
STRATEGIC PLAN 2019-2021



Southasia Institute of Advanced Studies (SIAS)

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About SIAS

Southasia Institute of Advanced Studies (SIAS) is a policy research institute based in Nepal. Its goal is to become a 'Centre of Excellence' in policy research in South Asia. It was established in 2011 for undertaking research, policy engagement, and scholarly exchange across Southasia. SIAS operates in research-policy-practice interface, covering various themes: natural resources management; climate change, water, and urban resilience; livelihoods and economic development; and democratic processes and local governance. It aims to utilize its research to create state-of-the-art knowledge in the South Asian region to understand and influence policy challenges and sustainable development.

SIAS in a nutshell

LEGAL STATUS

SIAS is a not-for-profit institution registered under the Company Act of Nepal. It enjoys rights conferred under the Company Act and other applicable laws, and will uphold to relevant laws of Nepal and, when appropriate and relevant, of other countries while undertaking its engagements outside Nepal.

VISION

SIAS's vision is evidence informed policy and practices towards inclusive and sustainable development. It seeks to contribute to this vision as recognized in Nepal, South Asia and around the global as a unique South-based high quality policy research organization, with a reputation as a policy think tank.

MISSION

SIAS's mission is to nurture, cultivate, organize and promote critical knowledge, research and scholarly learning in South Asia. Based in Kathmandu, it has currently been focusing its activities in Nepal, Northern India and Bangladesh, and intends to expand its geographical coverage in the region.

GOVERNANCE

SIAS is governed by a board of directors elected by general members. It is a professionally managed group for delivering high quality research outcomes.

OBJECTIVE

- Generate action-verified lessons and the state-of-the-art knowledge on environmental, socio-economic and political issues.
- Engage critically in the policy processes from national to local levels.
- Develop capacity of research community and professionals.
- Inform practitioners, policy makers and epistemic community (researchers and academia) through diverse form of communication and dissemination of the knowledge generated through research and policy analysis.

This strategic plan first presents summary of achievements of last seven years, and details locally contextualized Theory of Change, the thematic focus, working approaches and strategic priorities of SIAS for the next three years (2019-2021).

Achievements to Date

After its inception in March 2011, SIAS has primarily worked on research, capacity building, policy engagement and publications. It has focused on policy-oriented action research and critical policy analysis in collaboration with universities, local governments and communities. The central focus of SIAS's work has been to link science with public policy processes and local practices to ultimately produce positive impact in the lives of people. Its major achievements over last eight years are presented below:

Action research leader

Since its establishment, SIAS has been conducting policy oriented action research on the issues related to environment, natural resources and local governance with geographical focus in Nepal, and other South Asian countries such as India, and Bangladesh.



Informed policy process

From the very beginning, SIAS's focus has been on creating environment for evidence-informed policy making. It has facilitated informed decision making through organizing multi-stakeholder dialogues and policy labs. SIAS collaborated with Martin Chautari, a NGO working on enhancing public dialogue, to organize policy discussion series.

Capacity building

Capacity building has been one of the key working approaches of SIAS and it has been nurturing mid-career researchers and professionals through supervision of masters and PhD students and providing fellowships and scholarships. It has also worked towards developing capacity of professionals and local leaders through trainings, exposure visits and shared learning.



Publications

Along with its specialization on action research and policy analysis, SIAS also promotes broader theoretical and academic discourse through its publications and research seminar series. SIAS has been coordinating the publication of 'New Angle' (a Nepalese Journal of Social Science and Public Policy) and publishing journal articles, policy briefs, research reports and blogs.

Collaboration and networking

During this period, SIAS has developed strong collaboration with universities and research organizations in Nepal, India, Europe, UK, USA and Australia. Through these collaboration SIAS has secured and become part of the globally competitive research grants from UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Swedish Research Council (VR and Formas), and Netherland Organization for Scientific Research (NWO), to name a few. SIAS has also been hosting secretariat of Nepal Policy Research Network (NPRN), a loose network of policy research organizations in Nepal.



