2015

2015 First Annual US-India Think Tank Summit

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2015 First Annual US-India Think Tank Summit

Abstract
Since 2013, the Think Tank and Civil Societies Program of the University of Pennsylvania (TTCSP) has been organizing a series of regional and global “Think Tank Summits”, bringing together professionals of top-ranked think tanks to connect as a trade association for networking, reflection and discussions on the pressing issues of the day. Over nine summits have been held so far, including regional convocations for Asia, Africa, Europe, Middle East, Latin America and North America, the G20 countries. The First Annual US India Think Tank Summit brought together over seventy think tanks from India and the United States of America to discuss how best to create a sustainable future for Indian think tanks.

Keywords
Think Tank, Civil Society, NGO, India Think Tank Summit, Lauder Institute, University of Pennsylvania

Disciplines
International Relations

Comments
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First Annual US-India Think Tank Summit
National Capital Territory of Delhi, Republic of India

James G McGann
University of Pennsylvania
2015
Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program

“Helping to bridge the gap between knowledge and policy”

Researching the trends and challenges facing think tanks, policymakers, and policy-oriented civil society groups...

Sustaining, strengthening, and building capacity for think tanks around the world...

Maintaining the largest, most comprehensive database of over 6,500 think tanks...

All requests, questions, and comments should be directed to:

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Background on the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program

Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program
The Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP) of the Lauder Institute at the University of Pennsylvania conducts research on the role policy institutes play in governments and civil societies around the world. Often referred to as the “think tanks’ think tank,” TTCSP examines the evolving role and character of public policy research organizations. Over the last 25 years, the TTCSP has developed and led a series of global initiatives that have helped bridge the gap between knowledge and policy in critical policy areas such as international peace and security, globalization and governance, international economics, environmental issues, information and society, poverty alleviation, and healthcare and global health. These international collaborative efforts are designed to establish regional and international networks of policy institutes and communities that improve policy making while strengthening democratic institutions and civil societies around the world.

The TTCSP works with leading scholars and practitioners from think tanks and universities in a variety of collaborative efforts and programs, and produces the annual Global Go To Think Tank Index that ranks the world’s leading think tanks in a variety of categories. This is achieved with the help of a panel of over 1,900 peer institutions and experts from the print and electronic media, academia, public and private donor institutions, and governments around the world. We have strong relationships with leading think tanks around the world, and our annual Think Tank Index is used by academics, journalists, donors and the public to locate and connect with the leading centers of public policy research around the world. Our goal is to increase the profile and performance of think tanks and raise the public awareness of the important role think tanks play in governments and civil societies around the globe.

Since its inception in 1989, the TTCSP has focused on collecting data and conducting research on think tank trends and the role think tanks play as civil society actors in the policymaking process. In 2007, the TTCSP developed and launched the global index of think tanks, which is designed to identify and recognize centers of excellence in all the major areas of public policy research and in every region of the world. To date TTCSP has provided technical assistance and capacity building programs in 81 countries. We are now working to create regional and global networks of think tanks in an effort to facilitate collaboration and the production of a modest yet achievable set of global public goods. Our goal is to create lasting institutional and state-level partnerships by engaging and mobilizing think tanks that have demonstrated their ability to produce high quality policy research and shape popular and elite opinion and actions for public good.

The Lauder Institute of Management and International Studies
The Lauder Institute of Management and International Studies offers an MA in international studies, and conducts fundamental and policy-oriented research on current economic, political, and business issues. It organizes an annual conference that brings academics, practitioners and policymakers together to examine global challenges such as financial risks, sustainability, inequality, and the future of the state.
University of Pennsylvania
The University of Pennsylvania (Penn) is an Ivy League school with highly selective admissions and a history of innovation in interdisciplinary education and scholarship. A world-class research institution, Penn boasts a picturesque campus in the middle of a dynamic city. Founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1740 and recognized as America’s first university, Penn remains today a world-renowned center for the creation and dissemination of knowledge. It serves as a model for research colleges and universities throughout the world.
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Executive Summary

