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Evidence and the policy process from an Indian perspective

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This paper analyses the institutional framework and setting within which evidence has become linked to policy in India, and the role that multidisciplinary researchers play in the policy process. It draws on a number of empirical studies exploring sustainable and equitable development in India to illustrate the two-way relationship between researchers and policymakers, and to demonstrate the value in policy-oriented research of combining quantitative and qualitative methods. The author assesses the potential impact and effectiveness of evidence-based policymaking within the institutionalised strategic planning framework of the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog. She considers whether the lessons learnt from one region could be transposed to other regions within India and elsewhere, and discusses how and why policies and forms of delivery may require adaptation if they are to be implemented in different socioeconomic, political and cultural contexts.

Keywords: policy process in India, multidisciplinary approaches, institutionalised strategic planning, NITI Aayog, policy evaluation

Introduction

Historic Indian texts over the centuries, such as Valmiki's Ramayana (400 BCE–400 CE), Kautilya's Arthashastra (400 BCE–200 CE) and stories of the Pandyan kingdom (600 BCE–seventeenth Century), relate how famous emperors would visit their subjects incognito to observe and understand their lives and concerns first-hand (Jha, 2004). When particular issues were brought to their attention, exemplary kings would, reportedly, act to improve the welfare of their subjects both collectively and individually. Many centuries later, but with similar motives, Indian governments in postcolonial times have embraced a formalised system of centralised planning in an attempt to ensure that the country's resources are used to greatest effect.

As in many other countries around the world, current debate in India focusses on the ability of researchers to communicate their findings and engage with policymakers, and on the development of the knowledge, capabilities, motivation, incentives and attitudes of policymakers needed to ensure that evidence is used effectively (Newman, Capillo,

Famurewa, Nath & Siyanbola, 2013). Key to the success of the planning process in a society as vast and complex as India are the quantity and quality of the evidence base, and the way in which it is assessed, interpreted and fed into policy. While the supply of evidence from research is important, arguably, it can only be used effectively to inform policy if it is contextualised, readily accessible and valued by policymakers. This article explores the evidence-based policy process in India within the framework of national strategic planning, drawing on examples from multidisciplinary case studies in the areas of sustainable and equitable development to illustrate how the relationship between researchers and policymakers operates and to document the lessons that might be learnt from the Indian experience.

Sourcing the evidence base in India

Evidence is derived from a multiplicity of human observations in an attempt to record and understand social development and provide an accurate and logical account of behaviour. As in other countries, the nature of evidence in India depends on who the observer is, what is being observed and how the object is perceived and conceptualised within its socioeconomic, political and ideological context. Politicians, practitioners, journalists, researchers, artists and various others are constantly searching for the most feasible and tractable approaches to the collection and presentation of evidence, subject to available human, temporal and capital resources. The ways in which evidence is accumulated and processed depends, in turn, on multiple factors, including individual or teamwork, training, disciplinary perspectives, experience and circumstances, which together make for an extremely complex process.

A number of public and private institutions have long been generating large-scale data in India. For example, the Indian Census was established in 1871 during British Empire and was retained in independent India; the fifteenth national Census, the world's largest data collection exercise, conducted in 2011, enumerated over a billion people. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research was set up in 1929, and the International Crop Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics in 1972, to collect evidence using statistical techniques and agricultural experimentation.

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation is responsible for National Sample Surveys (NSS) that regularly collect social, economic, demographic, industrial and agricultural statistics through representative large-scale sample surveys conducted across the country. The main purpose of NSS is to help central and state governments with planning and

policy formation. NSS is also the main data source for researchers. The National Family Health Surveys (NFHS), which are large-scale surveys conducted by the Indian Institute of Population Studies (IIPS), provide national and state-level data on health and family welfare issues, including reproductive health, nutrition and fertility, to assist the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare with their planning and policy formulation. Funding support has been received for different rounds of surveys from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India and international agencies, including the US Agency for International Development, UK Department for International Development (DfID), Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund and United Nations Population Fund (see <http://www.rchiips.org/nfhs/>). Various private sector institutions, universities, research organisations and researchers also conduct their own large and small-scale surveys. Opinion polls and exit polls have increasingly become the domain of private media channels, and are sometimes conducted in collaboration with various research organisations.

