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Policy Research Institutions in Nepal

(Experience of Publicly-funded Think Tanks)

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Areas covered

- Brief history of government policy formulation system and publically funded research institutes
- Experiences of, and causes for *Rise, Fall* and *Demise* of publicly funded research institutes (think-tanks) in post 1990
- Issues and Prospects

Limitation of presentation

Work experience at:

- Centre for Economic Development and Administration (CEDA), Tribhuvan University
- Janchha Bujha Kendra, Narayanhiti Royal Palace Secretariat
- Panchayat Training Centres, (Now Local Development Training Academy)
- Institute for Integrated Development Studies (IIDS)

Part I

Brief History between 1951 and 1990 AD

Realization of the Importance of the Research

1. Importance of research realized for first time in post 1951, in *“First Periodic Plan: 1956–61”* chapter *“Survey, Research, Statistics and Publication”*
2. Mentions – “For effective economic development, government would:
 - Undertake certain types of researches through its departments
 - Undertake general and basic nature type through proposed university program
 - Establish Central Science Research and Development Institute to serve all the agencies of the Govt. requiring assistance in coping with Scientific Problems . Such agencies would be either under the
 - Proposed university or Independent agency of the Govt or Ministry of Planning and Development, which would provide services to private sector
 - Establish Central Statistical office
3. Tribhuvan University was established during Plan period, it has four research centers: CEDA, CNAS, RECAST and CERID

Between 1951 and '69

3. Government ministries and departments undertook studies per requirements with or without donor support like:
 - USOM/USAID and its divisions
 - Ford Foundation
 - Indian Aid mission

4. Following centre established
 - **Rural Development Trainings centers** – part of Tribhuvan Village Development Program, 1951, Later Panchayat Development Training centres – now Local Development Training Academy

Between 1951 and '69

5. Tripartite Agreement among Government of Nepal, Tribhuvan University and Ford Foundation on *May 15, 1969* to establish *Centre for Economic Development and Administration (CEDA) with a view*, among others, to

- Provide facilities and conduct applied research
- Develop competent facility to provide consulting services

(Now a center of the Tribhuvan University)

Between 1969 and 1990

6. *Janchbujjha Kendra:*

- Established on December 21, 1970 as unit of Principal Private Secretariat of Narayanhiti Royal Palace Secretariat to –
 - Assist government to develop national development policies
 - Provide background documents for King Birendra's regional visit
 - Act as watchdog on workings of ministries, departments and public institutions

Between 1969 and 1990

7. *Agriculture Project Services Centre (APROSC):*

- Established in February 9, 1975 as a company
- Under initiative of Nepal Rastra Bank
- With participation of government and Rastriya Banijya bank and Agriculture Development Bank and Nepal Bank Ltd.
- To provide professional support such as researches to Government of Nepal on agriculture subjects

Between 1969 and 1990

8. *Industrial Services Centre:*

(now National Productivity and Economic Development Centre)

- Established in 1974 as a public sector organization
- Goal to provide services (Research and Consultancy services) to Government in general and Ministry of Industry specifically on Industry related subjects

9. *Nepal Administrative Staff College (NASC):*

- Established through parliamentary enactment of 1982
- Goal to train public officials and undertake problem-oriented research and consulting works in the fields of Adm. and Management

Other Institutions

- *Now Nepal Academy*
- *Now Nepal Academy of Science and Technology*
- *Water and Energy Commission (WEC) and its Secretariat*
- *Bureau of Statistics (CBS)*
- *Nepal Rastra Bank (Research Division)*
- *National Council For Agriculture Research (NARC)*

Overall performance of institutions

- Contributed to knowledge advancement and provided inputs to government and others in policy matters
- Some examples
 - Rural Development Training Institutes Undertook
 - Action researches
 - Established field labs
 - Commissioned studies for Ministry on Local Government units on decentralization, local taxes etc.

Overall performance of institutions

- **CEDA:**
 - Policy studies such as
 - Regional planning in Nepal
 - Comparative study of Indian and Chinese road construction techniques in Nepal
 - Alignment of the Dhangadi–Dadeldhura road
 - Sociological survey of Pokhara
 - Local planning
 - Decentralization
 - Status of Women

Overall performance of institutions

- **Janchbujha Kendra:**
 - Conducted various policy studies
 - Initiated policies, which were implemented by the Govt.
 - Examples
 - Agriculture policy
 - Promotion policy
 - District administration plan
 - Regional administrative setup (not implemented)

Overall performance of institutions

- **APROSC:**
 - Undertook studies on Agriculture and Livestock related topics
 - Ministry of Agriculture supported centre during 1980–90's to undertake field studies
 - Important works done
 - World Bank commissioned preparation of Second phase project of Rasuwa– Nuwakot Integrated Rural Development project
 - USAID commissioned base line survey for RCUP, Rapti Zone Integrated Development project
 - ADB commissioned base line survey of Upper Sagarmatha Rural Development project

Overall performance of institutions

- **ISC/ Economic Services Center, now National Productivity and Economic Development Center:**
 - Some studies undertaken:
 - Industrial Policy
 - Institutional Infrastructure
 - Public Enterprises
 - Khumbu Valley
- **NASC:**
 - Primarily involved in imparting training programs
 - Undertaken administrative reforms studies
 - Helped prepare paper on training related policy for inclusion in report of administrative Reforms Commission of 1991-'92, study on morale within the civil service etc.

