

Gaps in the National Sample Survey (NSS) Data: Need for and Ways to Bridge them for Economic Studies

Indrajit Bairagya

National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) is one of the vital official data sources for Indian economy. It carries out large-scale national-level surveys on various issues for capturing several important variables at the micro level from time to time. In addition, NSSO introduces different new surveys relevant to the contemporary times. More importantly, these data incorporate the information on 'multiplier', using which one can estimate the parameters for the entire nation based on the statistic. Considering the importance of NSSO data for empirical research, the present paper tries to identify the limitations associated with its surveys and discusses the possible ways to overcome the limitations in order to make the data more useful.

I Introduction

National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) in India carries out large scale national level surveys for capturing several important variables pertaining to the Indian economy. This includes employment–unemployment situation of individuals and households, households' consumption expenditure pattern, status of unorganized enterprises, education and health status of households, debt and investment survey, and situation assessment of agricultural households, etc. The surveys conducted by NSSO are mostly based on multi-stage stratified random sampling procedures wherein the first stage units (FSU) are villages in the rural sector and urban blocks in the urban sector, while the ultimate stage units (USU) are households, individuals or enterprises. Both FSUs and USUs are selected based on heterogeneity that characterises various groups. It is also important to recognise that the NSSO questionnaires for conducting surveys related to various socio-economic aspects has been subject to revision from time to time in relation to the changes taking place in the current economic situation and persisting debates. For instance, the employment–unemployment survey has introduced new and relevant questions on the subject of informal sector and informal employment for the first time in 1999-2000 (NSSO, 1999-2000). In addition, NSSO has introduced new surveys relevant to the contemporary times. Most importantly, it provides information on 'multiplier', by using which one can estimate the parameters based on the statistic. Considering the importance of NSSO data for empirical research, the present paper tries to identify the