As government support for evidence-based policy formation has grown in developing countries over the past decade (Newman, Fisher & Shaxson, 2012), the Indian Government has been engaging increasingly with researchers nationally and internationally to generate, discuss and understand evidence. Methodologies and data quality have improved markedly. Comparison of the evidence collected in the first NFHS in 1992–1993 and subsequent surveys, for example, demonstrates how collaboration between policymakers, national and international professional organisations can help to raise technical standards, the quality of data analysis and reporting.

In India, public and private institutions, media and civil society regularly raise public awareness of critical issues, thereby indirectly exerting further pressure on government to ensure that policymaking prioritises the welfare of citizens. The Government has also invested substantially in the development of the knowledge and skills of its own officials through leadership training programmes, workshops and secondments at various international universities in the US and Europe, and in public policy institutions, including the World Bank and Bank of England.

Multidisciplinary approaches to the generation of evidence

The value of multidisciplinary approaches and mixed methods in evidence-based policy research is widely recognised for their contribution to the understanding of international

cultures and comparisons in the social and human sciences (Hantrais, 2009; Mark, Greene & Shaw, 2006). The major challenge for researchers and policymakers in India is to ensure quality of data collection, and effective assimilation and analysis of evidence in a context of globally interlinked overload of information characteristic of the ‘internet of everything’ age. They are able to call upon a well-established tradition of multi-methods data collection as a basis for policy. Several sources for large-scale data collection exist as noted above, and multidisciplinary and mixed methods are regularly employed in empirical evidence-based research in India. Technology has enabled further advancements in data collection such as the digitally developed Unique Identification (UID) Aadhaar (see <https://uidai.gov.in/>), which serves as an important data source, for example in the coordination of the various schemes to improve implementation of welfare programmes by enabling direct benefits transfers (DBT) for food and fertiliser subsidies (see <http://indiabudget.nic.in/survey.asp>).

An in-depth study has been conducted each decade since 1957 in Palanpur, Uttar Pradesh (Bliss & Stern, 1982; India Observatory, 2011; Lanjouw & Stern, 1998), and the latest survey having been conducted during 2008-2010 and a quick survey to update the data has been conducted in the first quarter of 2015. The 2000s saw a general revival of interest in longitudinal village and community-based studies in India. The Palanpur research comprises a rich source of longitudinal data and involves an international multidisciplinary research team of economists, statisticians and anthropologists and uses a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods to contextualise, inform and influence the understanding of developments in India, and internationally, including agricultural productivity, wages, migration, education, health and governance. Some investigators have been involved continuously across several studies and have spent prolonged periods of time in the village, accumulating detailed knowledge pertaining to every family across generations.

A study of HIV/AIDS prevalence and means of prevention in Tamil Nadu is another example of in-depth evidence-based research. The study was conducted in 1999 at a time when very little was known about the disease in India. Building on more than 15 years’ experience of state-wide surveys in Tamil Nadu and field surveys in other states in South India, the researcher (Kattumuri, 2003) looked behind the statistics and engaged with people living with the infection, their families and the communities around them. Many hours were spent with the respondents, talking and observing their daily lives, using both quantitative and qualitative techniques to gather a rich body of evidence.

The Palanpur and Tamil Nadu studies demonstrate the value of in-depth mixed methods. Given the prevailing social, literacy, economic and cultural circumstances in India, ethnographic methods and face-to-face interviews still offer the best means of gathering reliable evidence about the underlying causes of patterns of behaviour and social change to supplement data available from large-scale surveys. Qualitative approaches are particularly valuable in overcoming the otherwise low response rate and accuracy levels from self-reported survey data. As in most other countries, finding credible evidence requires building a relationship of trust with respondents and engaging directly with the issues and the community, the more so if the researchers are from a different social, economic or national background, as demonstrated, for example, by Boo's (2012) study of Mumbai slum-dwellers, or Crowley's (2012) account of children's parliaments in Tamil Nadu.

The problems faced in conducting in-depth studies in a country as complex as India primarily concern the limited resources of time, skilled persons and material, as well as researcher and other forms of bias (Harkness, Mohler & Van de Vijver, 2003). As reported in other countries (for example United Nations Statistics Division, 2005), a number of risks are inherent in surveys where investigators spent only a limited time at the field site: respondents are sometimes shrewd enough to tailor their answers to what they think the investigator wants to hear; they may exaggerate the situation in the hope of personal gain; and/or, in situations where people are craving publicity, they may seek to sensationalise their statements. Cases have also been recorded by the author where subjects have fabricated their answers just to get rid of the investigators. Personal experience of carrying out in-depth studies on a large scale in India suggests that, it is important to spend time, and establish trust, with the respondents in order to obtain reliable data. Subjects in India are always keen to know the purpose of the research, even if they do not see any immediate economic or social benefit. If they are made aware that the investigator's motivation is to supply the evidence needed to improve policy development, they will be more likely to be cooperative, as they expect to benefit eventually from the research findings.