Our Theory of Change

Figure 1 summarizes SIAS's Theory of Change. SIAS seeks to contribute towards inclusive and sustainable development (vision) by generating knowledge through action research and critical policy analysis. Further, it seeks to foster evidence informed policy and practices through engagement with epistemic community, policy community, local community and practitioners. In doing so, it adopts four major approaches of research and innovations, critical policy engagement, capacity building (of researchers and stakeholders) and communication and dissemination. It works across four thematic areas and two cross-cutting issues.

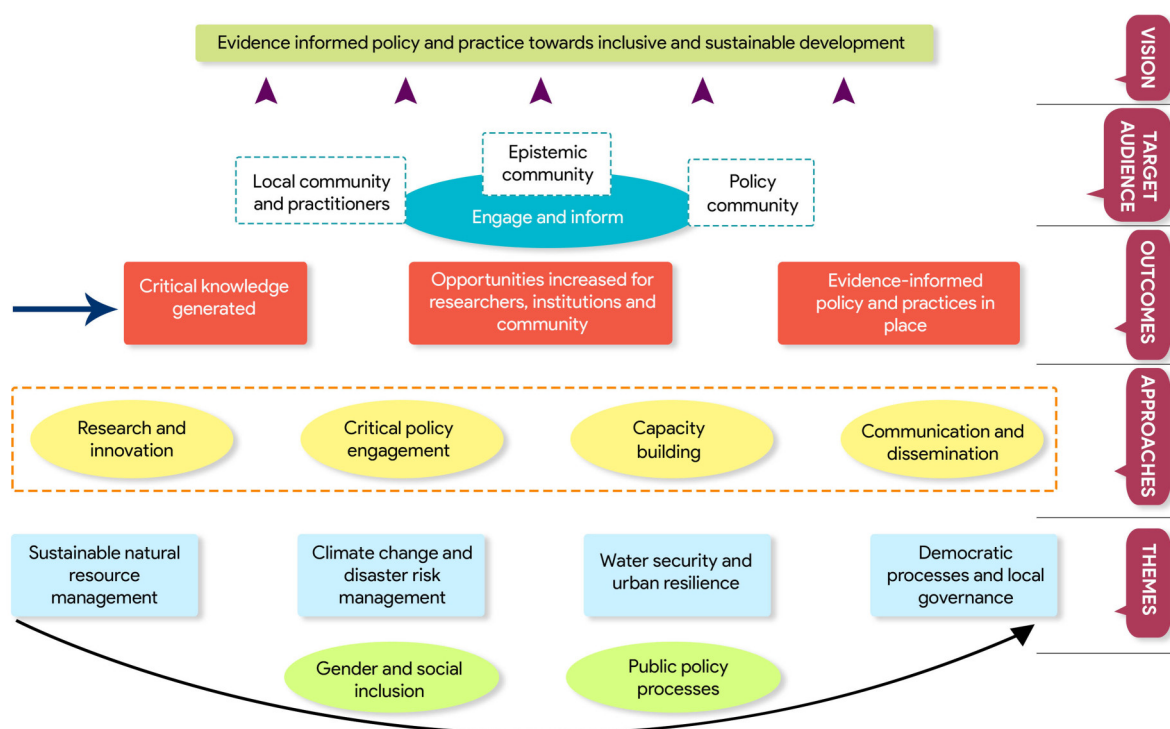


Figure 1: SIAS Theory of Change



Thematic Outcome Areas

Sustainable natural resources management

The South communities living in the foothills of Himalayas in south Asia are highly dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods. The socioeconomic transformations, globalization processes and bio-physical stress due to climate change have posed new challenges to the management of resources. The challenges are further exacerbated by the hierarchical social systems, which override equity and justice. SIAS has been putting efforts into developing a better understanding of these challenges and fostering equitable governance of natural resources particularly forest, water and land. In next three years, a specific attention will be given to the innovative and institutional solutions for climate change adaptive and inclusive governance and sustainable management of natural resources that helps supporting local livelihoods and local economy.