Since 2013, the Think Tank and Civil Societies Program of the University of Pennsylvania (TTCSP) has been organizing a series of regional and global “Think Tank Summits”, bringing together professionals of top-ranked think tanks to connect as a trade association for networking, reflection and discussions on the pressing issues of the day. Over nine summits have been held so far, including regional convocations for Asia, Africa, Europe, Middle East, Latin America and North America, the G20 countries. The 1st Annual US India Think Tank summit brought together over seventy think tanks from India and the United States of America to discuss how best to create a sustainable future for Indian think tanks. Over the course of the summit, top level management from leading think tanks, policy experts, and government officials addressed the potential effectiveness of an industry wide set of standards in protecting a think tanks’ core assets of quality research and credibility. In light of concerns raised about future of think tank’s in India, summit participants deliberated:

1. The overall lack of operational funding and an overreliance on project-specific funding, the relationship between transparency, donors, and researchers, how best to diverse sources of funding
2. The lack of effective communication and marketing strategies to reach target audiences and achieve greater impact
3. How think tanks attract the best and brightest to make working in a think tank an appealing career choice
4. The lack of qualified staff caused by a serious under supply of graduate schools and programs in the social sciences, international affairs and public policy in India

This three day summit was held at the Nilgiri Oberoi and conducted in a Roundtable format according to Chatham House Rules. There were no panels and each session opened with 2-3 individuals making brief remarks that were constructively provocative and served to frame and stimulate the roundtable discussion that followed. Only the opening and closing keynote sessions were open to the press. The summit was made possible through partnerships with the Brooking India, the Observer Research Foundation, Gateway House, The US State Department, and the US embassy in New Delhi.
The Think Tank was effective at bringing together a large and diverse group of think tanks from throughout India. More importantly the impact of the Summit has been significant with more think tanks participating in regional and global think tank Summits and conferences than ever before. For the first time, 2 think tanks attended the Global Think Tank Summit in Milan, Italy in October 2015 and 2-3 will be participating in the Think Tank Innovations Summit in Philadelphia in December 2015. In addition, the US-India Summit served as a catalyst for the creation of an All India Think Tank Network and annual conference of think tanks in India that is planned for March 2016. The Call Papers “Creating a Sustainable Future of Think Tanks in India” resulted in a collection of excellent plans and programs that address some of the critical issues facing think tanks in India. What was originally conceived as a meeting of a small group of 20-25 Indian and US think tanks became a major event in Delhi with over 80 think tanks from throughout India participating. In conclusion, the partnerships forged by the TTCSP leveraged significant resources and talent to create a very successful Summit that will have a long-term positive impact on the think tank community in India and provides a solid foundation for future collaboration between think tanks in the US and India.

Introduction and Background

Since 2013, the Think Tank and Civil Societies Program of the University of Pennsylvania (TTCSP) has been organizing a series of regional and global “Think Tank Summits”, bringing together professionals of top-ranked think tanks to connect as a trade association for networking, reflection and discussions on the pressing issues of the day. Over eleven summits have been held so far, including regional summits for Asia, Africa, Europe, Middle East, Latin America, North America, and the G20 countries. In September of 2014 the US State Department approached the TTCSP to organize a Summit that would bring together think tanks from the US and India.

The immediate objective of the U.S.-India Think Tank Summit was to mobilize and connect think tanks in Asia with the US and those in other regions of the world and with each other. In addition, the summit aims to be a place for mutual exchanges of experience, networking and the identification of future areas of cooperation and institutional collaboration. The long-term goal is to help improve the quality and scope of the interventions that Indian think tanks might make on some of the critical policy issues facing the region. Toward that end, additional outcomes are to:

1) **Explore Key Policy Issues Facing Issues Think Tanks**

Energy’s Role in Propelling Trade, Environmental Sustainability Driving Economic Efficiency,
Economics as the Foundation of Regional Security, Sharing Indian Development Innovations with the World, and Brokering Public-Private Partnerships in the Wake of the Indian Companies Act.