Institutionalised evidence-based policy in India

In 1950, immediately after India became a Republic, the national Planning Commission was created with a mandate to assess all resources in the country, formulate plans for their most effective and balanced use, and determine priorities for implementation (see <http://planningcommission.gov.in/aboutus/history/index.php?about=aboutbdy.htm>). The first five-year plan was launched in 1951. For more than half a century, five-year plans have been

central in setting priorities for the country's development; despite this long tradition, the planning process still lacks formality and rigour. Challenges encountered in the past that are still present today are how to ensure the quality and standards of evidence being produced, the effectiveness of linkages between evidence and policy, and of policy implementation and evaluation.

The formal model of planning adopted in India after independence, and which operated during the socialist era, was considered to have limited relevance in the post-reform period. Consequently, in January 2015, Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi established the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog as a think tank to replace the Planning Commission.

In keeping with the guiding principle that, while incorporating positive international influences, no single model should be transplanted from outside into the Indian context, the NITI Aayog is intended to provide an explicit 'Bharatiya' (Sanskrit for 'of India' or Indian) approach to development, based on an independent strategy for growth that will work in and for India (Gilani, 2015). This ideological framework draws its inspiration from a long line of influential Indian thinkers, representing a broad range of the country's economic, social and cultural fibre: Thiruvalluvar (sometime between the third and first centuries BC), the Tamil poet and philosopher; Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), the philosopher and Indian Hindu monk known for raising interfaith awareness and elevating Hinduism to the status of world religion; Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948), the father of the nation and leader of the non-violent movement for Indian independence; Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956), the chief architect of the Indian Constitution and champion of civil liberties for individual citizens, including freedom of religion, the abolition of untouchability and the outlawing of all forms of discrimination; and Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya (1916–1968), the Indian philosopher, economist, sociologist, political scientist and leader of Bharatiya Jana Sangh, the forerunner of the Bharatiya Janata Party.

NITI Aayog's broad remit is to provide strategic and technical guidance to governments at central and state levels on relevant policy priorities affecting national interests, including within the international context, while enhancing cooperative federalism of the vast nation of India, with its immense sociocultural (religion and caste) and geopolitical (states and natural resources) diversity. NITI Aayog is charged with stimulating regional councils to address specific regional issues, by enabling greater consultation, cooperation, equal access to

opportunities, participative and adaptive governance and development across public and private sectors, as well as more effective use of technology. NITI Aayog is to be supplied with the necessary resources, knowledge, skills and capacity to act swiftly to provide a strategic policy vision for government and deal with contingent issues. The stated (and ambitious) priority for NITI Aayog is to support pro-people, proactive and participatory development agendas (see <http://pmindia.gov.in/en/tag/niti-aayog/>).

The former Planning Commission had the power to allocate funds and approve projects; it formulated policies and then consulted with states, which sometimes caused tensions between the centre and the states. By contrast, NITI Aayog, whose governing council is chaired by the PM and includes three sub-groups comprising the Chief Ministers (CMs) of the states, is designed to be an advisory body with no power to allocate funds or impose policies. Rather it is a formulator of ideas and policy priorities, and a facilitator for regular consultations between the centre, and the 29 states and 7 union territories (UTs). From its inception, the PM has been chairing regular consultations with CMs and UTs in designing and formulating plans, resulting in a general consensus in favour of greater devolution of powers and funds. The budget announced on 28 February 2015 accepted the fourteenth Finance Commission's recommendation to devolve 42% of the Centre's tax receipts to the states, representing an increase from 32% in the previous year, thereby demonstrating the Government's commitment to the devolution process (see <http://indiabudget.nic.in/ub2015-16/eb/intro.pdf>). In April 2015, a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance chaired by Veerapa Moily, a senior politician in the Congress Party, recommended that the NITI Aayog think tank should become an independent body and that the Planning Ministry, which would be left without a mandate, should be dismantled (ET Bureau, 2015). As an independent institution, NITI Aayog would thus have greater autonomy in providing unbiased evidence and policy recommendations, and could demonstrate a strong sense of commitment to the reform process.

