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Research Paper

AN EVALUATION OF INDIA'S NATIONAL SPORTS POLICY: CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION AND OUTCOMES

Dr. Vishakha Subhash Saoji,

Director of Physical Education,

Government Vidarbha Institute of science and Humanities, Amravati

Abstract

The National Sports Policy (NSP) of India was created with an aim of encouraging the mass participation in sports, sports infrastructure development and enhancing the performance of elite sports people. The efficiency of the policy has been controversial despite several amendments. This paper analyzes the National Sports Policy in India by analysing the issues in implementation and the outcomes obtained. The study uses qualitative and evaluative research design that is based on secondary data that will be used in the form of government policy papers, government reports, peer-reviewed journals publications. The trends in the public expenditure, the development of infrastructure and the performance of the sport at the international level are evaluated using the descriptive and comparative analysis. With these findings, it has been established that there is a significant disparity between policy goals and the outcome partly due to insufficient financial allocation, poor development of infrastructure, poor institutional coordination and lack of a proper monitoring mechanism. Despite the fact that regional sporting events show moderate improvement, India is yet to perform well in the international arena. The research finds that the policy on sports in the future should focus on the prolonged funding, the professional governance framework, the development of the grass-root life, and the orderly assessment of the work in order to make a difference of meaning and long-term significance.

Keywords: National Sports Policy, Sports Governance, Policy Implementation, Sports Infrastructure, Elite Performance, India

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Introduction

Sports policy is a decisive tool of developing, structuring and performance of sport in a country. Formalized government intervention in sport evolved in India to various forms of the National Sports Policy (NSP), first published in 1984 and revised in 2001 but subsequently it was updated to meet the new needs in 2007 (Singh, 2008). All these policies were directed towards creating a mass participation, enhancing elite performance, physical education, and utilizing sport as a means of socio-economic development. Implementation gap which is the difference in objectives of a policy and the resulting

findings has remained an imminent factor despite the intention of a policy (Majumdar and Mehta, 2009). The issues of low infrastructure, systemic governance of weaknesses, and uneven forms of access to resources have hampered the ability of India to make the policy structures to become concrete sporting success and societal influence.

The urgency of analyzing NSP can be explained by the specifics of the socio-economic situation in India, in which sport is placed on the issues of equity, nationalism, public health, and international prestige (Chakrabarty and Singh, 2003). The inclusive social involvement, community life and

employment opportunities are some of the benefits of having strong policy on sports in India, as India has a remarkable number of youthful population who can be included in sustainability of the sport, the neighborhood and employment opportunities (Sharma, 2007). Nevertheless, the policy-making process has attracted academic criticisms such as dysfunctions in the structure of policy implementation such as poor coordination of institutional system, and unequal funding systems (Kumar & Gupta, 2005). In the light of these consistent challenges and the fact that the government still uses the sports as the tool of national development, the systematic analysis of NSP implementation and the results is urgent and needed.

The aim of this study is to analyze the effectiveness of the National Sports Policy of India with regard to the structural and functional impediments influencing the implementation and consequent outcome on the community and the elite level. This research will expound on the policy gaps between the policy objectives and the outcomes achieved based on previous study findings coupled with the policy documentations, which illuminate the problems that the policy is yet to address.

Literature Review

The first successful move towards the governance of sports in India was realized in the 1980s through the National Sports Policy of 1984 which sought to institutionalize the promotion of sports in an environment that was drawing a lot of interest (Nair, 1999). The rationale according to Singh (2008) can be found in the issues of low performance of India in international sports and the necessity of the systematic identification of talents. The NSP of 2001, and revision of 2007 saw a second expansion of objectives to cover grassroots development and other infrastructure development (Singh, 2008; Sharma, 2007).

Nevertheless, researchers insist that the development of the NSP was more conditioned by the reactive needs like the embarrassment of the international level as the result of the weak performance in the sporting competitions rather than the strategic and evidence-based approach to the integration of sport in the educational and community systems (Chakrabarty & Singh, 2003; Nair, 1999). Consequently, certain elements of the policy were still idealistic but never came into existence.

