ratio in primary education, primary completion rate, proportion of pupils starting grade one who reach grade five, and ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education.

CBS uses education statistics from MoE (like number of schools and enrolment rates) for the annual national accounts statistics compilation purposes. Further, CBS compiles and publishes several education indicators based on secondary data.

4 Problems with the Administrative Data

There is no doubt that administrative data form the very important source of official statistics in Nepal. Administrative records are the prime source for some of the education related indicators.

Notwithstanding their importance, educational data compiled from different administrative records sometimes result in deficiencies. These records have varying scope and coverage. They are also challenged in terms of their completeness as well as

their correctness. Some of the schools, for example, either do not report or report with a time lag. Hence, the school level information may not be comprehensive.

Record keeping systems in the school are not accurate. Manual processing of data creates compilation error. There are difficulties in questionnaire forms in flash reporting. These problems ultimately lead to discrepancies in the data reported.

Education statistics based on administrative records do not always meet the needs of the general users and agencies other than MoE. As mentioned earlier, several reasons for this include – method of recording data, scope of data, coverage of data, reporting of data and format of data reporting. School enrolment at the beginning of the school year is not necessarily the same as school attendance.

Education statistics based on administrative records provide little information about the characteristics of students beyond age and sex. These records contain limited or no information about the individual students. For example, no information is available of children who do not attend school.

Data collection and reporting is used for assessing the monitoring of progress. Therefore, reporting agencies tend to exaggerate their progress status positively. It is said that sometimes data are inflated for recruitment of additional teachers. There is also a tendency to under and over reporting by the private schools.

As mentioned earlier, another issue is that of “timeliness”. Reporting is delayed by one year or even two years in some cases. Serious communication problems exist at the schools as well as district level reporting systems. Many schools return back the forms only when financial grants to those schools are withheld.

Occasionally, a large jump is seen in data without any associated explanation of such changes. This creates confusion among data users. It is often very difficult to explain the trends shown by these data. This reduces the confidence of the users in data and finally the credibility of data.

5 Facets of the Use of Administrative Data

5.1 *Data for Statistical Purposes*

The major uses of administrative data for statistical purposes include: compilation of national accounts statistics, compilation of indicators for MDGs, compilation of sector wise indicators and in a few cases for providing statistical frames.

Providing the necessary data for monitoring and reporting of progress on achieving the MDGs with limited resource is a challenge. Providing meaningful disaggregated data is even more complicated task. However, there is good news also. Over the years there has been an increasing realisation that a large number of the MDG indicators can be produced based on administrative records. Consequently, a wide range of administrative data has been utilized in compiling these indicators.

5.2 *Management Issues*

In spite of their popularity, there are management issues associated with the use of administrative data for statistical purposes. In several instances, basic concepts and definitions do not conform to the international standards.

Let us take an example from education sector. There is an increasing tendency to adopt the concepts and definitions for the school level information as per the international recommendation. The present data capturing questionnaires in use seem entirely in line with the EFA Dakar framework and MDG indicators. This is not the case, however, for some other indicators related to literacy and learning achievement.

Some of the questions for the flash report are designed as per the local definitions and requirements to capture the progress on outputs and outcomes. So there are problems.

Often, incomplete data create problems in using administrative records. School records, for example, are not complete always due to lack of reporting by schools themselves.

The emerging issues of the changed paradigm of politics in the country have created increasing demand to produce data at disaggregated levels and categories. Accordingly, in many cases data are made available to provide indicators at disaggregated levels such as regions and sub-populations. In some other instances, however, data from the official records are available only for national level indicators. Quarterly data in usable formats are still very rare.

5.3 Quality Issues

There is no specific method, as such, followed to evaluate the quality of administrative data. The only method used at present is to compare administrative data with the similar data from the near past surveys and censuses. Such cross checks from survey data are not enough though. The other method is to look at the trends over the years and compare it with available relevant evidences.

EIMS in MoE is a regular system to transfer the data into meaningful indicators and analyze and interpret them so as to assist decision makers in drawing conclusions. Besides, different organizations and institutions under or affiliated with the MoE system collect, compile, interpret, analyze, publish and disseminate the information. In spite of MoE's recent efforts to enhance the quality of data on education statistics from administrative records, there are problems. Linkage between EMIS and other MIS system is still weak.

In this regard, National Planning Commission is considering establishing linkages among the organizations to include the education related questions in their survey instruments. On its part, CBS is always suggesting MoE/DoE to design questionnaires to capture the information relating to education using the standard concepts, definitions and formats.

5.4 Relationship with Agencies

In the absence of a well developed designated system of data collection and effective coordination mechanism, it is very difficult to establish relationship with the government agencies collecting data used in compiling important indicators and other statistics. CBS can only put forward its recommendations through technical committee meetings. The

present low status of CBS within the bureaucracy has further limited its relationship with other Government agencies.

CBS does not provide any formal training to these institutions. The specific departments have their own training programmes which help the quality enhancement programmes.

To take an example from education sector, computerization of data directly from the school forms is one of such quality enhancement programmes. In recent years the DoE has implemented series of training and orientation programmes to data suppliers as well as to users. Head teachers of all schools in the country have been oriented on aspects of EMIS as well as on the school data forms.

Similar types of trainings have been organized for data managers at different levels in MoE. These trainings cover the several aspects of data management including data collection, processing, analyses and dissemination as well as linking data activity with planning and decision making process.

CBS does not have formal agreements with separate agencies except for a few agencies like Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives. It has been very difficult to make formal agreement with the Ministry of Finance because they give less importance to statistical activities in the country.

5.5 Major Weaknesses

Yes, there are many. Lack of data sharing culture is one of them. There are other obstacles also. The administrative concepts are very seldom exactly the same as the statistical concepts. It is not always easy to access data from the records. There is lack of survey clearance system in the country. In the absence of quality assurance mechanism, data remain not much of use.

Despite its long history and several efforts to strengthen it, Nepali information system still suffers from many weaknesses. An example from education sector again, school personnel lack environment and consciousness towards the importance of reporting. In spite of the training initiatives, there is lack of training to the concerned people at all levels of record keeping.

Data are not kept in an organized way so the concerned institutions are reluctant to report the data required by the agencies such as CBS. For this, it is essential to change the perception of record keeping agencies towards the importance of statistics.

6 Conclusion

Reasons for using administrative data are many. The most common are – reduction of cost, reduction of response burden and facility for more detailed classifications. Other reasons include – availability of disaggregated data and relevance of information.

Administrative records can help to inexpensively replace some censuses and surveys required for education statistics. These records, however, can not replace all field surveys in countries like Nepal at least in near future.

In spite of their usefulness, importance and popularity, administrative records have several quality issues including time lag and coverage.

Increasing use of administrative data as a source of education statistics often raises another important issue of data sharing. In this regard, major concerns are - lack of data sharing culture, legal provision as an obstacle for access, poor documentation practices, and lack of comparability and harmonization.

Some other emerging issues are – growing concerns about confidentiality and data sensitivity, requirement of statistical tools, and increasing number of data providers.

At the Government level, data-based decision making practice has become more popular in recent years. This has further increased the importance of administrative data. In school education, decision on funding allocation to district is made based on some specific education indicators like net enrolment rate and girl's per cent in school.

There is a growing realisation that administrative records can be used to compile various indicators. Government has plans to make a consolidated national statistical system for strengthening coordination and standardization in the national information management system. There is, however, a long way to go before reaching to fruition.