Like many of the institutionalised evidence-based policy structures in other countries (Lenihan, 2013), the main functions of NITI Aayog, drawn up by the PM in consultation with close colleagues and civil servants, can be summarised as follows:

- to design strategic and long-term policy and programme frameworks and initiatives;
- to monitor their progress and efficacy and provide feedback for any mid-course corrections, improvements and innovations that might be required;

- actively to monitor and evaluate the implementation of programmes and initiatives, including the identification of resources that might be required to strengthen the probability of success and scope of delivery;
- to provide advice and encourage partnerships between key stakeholders and like-minded national and international think tanks, educational and policy research institutions;
- to create a knowledge, innovation and entrepreneurial support system through a collaborative community of national and international experts, practitioners and other partners;
- to offer a platform for resolution of inter-sectoral and inter-departmental issues to accelerate the implementation of the development agenda;
- and to maintain a resource centre as a repository of research on good governance and best practices in sustainable and equitable development, while also assisting in their dissemination to stakeholders.

(collated by the author from <http://pmindia.gov.in/en/tag/niti-aayog/>)

The structure of NITI Aayog is designed to enable it to carry out its many functions by sharing responsibilities between several ‘wings’, encompassing research, consultancy and Team India. The role of the research wing is to develop in-house research and analysis, to act as an incubator and disseminator for thoughts and ideas for development. To this end, the council comprises two part-time members from leading universities and research institutions. The role of the consultancy wing is to develop expertise on markets and funding advice that central and state governments can access. The council therefore includes experts, specialists and practitioners. Team India comprises representatives from the states and centre, and serves as a nodal unit for their collaboration, charged with enhancing communication and fostering better interstate and centre–state coordination (Press Trust of India, 2015).

Effective operationalisation of the new commission’s plans will be highly resource intensive. Achieving its extensive goals, particularly in fast-tracking growth and development in India, meeting contemporary standards, and responding to the aspirations and needs of its vast population, are major tasks requiring strong commitment, investment and leadership to improve collaboration in research, training, knowledge sharing and dissemination. NITI Aayog’s wide range of constituent members is designed to ensure that the interests of the rich and poor states, as well as the variety of economic and social issues pertaining to the country as a whole, are represented. The varied political leadership of the state CMs should also

contribute to the development of a varied agenda, requiring rigorous evidence-based analyses to inform and implement policy priorities.

NITI Aayog is too recent a creation to enable any assessment of its likely success as an evidence broker and coordinator between producers and users of evidence. If implemented and coordinated effectively, the institution could provide a strong mechanism for enhancing evidence-based policymaking. The more optimistic view is that NITI Aayog is aspirational and promising, and that, under strong leadership and with an appropriate methodology, its goals seem to be both relevant and achievable.

Mediating the evidence-based policy process

The extent and range of policy domains and stakeholders in any country, and more especially in a country as complex as India, mean that collaboration between researchers and policymakers at national and international levels is essential if the evidence-based policy process is to be effective.

In India, as elsewhere, the various actors and stakeholders in the policy process utilise each other's expertise to ground their analyses and conclusions, formulate and present their ideas, with the shared aim of contributing to the improvement of society. The wide range of linguistic and cultural knowledge required to carry out fieldwork, process and analyse evidence, and present it in an accessible way to policymakers in different policy environments means that the role of intermediaries as knowledge brokers in collaborative programmes is of critical importance. Collaboration between practitioners and researchers, and between people with experience and those with conceptual knowledge, has the potential for creating and presenting evidence and informing policy. Researchers are constantly seeking, finding and publishing evidence; policymakers are constantly seeking evidence that can become lodged in their minds and influence decisions. However, researchers and policymakers have different levels of motivations and capacities for producing and presenting evidence and influencing policies (Newman *et al.*, 2013). Society benefits most when both parties consciously nurture the two-way relationship and jointly develop processes whereby evidence is woven into the policy process. Successful collaboration between policymakers and national and international research organisations depends crucially on the assistance of intermediaries who are trusted by both the scientific community and by politicians.