2) **Raise the Profile of Think Tanks in India**

Many think tanks across India lack recognition and visibility. Without this visibility, it is extremely difficult to be consulted, funded and to impact public policy. The Summit aims to position think tanks in the public policy sphere in Africa and raise their profile through media coverage, follow-up initiatives and networking opportunities. The Summit will also feature recently developed case studies that focus on think tanks in India that have affected the formulations of key policies in their countries.

3) **Foster Cooperation among think tanks in India and the United States**

As India attempts to achieve political and economic integration, its civil society remains to a large extent centered between two polar extremes: local and global. As a result, think tanks in the region tend to be narrowly focused on one or more of the following: 1) internal, institutional development issues (capacity building and resource mobilization); 2) maintaining highly specialized, local policy and civil society networks or; 3) building links with institutions in the developed world and emerging powers like United States, Japan, South Korea, China and other emerging economies like Brazil and Turkey rather than amongst themselves. These external organizations are seen as sources of funding and benchmarks to strive for. However, to solve the challenges facing think tanks in India, it is equally, if not more, important to convene Indian think tanks to cooperate amongst themselves to help facilitate the following Summit sub-goals:

   a) Exchange relevant experiences and best practices on topics specifically linked to think tanks (access to information, fiscal transparency, political system and transparency of government decisions, quality standards for policy-relevant research);

   b) Develop strategies to address organizational and policy challenges facing think tanks and policymakers in the region;

   c) Share best practices for managing think tanks and high impact policy research programs;
d) Share innovative strategies for engaging policymakers, the media and the public;

e) Develop joint advocacy on issues such as censorship and attacks on freedom of speech; and

f) Share programs and ideas for increasing organizational capacity through training and internship opportunities for African think tank staff.

By all accounts the US-India Summit exceeded these objectives in both qualitative and quantitative metrics. More importantly, the impact of the Summit is already being realized through partnerships and plans for future summits, joint programs, and exchanges.

This year, for the first time, a national summit for think tanks in India was held in New Delhi, India. 1st Annual US India Think Tank summit brought together over seventy think tanks from throughout India, and the United States of America to discuss how best to create a sustainable future for Indian think tanks and create lasting knowledge and policy partnerships between think tanks in India and the US. Following the Summit in Delhi meetings and briefings were held with over sixty additional top think tanks in Bangalore, Chennai and Mumbai.

During the course of the Summit, top level management from leading think tanks, policy experts, and government officials addressed the potential effectiveness of an industry wide set of standards in protecting a think tanks’ core assets of quality research and credibility. In light of concerns raised about future of think tanks’ in India, summit participants deliberated:

1. The overall lack of operational funding and an overreliance on project-specific funding, the relationship between transparency, donors, and researchers, how best to diverse sources of funding

2. The lack of effective communication and marketing strategies to reach target audiences and achieve greater impact

3. How think tanks attract the best and brightest to make working in a think tank an appealing career choice

4. The lack of qualified staff caused by a serious under supply of graduate schools and programs in the social sciences, international affairs and public policy in India
This three day summit was held at the Nilgiri Oberoi and conducted in a Roundtable format according to Chatham House Rules. There were no panels and each session opened with 2-3 individuals making brief remarks that were constructively provocative and served to frame and stimulate the roundtable discussion that followed. Only the opening and closing keynote sessions were open to the press.

Following the summit in New Delhi a roundtable discussion in Bangalore was hosted by T.B. Jayachandra, the Karnataka minister for Law, Parliamentary Affairs, Animal Husbandry, and Muzrai. Two separate forums were held, one for local media and one for policy analysts and representatives of Bangalore based think tanks. Main topics of discussion were capacity building for think tanks and civil society organizations. A similar roundtable was hosted in Chennai by the US Consulate for Chennai-based think tanks and policy research institutions. A longer full day symposium was hosted by and held at Gateway House in Mumbai. In addition to discussing global research and policy trends; symposium participants specifically addressed the impact of these trends on think tanks in Mumbai. These conferences were made possible through partnerships with Brooking India, the Observer Research Foundation, Gateway House, The US State Department, and the US embassy in New Delhi.