Part II

Reasons for Rise, Success, Fall and Demise

Reasons for Rise and Success

1. Leadership selection and backing by government and donors
2. High quality staff recruitment
3. Opportunity for staff to go abroad for professional and academic advancement

Reasons for Rise and Success

4. Professional capacity, credibility and dedication of professionals
5. Funding support of donors
6. Flexibility, autonomy and incentive packages of the institutes
7. Managerial style, said to be democratic

Reasons for Fall and Demise

1. Political system change and loss of support of new political leaders
2. Leadership loss and increased institutional control by university or government, political Interference
3. Jealousy, Feeling of Revelry, Loss of autonomy, flexibility and decline in incentive package

Reasons for Fall and Demise

4. Politicization of institutions and in selection of executive heads
5. Drying up of donor support
6. Decline of competitive capacity and credibility
7. Cooption of Competent Professional Staff in other Institutions and Movement of professionals towards more greener pasture

Reasons for Fall and Demise

Scenario in 1990 and afterwards

- Institutions, such as the following , with the competitive capacity with credibility already established and getting more prominence:

NEW ERA (established in 1971 as non government institution to help government to implement new education plan , seemed to be doing well

Integrated Development System (IDS) established in 1979 as consulting firm, latter re-designed as non-government/non-profit organization in 1990, also field of research and study , now struggling to sustain and be competitive with the new institutions

Reasons for Fall and Demise

- Establishment and emergence of a number of institutions in the non government sector in the name of consulting firms or research centers/organizations, and they are competing with the publically funded and other institutions like New ERA and IIDS
- Government's budget allocation to research institutions getting depleted, started also working with non government institutions. Same with the donors

As a Result

- *Janchhbujha Kendra* lost its utility and got dissolved
- APROSC got liquidated, its functions were supposed to be performed by the NARC
- Others are having problems competing with emerged institutions, sustaining themselves and getting jobs in market

Part III

Issues and Prospects

Issues

1. Distinguishing between research institution and consulting firms from the large number of such institutions
2. Creation, Updating and Maintaining Data bank of who is doing what ?
3. Ensuring that government looks/treats at institutions purely on the grounds of expertise and their professional capacity and credibility rather on the basis of its political ideology perspective

Issues

4. Creating level playing field for all institutions based on their professional capacity and credibility
5. Revival and Maintaining autonomy and flexibility in the working of institutions such as NASC, Local Development Academy, CEDA etc.

Prospects

1. Existence of large pool expertise outside the government, especially involved in researches and studies, that could be optimally used
2. Possibility of Joining hands by the institutions to undertake joint studies and form networks (as ne under which this program has been organized) on the basis of subject discipline and share information amongst network members
3. Possibility of Undertaking capacity development program for members of the network

Suggestions

1. Periodically Update of list of works done by different institutions
2. Work out a list of persons who have worked, or are working in different areas, and can be tapped as resource (as advisor or other role)
3. Documentation of works/studies done in subject areas by network for archival use
4. Need for a National Research Council under the aegis of the Government with the representation of Govt., Academic and other Institutions/Organizations
5. Need for an in-depth study of the rise, fall and demise of publically funded research, training and consulting organizations/institutions

Conclusion

- Existence of large number of organizations, new ones are emerging almost every day, which is not bad, they are competing, except a few, on any subject without giving serious thought to one's own strength, resulting into compromise in work quality, giving opportunity to the funding agency/ies to exploit the situation
- Reinventing the wheel in the name of studies, without or less exploration of what has already studied

Conclusion

- Government of the day seems to be more interest to find out Our Organization or Individual expert than the expertise while selecting for commissioning or arranging support to undertake studies, which is supposed to aid and support the government in policy formulation. How government can be pursued to go for optimal/maximum use of knowledge and expertise, I do not know ??? ??
- Sustainability issue would emerge sooner or later for many organizations/institutions, as CEDA 's peak days had been forecast for 5 to 10 years, for APROSC it was 10 to 15 years. How this would be tackled, it is up to the organizations/ institutions to think in advance