Climate change and disaster risk management

Himalayan region that includes most part of South Asia has been identified as the hotspot of climate change impacts and natural hazards ranging from earthquake, GLOF (Glacier Lake Outburst Flood), floods and landslides. Communities living in the region are, however, not fully prepared to cope with the increasing risks due to hazards and changing climate. Governments are developing policies and programs to respond to these risks. On the other hand, communities themselves are also adapting through different ways. In this context, SIAS is working to bridge the gap between policies and local practices through generating evidence and informing policy and practices. In coming years, SIAS will focus on understanding the contextual nature of peoples' vulnerability to the new challenges and provide insights for planned and self-organized adaptation strategies



Photo: Pemba Nbrbu Tsumpa Lema, SIAS

Water Security and urban resilience

One of the consequences of climate in the Himalayan region has been acute water shortages. Nevertheless, climate change is not the only the cause. Rapid socio-economic changes in the region leading to reckless and unplanned urbanization have exacerbated the effects. The rapidly urbanizing cities in this region are facing acute problem of water insecurity and municipal authorities are slow in responding such escalating challenges. SIAS understood the profundity and urgency and engaged with municipal actors towards informing their planning processes through the evidences generated from action research and local innovations. SIAS will continue research and interventions towards developing and recommending innovative institutional mechanisms for climate adaptive and inclusive water governance for future cities that are resilient and water-secure.

Crosscutting themes

Research policy linkages

While the role of evidence-based policy making is acknowledged globally, it has yet to be fully materialized in South Asian countries including Nepal. The policy making process is confined to a selected group of people (bureaucrats and experts) within the government-donor nexus. Even under the new governance structure, policy making has been largely limited to the elected representatives and the importance of evidence and the wider deliberation has been largely undermined. Realizing this gap, SIAS has identified policy engagement as a major thematic focus. SIAS will continue its efforts to link the research into policy across different levels through policy diagnostic studies, publications (e.g. journal articles, policy brief, blogs and OPEDs), policy dialogues and policy labs.

Democratic processes and local governance

Democratic processes are considered to be the key for natural resources governance. The new local governance system introduced in Nepal based on the 2015 Constitution has opened up tremendous opportunities for decentralized resource governance and local prosperity. Moreover, there have been concerns regarding the extent to which the reformed local governance provides space for the long standing practices of community-based resource governance. SIAS has been engaged in understanding the unfolding transformation in Nepal's local governance and fostering dialogues with policy makers at different levels. In this context, SIAS will be engaged in the democratic processes and local governance issues through creating deliberative spaces for dialogues across various levels. Through this, SIAS intends to contribute in the process of institutionalizing federalism and deepening democracy.

Gender equity and social inclusion

Achieving equity and inclusion has been a key development challenge in South Asia region. SIAS intends to contribute towards fair and just society by enhancing equitable participation and benefit-sharing among all communities. It promotes meaningful participation of women, ethnic and indigenous minorities, disadvantaged and differently able people in its endeavors. It promotes intersectional approach in its research to generate knowledge on groups that are historically missing from mainstream research. With its GESI (Gender Equity and Social Inclusion) strategy, SIAS aims to develop an inclusive research team by assuring the representation of the people from the excluded groups. We will also ensure mainstreaming GESI aspects in our research projects.

Approaches and Strategies

SIAS recognizes and adopts collaborative approach on research and innovation, knowledge production, policy engagement and capacity building as its key approaches. The four such approaches are explained below.

1

Research and innovation

Since its inception, SIAS has been successfully conducting various action research projects in collaboration with local stakeholders and global collaborators. The research projects are directed towards informing local practices, public policy processes and wider theoretical discourses. High quality policy-relevant research on a range of social, environmental and political issues has been recognized both nationally and internationally.

2

Critical policy engagements

SIAS holds a firm belief in the evidence-based policy processes and it makes efforts to engage in the policy processes from national to local levels bolstered by knowledge generated from research, critical policy analysis and stakeholder dialogue. The key tools for policy engagements include distilling research findings into policy texts i.e. policy brief, blogs; critical analysis of policy texts; creating deliberative platforms for policy debate using innovative tools such as policy labs. With such activities, SIAS has been recognized for its participation in providing critical feedback to the sectoral policy making process and encouraging evidence-based policy advocacy.