**Think Tanks in India:**

A renewed interest in South Asia as a region has emerged as a result of the area’s rapid political, economic, and social development. India is the indisputable focus of this attention because of its close ties with the United States and the United Kingdom, its position as the largest functioning democracy in the world, and the degree to which this populous state's actions and policies affect the international community. India also continues to grow in importance within Asia; its economic weight is expected to match that of China by the middle of the twenty-first century if its economy continues to grow at its current rate. At present, policy research in India is of particular interest. Its status as a large and heterogeneous democratic state makes it a powerful case study for drawing lessons and conclusions about policy-making in other nations, especially given the fact that it is home to just under one-sixth of the world’s population. In India itself, think tank growth has created an environment in which there is increased potential for the

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nation’s social, political, and economic development, and further interest in policy research will help India to realize further progress.

Currently India has the fifth largest think tank population in the world behind the United States, China, the United Kingdom, and Germany. In the 2014 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report (GGTTI) issued by Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program at the University of Pennsylvania, India contains 15 out of the 50 top think tanks in China, India, Japan, and the republic of Korea. Six Indian think tanks were featured on the list of the top 150 worldwide think tanks. Ranking at 50 was the Centre for Civil Society (CCS), at 100 is the Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses (IDSA), at 105 the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER), 107 is the Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) is ranked at 114, and finally Development Alternatives (DA) is at 129.

While India boasts of the largest population of think tanks in South Asia, think tanks in the region are faced with significant funding, communications, and human resources challenges. The US-India think tank summit allowed for leaders from prominent NGOs, think tanks and businesses, bureaucrats and elected representatives to identify primary areas of concerns and targeted solutions. This report details the problems participants recognized and concludes with a list of recommendations for Indian think tanks.

**Roundtable Session Discussions:**

**Funding Challenges:**

The nature of funding, a primary operational concern, has evolved in response to a changing environment where think tanks are subject to increased public scrutiny and a call for greater transparency. During panels, and subsequent breakout sessions, participants identified the three main funding challenges as follows: How can think tanks diversify their sources of funding? What is the capacity for think tanks to build long-term strategies, and how can think tanks achieve both financial and research independence?

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The integrity of policy research depends on the degree of organizational, economic, and political freedom it is afforded and the environment in which it operates. The Indian government directly contributes funding for a large number of think tanks, with a significant portion of this subset being some of India’s most well established think tanks. While government funding of think tanks in India demonstrates a high level of governmental encouragement of social science and policy research found in few developing countries, participants agreed that it simultaneously poses limitations on the autonomy of these institutions.

The Indian private sector, though having a very active philanthropic side, has yet to build partnerships with Indian think tanks. Summit participants noted that Indian entrepreneurs, with some notable exceptions, choose to work with international partners. This has left Indian think tanks relying on international sources of funding to meet their operational costs. These external sources of funding have raised concerns about the influence of foreign funding on domestic policy. Many participants favored moving away from external funding altogether, while others took a less absolute approach. However all participants agreed that think tanks need to cultivate partnerships with the Indian private sector as means to diversify their funding streams.

Participants also discussed the trend of “short-termism,” where many think tanks are pressured to pursue project-specific funding at the expense of long-term operational bridge funding. This adversely affects the overall quality of research by constraining a think tank’s ability to engage in longer-term projects. Participants asked, “Should think tanks spend more time developing a donor database exclusively for overhead budgets?” Similarly, donors are increasingly interested in participating and socializing with researchers, which then raises questions about the quality and legitimacy of produced research.