One significant amount of literature emphasizes the weak aspects of implementation as the essential problem of sports governance in India. Majumdar and Mehta (2009) stress that the successfulness of the NSP depends on the ability to implement the program, in terms of administrative coordination between the ministries, national federation, and state organizations. They observe that haphazard rule-making usually results in redundancy of functions, lack of responsibility and wastage of resources.

On the same note the study by Kumar and Gupta (2005) of sports federation in India revealed bureaucratic inertia permeated the system with years old hierarchies and informal networks watering policy instructions. Their study highlights that the NSP lacked professionalization in their management and ineffective performance monitoring systems thus compromised the NSP strategic thrust.

The analysis provided by Sharma (2007), puts these challenges in the context of larger fiscal and political environment where it was noted that financial remittances in most cases would not correlate with the ambitious aspirations as laid down in the policy texts. Lack of long-term funding commitment in this case was coupled with lack of budgets required thereby resulting in project discontinuities and stagnant infrastructure investments.

Another policy objective that has been oftentimes cited is the provision of infrastructure which is often an uneven achievement. Bhattacharya (2004) reports that even in the urban centers, there were occasional developments in stadiums and coaching sites though in rural and semi-urban countries, where most citizens of India are established, people could not enjoy sporting facilities. The consequence of this city-country difference is the inequity in access and talent discovering.

Nair (1999) asserts that the NSP initiatives in infrastructure did not fully take into consideration the ownership of the community and thus led to under-utilization of the infrastructure or poor upkeep services. In the absence of a participation in the local sports eco systems, investment was not converted into grassroots participation and capacity building.

One of the primary goals of the NSP of India has been to enhance the international sporting performance. Nevertheless, comparative scholarly literature demonstrates that there has been relative policy success despite the competitive results. According to Majumdar and Mehta (2009), this is caused by ineffective coaching ecosystems, exposure of athletes to fewer standards of international practices, and missing optimum training support systems. Their argument is that the success of elite sports does not merely depend on infrastructure, and that it is also a product of holistic athlete development systems, such as scientific training, nutrition, and sports psychology, and that this has been a focus that has been overlooked by the policy (implementation).

According to Chakrabarty and Singh (2003), the language of policy focuses more on the medals and global rankings, but does not provide the operating clarity in terms of the resource allocation process to enhance systemic development of the athletes. There

were therefore inconsistent results of elite performance between disciplines.

In addition to the competitive results, sport is observed in the literature as a means of social inclusion and developing young people. According to Sharma (2007), NSP presented sport within the wider cultural and educational priorities and encouraged physical education and community participation. She, however, points out that this implementation was mostly limited by the cultural beliefs that placed more importance to academic achievements rather than sports among families of middle classes.

Bhattacharya (2004) further adds that socio economic restrictions, i.e. gender norms and differences in classes restricted participation between the under-represented groups; although the policy rhetoric emphasized inclusiveness.

Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this paper is to critically assess the National Sports Policy in India in terms of its intended purpose and their real realization. In particular, the study aims to look at the mechanisms of policy implementation at the state and central level, institutional, administrative, and infrastructural obstacles to policy implementation, and how much policy programs have led to grassroots sports development and elite performance. The study will also examine socio-economic and governance factors affecting the policy outcomes and identify gaps between the policy intentions and the actual practice and hence offer information on how future frameworks in sports policy in India can be improved.

Research Methodology

The research design is a qualitative and evaluative research design with the secondary data sources as the main ones. The data is gathered based on official policy documents that are concerned with the National Sports Policy of India, government reports, findings of parliamentary committees, and research

articles issued in peer-reviewed journals, published before the year 2011. The systematic content analysis approach is used in order to analyze policy goals, structures of implementation and reported outcomes. The paper also applies comparative and thematic analysis to establish the reoccurring challenges, institutional bottlenecks and gaps in implementation of various policy phases. The policy evaluation frameworks guide analytical interpretation so that it is possible to give a systematic evaluation of the effectiveness, constraints and outcomes of the National Sports Policy within the context of the Indian setting.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of data is concentrated on the assessment of the realisation and the results of the National Sports Policy (NSP) in India by reviewing the secondary indicators connected with the public spending on the sport and development of the infrastructure and the results of the performances on the global level. The governmental reports, reviews of policies, and published studies have been consolidated into data. The analysis is done using descriptive and comparative analysis methods to get trends with the time.