3

Building capacities

SIAS is dedicated to build strong communities of researchers and professionals committed to inclusive and equitable resource governance and socio-economic transformation for better life of people in the region. SIAS is putting continuous efforts towards building a strong research institution by diversifying its funding base and developing human resources. It has been nurturing young researchers and professionals through supervision, writing workshops and research seminars. Besides developing research capacity, it will also work towards capacitating stakeholders and beneficiaries towards democratic and sustainable resource governance. In the changed federal context, SIAS will expand its scope towards developing capacity of local governments.

4

Communication and dissemination

SIAS seeks to inform practitioners, policy actors and epistemic community (researchers and academia) through communication and dissemination of the action verified insights and knowledge generated through research and policy analysis. Based on the targeted audience, SIAS publishes a wide range of knowledge products; scientific publication such as research reports, journal articles, books & book chapters, discussion/working papers, policy targeted communication like policy briefs, policy reviews and opinion based articles such as blogs, newspaper OP-ED, etc. Further, it has been hosting the editorial process of the New Angle, a local journal focusing on public policy issues.

Strategic Priorities

In next three years, SIAS will further develop its capacity and enhance the quality of research, policy engagement and publications for better science-policy-practice linkage. Six key strategic outcomes for upcoming three years (2019-2021) are:



Design and deliver action research projects

Consistent with its working approach, the focus on the coming three years will be on action research to generate both innovations and insights for policy process to the broader issues intersecting bio-physical and social sphere. SIAS has mainly converged, but not limited, its research focus for next three years to four themes, namely, i) sustainable resource management, ii) climate change and disaster risk management, iii) water security and urban resilience and iv) democratic process and local governance.

Develop capacity

SIAS will further develop its in-house capacity by providing even better environment and more space for young researchers to develop their analytical and writing skills and providing platforms for sharing their works. In coming three years, we will have a critical group of established and young researchers across all four themes. In this line, SIAS will further strengthen its new initiatives like Himalayan Policy Lab and Future Himalayan Research Seminar Series.

Improve research communication and dissemination

Based on its seven years of experience as a policy research institution, SIAS has realized the limit of translating knowledge generated from research into the policy processes. In coming three years, SIAS will put more efforts to enhance access of research knowledge to policy community and practitioners. Towards this end, it will focus on developing message useful for policy makers and ordinary people. We will focus on writing blogs out of the research outputs i.e. research reports and journal articles. We will also provide expert opinions and inputs to the ongoing policy processes by writing critical policy reviews and developing video documentaries.

Intensify sectoral policy engagement

SIAS has been engaging in policy processes in the sectors related to forest and climate change. We will intensify such engagements in sectors related to drinking water and irrigation, local governance, disaster risk reduction and agriculture. Further, we will also engage with major civil society organizations such as Federation of Community Forest Users, Nepal (FECOFUN), Federation of Drinking Water and Sanitation Users Nepal (FEDWASUN) and Municipal Association Nepal (MUAN) through providing inputs and action verified lessons. Our research and publications will help them to strengthen their roles and positions in policy negotiations.

Improve strategic collaboration and networking

SIAS has been able to build strong collaboration with universities and international research organizations and it wants to diversify funding sources and collaboration. In coming years, it will expand its collaboration with international organizations working in Nepal and develop strategic partnership for longer term collaboration. SIAS will also enhance strategic alliance among policy research and professional organizations for better science policy linkage through reframing Nepal Policy Research Network (NPRN).

Improve internal governance

It will be equally important to strengthen internal governance mechanisms of SIAS to become a center of excellence and expand its reach. It will strive to find balance between the aspiration of individual researchers and professionals and meeting the vision of the organization. In this process, we will work towards nurturing and retaining our staff and affiliates. We will update our policies and formulate new ones as per the necessity in order to regulate and strengthen the institutional governance system.





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