**Communication Challenges:**

While the primary purpose of think tanks is to produce quality research, disseminating this research effectively to policy makers and the public is a rising challenge. Internet-based media has fundamentally changed how think tanks communicate their product. However, Indian think tanks struggle to optimize the use of Internet tools due to inconsistent access to computers and the web. Because of India’s economic successes in software exports, foreign companies have recruited many of the most skilled informational technology professionals.
Access to local top talent has since suffered, hindering a think tanks ability to develop reliable web infrastructure. However, increasing media freedoms do reflect a slow growing Internet community that think tanks could utilize to reach key policy makers. Reaching the target audience with Internet based media is challenging, particularly when in person relationship building and networking has long played an integral part of think tank communications strategy. Coupled with technological issues and infrastructural challenges, a multimedia approach to communications could be rewarding but is difficult to achieve.

Participants also noted that as the public becomes a stronger political force in India, it is crucial that think tanks be able to engage the citizenry. Thus, think tanks must disseminate research in ways that are digestible to the public: the use of the main local language, effective media presence (social and traditional), and the publication of policy briefs are critical. Language presents a unique challenge in research dissemination in India. English is the primary mode of professional communication, yet is not understood by the majority of India’s population. This acts as a barrier between a think tank’s product and public viewership, limiting productive outreach. Participants suggested holding open seminars, conferences, etc., engaging civil society, and disseminating research through social media in digestible lengths and forms.

Communicating within the think tank sector was also discussed at the summit. It was widely agreed that Indian think tanks have much to gain from creating regional and national networks. these networks could serve as sources of ‘track II diplomacy.’ Networks could be specialized, focused around specific research areas or sub-regions, allowing for experts in the same field to share and collaborate. They would also provide members with access to fellow institutions’ international networks, increasing opportunities for collaboration. Regional and national networks could also conduct pooled training and share staff with expertise in demanded fields, thereby cutting down on personnel costs and increasing members’ abilities to conduct specialized research. More established think tanks in the network could also provide capacity building and advice for newer institutions. Participants expressed a strong interest in continuing to hold annual regional meetings modeled after the New Delhi Summit.
Human Resources Challenges:

Participants sought to discuss challenges in recruiting and retaining top talent in their organizations, and explored the skills and attributes needed for a successful career at a think tank. Participants noted that the United Nations, Work Bank, and other IGOs have the resources required to recruit and retain India's top talent. A lack of sufficient core support at think tanks makes it difficult to support competitive salaries that would make it possible to attract scholars and managers. Participants suggested creating fellowship and training programs in tandem with top universities to make think tanks a more appealing career path.

Another major obstacle for Indian think tanks is the lack of representation in the social sciences. Indian universities tend to favor STEM programs, resulting in a shortage of graduate level studies in political science and international relations. Professionals trained in methodology and research techniques are few in numbers and difficult to retain. Additionally, participants noted the common perception that think tanks are a great place to start a career as an intern or research assistant, and end a career as a distinguished fellow. This creates a lack of mid-level professionals. As one participant noted, young professionals often seek clear paths of advancement within the organization, which may not exist. They then instead spend a few years in a mentorship program before moving on.

Other participants spoke to the issue of work-life balance, and noted that many higher-level professionals work predominantly on individualized, self-serving projects. These project preferences call into question the contributions these top researchers make to overall think tank performance. Additionally, current performance evaluations are outdated and ineffective at pinpointing the problems, preventing non-performers from improving. Successful results in think tanks are intangible and difficult to determine, but participants agreed that some form of measuring individual performance is necessary. Often, top scholars are drawn away from think tanks to bigger institutions, such as universities, that can provide larger salaries and better benefits. Think tanks are in constant competition with academic institutions for employees, and lack the cultural atmosphere to retain talent. Participants agreed that in order to make think tank jobs more appealing more they needed to introduce more professional development for staff and ensure that workers are given adequate incentives in the form of pay, job security, and
promotion opportunities.