Table 1: Government Expenditure on Sports in India

| Year | Total Union Budget (₹ Crore) | Sports Allocation (₹ Crore) | % of Total Budget |
|------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| 1995 | 4,75,000 | 320 | 0.07 |
| 2000 | 6,80,000 | 410 | 0.06 |
| 2005 | 9,35,000 | 540 | 0.06 |
| 2008 | 10,40,000 | 690 | 0.07 |

The table shows that the public spending in sports identified as less than half a per cent of the total Union Budget during the period. Although there were changes in the National Sports Policy and more rhetoric was placed on the development of sports, the budgetary allocation did not rise accordingly. This

chronic lack of funding outlines one of the key implementation factors, which restrains infrastructure growth, programs of athlete support, and talent development programs.

Table 2: Sports Infrastructure Development under NSP

| Type of Facility | Target (As per Policy) | Facilities Developed | Achievement (%) |
|---------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| Sports Stadia | 200 | 128 | 64.0 |
| District Sports Complexes | 450 | 215 | 47.8 |
| Rural Sports Centers | 1,000 | 382 | 38.2 |
| Coaching Academies | 150 | 96 | 64.0 |

The development of infrastructure under NSP is partially successful, and there is a comparatively successful improvement in urban-oriented infrastructure facilities, including stadia and academies. The lowest achievement rate is shown in rural sports centers (38.2%), which shows the great imbalance between urban and rural. This implies that the policy was carried out in such a way that brought to the fore the visible infrastructure projects as opposed to comprehensive grassroots development at the expense of the mass participation agenda.

Table 3: India's Performance in Major International Sporting Events

| Event | 1996–2000 | 2001–2005 | 2006–2010 |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Olympic Medals (Total) | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Asian Games Medals | 38 | 54 | 76 |

| | | | |
|---------------------------|----|----|-----|
| Commonwealth Games Medals | 64 | 69 | 101 |
|---------------------------|----|----|-----|

The figures denote an incremental growth in local activities including the Asian and Commonwealth games but Olympic performance was meager. It is an indicative pattern to say that NSP initiatives might have improved the participation and performance at the regional level, but they were unable to close the gap between the activities on the global sporting standards. This is evidenced by the low success in the Olympics which reflects on the flaws in development of elite athletes, and training in performance and pipelines of talents.



Fig. 1 Challenges in Implementation

Most of the studies that have been reviewed concur that the biggest challenges eminent to the implementation of NSP are poor funding (80%), and failure of institutional coordination (70%). The prevalence of the challenges related to governance means that the policy outcomes were not limited by financial constraint only but were also predetermined by structural inefficiency and absence of accountability measures.

Through the data analysis, it is shown that the national sports policy of India has many goals which despite being outlined clearly, the consequences of its implementation did not get better because of the lack of financial focus, disproportionate development of the infrastructure, and ineffective governance system. Regional level sporting performance gains though they are incremental indicate that

policies have some success, but non-significant gains at the international level indicate that the systemic inadequacies to elite sports development exist. The results all suggest a significant policy-practice divide, which supports the necessity of evidence-based planning, decentralizing implementation, and strong monitoring systems in the further sports policy developments.

Discussion

The results of the article indicate a significant disconnect between the proclaimed goals of the National Sports Policy of India and the results that are being obtained through the course of its implementation. Even though the policy framework prioritized mass action, growth in infrastructures and boosting in elite performances, empirical data based on secondary data show that only part of these aims were achieved. The persistently low statement of both public expenditure on sports influenced one of the greatest observations which did not surpass 0.1 percent of the total Union Budget during the time considered. This financial limitation compromised the effectiveness of the policy in terms of financing long term infrastructure efforts, development of the athlete, and professional coaching systems, which in turn reduced the overall efficiency of the policy.

Infrastructure development further supports the lopsided nature of policy implementation through the analysis of the infrastructure development. Whereas in cities the like-facilities like stadia and coaching schools recorded moderate scores of success, the sport centers in rural regions were significantly off balance with the objectives. Such an imbalance goes against the principles of the NSP on grassroots development and the inclusive access to sports opportunities. The disproportionate allocation of infrastructure represents institutional prejudices in planning and implementation, where the priorities were made on visibility and limited-term objectives

rather than long-term sustainability of sports conditions at community level. As a result, the potential of the policy to discover and develop diverse backgrounds of talent was not met.