Currently, the Indian Economic Service (IES) and Indian Revenue Service (IRS) are among key government services responsible for the transmission of knowledge to policymakers. Officers are selected through highly competitive processes and regularly undertake national and international training programmes. The question arises as to whether the IES and IRS are equipped to be the most effective intermediaries. Although administrative officers in India often possess in-depth knowledge based on their experience and interaction in the field, it has been claimed that its public institutions lack the capacity to generate high quality data and the knowledge needed to use evidence efficiently (Shekhar & Padmanabhan, 2014). Through these and other institutions, the Indian Government, in principle, already has available in-house, an extremely well informed, knowledgeable and highly qualified corps, with mechanisms that NITI Aayog can draw on for processing evidence-informed policy. However, further investment and effective mediation strategies are required to optimise the productivity of existing human and capital resources. NITI Aayog could benefit from sourcing and scaling up the collaborations where national and international researchers are engaged as knowledge brokers.

Existing relationships built through educational institutions, as well as in the community through social and family contacts, provide valuable resources for establishing and enhancing the nexus between researchers and policymakers. The longitudinal village study of Palanpur is a good example of how, over the years, Stern, the principal investigator, this author, and other colleagues have been able to disseminate their findings to the highest level of national and international policymakers in India and elsewhere: for example, they have regularly discussed research evidence about economic developments in Palanpur with senior cabinet ministers at the highest level.

The experience of HIV/AIDS in India also shows how collaboration between research and policy operates (Kattumuri, 2003). Very little was known about the problem when researchers started investigating HIV prevalence and prevention in the early 1990s in Tamil Nadu. Considerable time and effort were devoted to the sharing of evidence and transmission of knowledge in discussions with central and state government officials, thereby providing an opportunity to influence policymaking through regular communication of the findings to the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO, 2012), as it was developed in the states and centrally. Multi-sectoral state, national and international communities collaborated and shared knowledge and resources, thereby creating and increasing awareness, and improving prevention strategies.

The evidence-based environmental sustainability programme in Karnataka state is a further example of successful mediation brokered by researchers (India Observatory, 2009). This collaborative project involved a consortium of researchers and engagement with senior government officials. The findings were presented as technical reports and summary recommendations in both English and Kannada (the state language) and were released by CM Siddaramaiah, who chaired and hosted their launch in the state Assembly. The CM and relevant cabinet members had carefully read through the reports and had absorbed the findings and recommendations. CM Siddaramaiah commended the evidence-based research and analyses and stated that reports such as these provided much needed resources for the state government and would be incorporated into the planning and development of low-carbon green growth policies. The reports have subsequently been made widely available to all relevant policymakers in other states in India and in other countries facing similar challenges for sustainable development, and interested in drawing lessons from the research findings, notably South Africa and South Korea.

Evidence can be communicated and transmitted in different forms to maximise policy influence and impact. Although demand for research-based evidence exists among policymakers, they are often too busy with various priorities (Newman *et al.*, 2013) and do not rely solely on evidence from research. Policymakers in India regularly read non-scientific reports, opinion editorials in magazines and various other sources of evidence to inform their thinking and understanding on a topical issue. The *Economic and Political Weekly*, in particular, has a wide readership among people involved in research-based evidence and policymaking. Published from Mumbai, the journal offers commentary and research papers on public policy, politics, economics and culture, and provides a platform for social scientists, activists, students and public officials to engage in analysis, debates and discussions (see <http://www.epw.in/>). Blogs, twitter and other social media sources are also becoming increasingly relevant as sources of information and influence. Researchers seeking to influence policy therefore need to communicate their findings concisely in easy-to-grasp policy briefs and to engage regularly with policymakers at various levels from local to national by publishing through these different media and accessing policymakers' networks.

In turn, politicians have been quick to seize the opportunities afforded by modern means of communication to disseminate their policy thinking through public lectures, blogs, tweets, books and other publications (for example Acharya & Mohan 2010; Ahluwalia, 2011; Ramesh, 2015). By engaging with researchers through these many channels, policymakers

may gain a more balanced understanding of local scenarios. In their paper, Kattumuri and Ravindranath (2014) demonstrate that, by engaging with one another through these different channels, policymakers and researchers are able to gain a more balanced understanding of local scenarios.

Measuring impact

Commissioned or invited research by government is intended to inform, influence and impact policy change. Policymaking in India, as elsewhere, is intrinsically interwoven with evidence-based research together with experience and knowledge of practitioners. Policymakers are generally influenced by multiple factors, including in-house knowledge and mechanisms for gathering evidence. The importance of the what (issue being researched and/or policy being formulated), who (researcher, civil society and policymaker), how/where/when of evidence and the mechanics of the policy process are key factors in determining the impact of evidence-based policy.