**Recommendations:**

Participants were asked to develop potential strategies to address the various funding, communications, and human resources challenges deliberated during the summit.

1. Establish robust fundraising strategies, institute new business models and staffing patterns, and determine an optimal overhead budget.
2. Define the optimal donor-think tank relationship and develop an action plan to balance donor needs with maintaining research credibility. This will help manage lobbying from governments and other groups seeking to validate their interests.
3. Focus communications approach on applications of social media, instead of finished products. Networking avenues, such as LinkedIn, are vastly underutilized and could be a strategic and cost effective use of social media.
4. Strengthen network between think tanks in order to increase access to each other’s product.
5. Establish formal Human Resources departments in think tanks instead of relying on the director to fulfill hiring needs. Job listings should strategically assess the target audience in order to attract a diverse and well qualified applicant pool.
6. Urge both the government and the private sector to support the creation of premier schools of public policy and international affairs, modeled after Singapore.
7. Create a national think tank job bank, where think tanks post jobs and prospective employees can post resumes. This allows think tanks to identify and recruit the best and brightest from both India and the world.
8. Create fellowship program to fund graduate education in public policy and international affairs for promising young scholars. Fellowships would require a commitment of three years of service at an Indian think tank in exchange for a fully funded course at a leading global public policy or international affairs school. If fellows fail to complete three years of service, then they much repay their full tuition.
9. Create a mid-career training that would help existing scholars develop new skills or areas of expertise in the field of public policy or international affairs. These training programs should be geared towards increasing the capacity of existing staff at think tanks.
10. Provide customized communications training programs in increasingly relevant areas like social media, web design and content management, strategic marketing, info graphics, and TED talks, etc.

11. Support short term (2-3 months) and long term (6-12 months) exchanges between Indian think tanks and top European and American think tanks. Exchanges should be developed around key policy issues and areas that would help build capacity.

12. Develop and mobilize support for an executive program for think tank scholars and executives.
Creating a Sustainable Future for Think Tanks in India

Draft Collection of Papers, Not for Dissemination or Reproduction

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Executive Summary

While India boasts of the largest population of think tanks in South Asia, relatively little is known about these institutions, how they operate, or the influence they exert over policy. This report seeks to offer insight into the nature of think tank operations and policy influence in India and also offers the valuable resource of detailed profiles of all think tanks in India. A survey was sent out to think tanks by the Think Tank and Civil Society Program, to supplement this data a call for papers on “Creating a Sustainable Future for Think Tanks in India” was also issued. Leading think tanks, both in India and abroad, were asked to submit papers that provide concrete plans and programs to help assure sustainability and increase the profile, performance and impact of think tanks in India. This report combines a broad range of perspectives from leading think tanks and policy experts to offer a comprehensive analysis of the state of policy advice in India. Overall the authors have found that:

- India’s well-established associational culture, non-governmental organizations, and civil society in general provide a fertile environment for the growth of think tanks.
- During the past two decades, think tanks have grown in prominence in India, and since the 1970s there has been a large growth in the number of think tanks every year, though this has dropped off somewhat in the last decade.
- In stark contrast to global trends in other countries, the bureaucracy is a primary think tank audience within the policy-maker audience, indicating the amount of influence that members of the bureaucracy have relative to elected officials in the government.
- Indian think tanks primarily conduct research in eight subject areas: Agriculture and Rural Development, Economics, Foreign Policy, Governance, Military and Security Studies, Regional Studies, Science and Technology, and Social Sciences and Social Welfare Research. These subject areas are ranked in this report based on the data collected from the profiles of think tanks. The full report discusses particular concerns and research within each of these areas with examples of think tanks active in these issues.
• Funding is often from the government or universities, and at times can be heavily conditional. Meanwhile the Indian private sector, with the exception of some large corporations, has yet to make significant contributions to think tanks.

• Foreign funding is increasingly becoming an attractive option for think tanks. This in turn has raised concerns about the foreign influence over domestic policy and the impartiality of research produced.