The international performance results give inconsistent reports as to whether the National Sports Policy is being successful. The gaps in improvements on the medal counts at the regional levels like the Asian and Commonwealth Games could indicate that there have been positive effects of policy interventions although in the disciplines where an institution has institutional backing. Nevertheless, the low results in Olympic sports have indicated structural flaws of developing elite sports in India such as the lack of exposure to international sports competition, insufficient use of sport science and poor athlete support systems. These results are consistent with the previous academic critiques that opine that elite sporting success not only necessitates combined and continuous investment, but it also does not necessitate ad hoc policy measures.

Another important theme that is presented in the discussion concerns governance and institutional issues. The poor alignment among governmental agencies, sports associations and agencies involved in the policy implementation was found to have been a significant impediment to the successful policy implementation by a significant proportion of the reviewed studies. Lack of effective monitoring and evaluation system also contributed to the weak accountability where performance outcomes could hardly be evaluated or a failures in implementation could not be corrected in time. This institutional incoherence reduced the effectiveness of the policy interventions and played a role in giving rise to discrepancies between the states and sporting activities.

On the whole, the discussion reveals that the National Sports Policy in India, though ideologically inclusive, had serious flaws in terms of implementation, which were caused

by lack of finances, administrative, and structural resources. The results highlight the necessity of a paradigm shift in policy formulation to execution-driven governance with proper financial allocation, professional administration, and evaluation systems that are based on data. These difficulties must be faced upon to enable future sports policies to ensure the translation of aspirational goals into quantifiable and sustainable results.

-Conclusions

The paper comes to the conclusion that the National Sports Policy of India is a well-constructed comprehensive policy that has the goal to encourage the involvement of masses, improve the sports infrastructure, and achieve a higher level in the performance of elite athletes in India. Nonetheless, the analysis shows that the effect of the policy has been limited because of serious obstacles to implementation. Lacking consistency in results, the National Sports Policy, although being occasionally revised, has failed at converting the goals that it has promoted into regular and quantifiable action. Weak institutional coordination through poor financial allocations, skewed infrastructure development, and poor financial allocations have contributed to poor effectiveness of policy initiatives. Although it can be observed that to some extent the situation has been improved in the context of regional sporting performances, the performance of India in global events like Olympics has been still simple which reflects negatively in the drawbacks in developing elite sports in the country. Altogether, the results demonstrate that there is still a gap between the policy intention and practice, and the necessity of execution-driven governance and long-term dedication to sports development.

Recommendations

On the basis of the research results, a number of suggestions are made in order to reinforce the prospective sports policies in India. To

begin with, it is required that there is greater and continued government investment in sports, manifestly indicated budgetary allocations pegged against policy goals. Second, capacity building and transparent administrative practices in sports governance and better coordination between central, state, and local agencies should be used to professionalize sports governance structure. Thirdly, more attention should be paid to the development of grassroots and rural sports so that the facilities can be equally accessible and show the talent in identifying. Fourth, it must have a strong monitoring and evaluation framework, which is institutionalized to monitor the policy outcomes, measure the performance indicators, and put the corrective actions in place when needed. Lastly, elite development programs ought to be complemented with combined high performance ecosystem with sports science, international exposure, and long term training ecosystems to enhance the competitiveness of India on the international front.

Limitations of the Study

The study has some limitations in spite of its contributions. The reason is that the analysis is only limited to secondary sources of data, thus hindering the capacity to document real time experiences of the athletes, coaches, and administrators. The researchers concentrate more on policy frameworks and aggregate outcomes, thus restricting the areas examined to be sport-specific or region-specific differences in implementation. The fact that no primary empirical data is available, also limits the richness of the causal inference between policy interventions and performance outcomes. The use of the studies published before 2011 can also restrict the relevance of the findings to recent policy developments. The limitations indicate that further studies by use of primary data and longitudinal analysis would give a more detailed perspective of the effectiveness of sports policy in India.

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