Most often, the impact of a particular study can only be felt over a period of time after a long trajectory. Since policy influence and impact are embedded in multiple socioeconomic issues, they may often not be directly measurable, evidenced or evaluated. The HIV/AIDS study in Tamil Nadu illustrates how the impact of research on policy could be identified over time, although it would be unrealistic and presumptuous to claim that a single study was solely responsible for changing policy. Following the 1999 fieldwork, in the absence of a known cure, the exchange of field-based knowledge about medical, social and cultural practices for prevention, within and between states, was found to have contributed to the number of new HIV infections in India being halved in a decade (NACO, 2012). Multiple processes, whether or not they were mediated by researchers, national and international collaborations and sharing of evidence-based knowledge between researchers and policymakers were all found to be at play.

The willingness or capacity of policymakers in India, as elsewhere, to listen to and/or act on research evidence cannot, however, be taken for granted. Nor is the relationship between evidence and policy independent of other factors. Based on research evidence from India, Pande (2003) argues that policies enacted by electorally accountable governments often fail to reflect the interests of disadvantaged minorities and suggests that policymakers may lack a genuine commitment to evidence-based policy. In a study of theory and evidence, with reference to the political economy of government responsiveness in India, Besley & Burgess

(2002) have shown, by contrast, that public food distribution and calamity relief expenditure were more prevalent where governments faced greater electoral accountability, and where newspaper circulation was highest, suggesting that a more informed and politically active electorate strengthens incentives for governments to be responsive to their needs.

Equally, leaders from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds may influence policies affecting their own communities, as exemplified by Ambedkar who was able to help bring about improvements for Dalit communities in a context where caste politics is still a significant factor in decision-making (Bayly, 2001). To take another example, a study of 265 village councils in West Bengal and Rajasthan found that the engagement of women in the decision to introduce reserved council seats for them affected the types of public goods provided, and showed that leaders were more likely to invest in infrastructure that is directly relevant to the needs of their own sex (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004). Ultimately, the challenge for policymakers in using the evidence base would seem to lie in their ability to neutralise the conflict of interest between the pursuit of personal, party and corporate profit, popularity and power, and the aim of serving the public interest and promoting the welfare of society.

Policy learning and transfer

The world is intrinsically interconnected economically, socially and culturally, and a plethora of information exists in the public domain on which researchers and policymakers can draw. Policy learning and transfer take place at a number of levels over time and space, both nationally and internationally (Kattumuri, 2011). Indian researcher and policy communities have long been able to gain from knowledge exchange, skills development and training programmes, involving national and international development organisations, funding agencies, government organisations, universities, think tanks and non-governmental organisations, offering opportunities to develop knowledge and experience of effective evidence-based policymaking.

Policy learning and transfer is often a two-way process that is likely to be most effective when the societies concerned are at a similar stage of development and/or facing similar economic, social and cultural challenges. In the past ten years, India has sought to enhance its cooperation with the other three advanced developing countries, namely Brazil, China and South Africa, while also expanding its partnerships with developed countries (Ramesh, 2015). For example, when seeking to expand, redefine and improve the efficiency of her own social

protection programmes, India looked at Brazil's Bolsa Familia social welfare programme as a possible model suited to meeting the needs of a vast population (Kattumuri, 2011a). Other examples have been cited in this article, both of the influence on present-day approaches to policy development within India of thinkers in earlier centuries, and of the exchange of knowledge about methods and practices with other countries through bilateral and multilateral collaboration.

In a country as diverse and complex as India, knowledge sharing, cooperation and synergies between states are crucial in designing and implementing policies that can be rolled out by central government across states and scaled up from devolved state to federal level in an attempt to even out variations in development standards. For example, the nutritious noon-meal scheme, providing free lunches to children in government-run schools in Tamil Nadu to encourage school attendance, was revamped in the early 1980s and subsequently incorporated into policies at national level (Kattumuri, 2011a).

Building on its long tradition and the availability of mechanisms, technologies and other resources for policy formation and delivery, India can draw lessons from both inside and outside the country. By adapting policy models from elsewhere (Lenihan, 2013), India is well placed to optimise opportunities for enhancing evidence-based policy development and implementation. In this context, NITI Aayog offers a valuable potential framework for institutionalised evidence-based policy analyses and recommendations that could drive forward an innovative Bharatiya model of development by making the most of the entrepreneurial and technological acumen that exists in the country.

Notes on contributor

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