• The lack of proper funding has resulted in a very fragmented think tank community that consists of a large number of small, highly specialized, poorly funded think tanks that are underdeveloped and lack the capacity to meet the major policy challenges facing India.

• India’s current path of economic and political decentralization promises to aid the growth of civil society and create an additional demand for the advice and research of policy institutes. The lack of effective communication and marketing strategies to reach target audiences and achieve greater impact;

• Indian think tanks need to recruit and retain scholars and executives that have the proper training in the social sciences and have the requisite skills set to meet the current and future staffing needs of India’s think tanks;

Despite the many challenges faced by Indian think tanks, the growth of these organizations indicates a change in how think tanks fit into larger Indian civil society. The many issues that confront such organizations at present, including the existence of an underdeveloped civil society with fragmented political parties and interest groups, impediments to the dissemination of their research, widespread dependence on government funding, and difficulty in influencing Indian policy-makers to use their policy advice, may all be surmounted as India transitions from a developing to an industrialized state. The nation’s current path towards economic and political decentralization promises to nurture civil society growth and generate further demand for the advice of policy research institutes. Hopefully this transition will allow think tanks to have access to less restricted funding, and in turn better access to staff and resources. If think tanks are able to form meaningful partnerships with philanthropists and corporations, India’s generous philanthropic culture could be directed to the support of policy research. India’s think tanks, if able to diversify their funding, foster significant partnerships, and take advantage of decentralizing policy-making power, stand to make a significant impact on policy.
The Indian Think Tank Community: Seeking Sustainability, Impact and a More Central Role in the Indian Political Economy

By Steven Bennett
The Brookings Institution

The Global Context

The term “think tank” is vague—it is broad in both potential scope and meaning, and can be an attractive moniker based on its implications. A "think tank" can imply scholarly status, policy relevancy, or seriousness—impacting upon any organization that so self-designates a form of integrity. While many general definitions exist, the reality is that any organization that does any research at all can call itself a “think tank.”

And many do. According to the 2014 Global Go-To Think Tank Index, there are more than 6,500 organizations worldwide that self-identify as a think tank.4 This may be a significant under-reporting of the total number, given the popularity of the moniker and the recent proliferation of civil society groups using the title. Additionally, since some think tanks do not always describe themselves as such, there may be many more organizations that are either in part or on occasion "think tanks."

Given this nature of the field, as would be expected there is a huge diversity in the size, scope, focus, structure and mission of think tanks worldwide. This makes the "think tank sector" increasingly difficult to assess as a whole, and one cannot make generalizations about such different organizations.

While many definitions exist, Andrew Rich provides a general definition that is broadly accurate, and represents most true think tanks. Rich calls think tanks “independent, non interest based, nonprofit organizations that produce and principally rely on expertise and ideas to obtain

4 James McGann, “2014 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report,” March 1, 2015, http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1008&context=think_tanks
support and to influence the policy making process.” His definition suggests wide diversity, making it an accurate tool to navigate a broad field.

**Think Tank Differentiators**

Much has already been written about the typologies in think tanks. As early as 1971, Paul Dickson was sorting think tanks into various categories, focusing mostly on those that serviced the US Government, like the RAND Corporation and CNA, those offering “free advice,” like the Hudson Institute and the Brookings Institution, and those housed at universities, like the Hoover Institution and MITRE. Later authors of scholarship on think tanks have further titrated the typology, articulating differences beyond the federal contractor model and the independently funded model. They articulate differences between multidisciplinary organizations and single issue ones; between partisan organizations and nonpartisan organizations; between university, government or party affiliated organizations and independent ones; between those that lean more towards advocacy and those that tilt towards research; between any possible admixture of the above, and the list goes on. And this differentiation refers specifically to US based think tanks.

The differentiators increase when comparing think tanks across borders. Insofar as think tanks operations and impact differ as a function of their relationship with their government, every country has a profoundly different think tank community. Accordingly, a comparison of seemingly identical think tanks from one country to the next proves challenging.

This is particularly true when comparing think tanks from countries with different governing models. Think tanks operating in democracies will be structured, funded, and staffed quite differently from those operating in countries where the political economy follows a non-democratic model. So while a think tank in China and one in the United States may both conduct policy research using common social science research methods, and they may in fact study the same issues or set of facts, their operating model will differ tremendously. So too will their prospective audiences, their definition of policy impact, the incentives that guide research methods, the package used to deploy the conclusions…even the conclusions themselves. So

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while these institutions may both be high quality “think tanks,” their outputs and inputs are quite different.

In October 2014, Xi Jinping declared that think tanks were a critical component to the rise of China. In the years preceding that announcement, China had seen a large proliferation of think tanks, and in the months following the number of think tanks has continued to grow, as has their presumed importance within the Chinese system. As China has increased its focus on think tanks, and the number of Chinese think tanks has increased, there has been an increase in the study of the relative impact of these organizations. The study of the differences between think tanks in democracies and non-democratic states is fascinating, and worthy of future study.

More comparative international studies of think tank relevancy amongst democracies would also be an important addition to the literature, adding to the work already done by James G. McGann and Richard Sabatini, Diane Stone, Andrew Denham and Mark Garnett, and others. This study could offer some observations of think tanks in a presidential democracy—specifically the US—and compare it to those in parliamentary democracies—specifically India.

**Think Tanks in Democratic States**

In the case of democracies, it is widely noted that parliamentary democracies have less robust think tank communities than presidential democracies. This is a function of several key

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10 McGann, Viden, and Rafferty, *How Think Tanks Shape Social Development Policies*, 29-30, 43-44; Donald E. Abelson and Christine M. Carberry, “Following Suit or Falling behind? A Comparative
differences in these democratic systems. The differences are driven by the nature of the governance system. There are vastly different incentives and career courses facing the public servants who staff parliamentary systems versus presidential system. There are enormous differences in how policy is made—from formulating the idea, to framing the issue, to shaping the debate, to designing and shepherding the legislation, to crafting the implementation. There is, perhaps most importantly, an entirely different relationship between government and the governed, and between government and civil society.

Very briefly, and by way of example, when a minister in a parliamentary system finishes their term, or are ousted in a change of government, they return to the backbench rather than retire to a think tank, as do many secretaries and undersecretaries in a presidential democracy. Parliamentary democracies are known for large, professionalized bureaucracies. While the federal bureaucracy in the US is very large, the senior leadership tends to be political appointees, meaning their relationship to the president and civil society is very different.

Some parliamentary democracies have institutional relationships with think tanks, and in some cases, the parliamentary system has created the think tank sector itself. The largest German think tanks are structurally affiliated with the party system.11 Many large think tanks in the United Kingdom are either government- bureaucracies themselves, or they are almost entirely funded by parliament. Most of these institutions produce high quality, high impact work. But their relationship with the government is by definition very different from their independent think tank brethren.

This is not to imply that independent, non-affiliated think tanks don't exist, or produce product of lesser relevancy or impact. To the contrary, most well-functioning parliamentary democracies have thriving and healthy think tank sectors. Indeed, according to James McGann, Anna Viden, and James Rafferty, a key indicator of a healthy democracy is a robust think tank

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11 Under the German “Stiftung” system, each political party with more than 5% representation in parliament gets a foundation/think tank.
sector, insofar as the independent ideas industry has been noted to bolster rule of law and good governance.\textsuperscript{12}

In those parliamentary democracies where the think tank sector has developed in the absence of state-sponsorship, healthy institutions can develop, yet they tend to have less-mature relationships with the government than do think tanks in presidential democracies. This limits their potential impact, insofar as they have not, in many cases, developed constructive and well-understood working relationships with policymakers. These institutions tend to be smaller and more “issue specific” (i.e., they are not multidisciplinary), and, perhaps most importantly, they have less secure and diversified funding bases than their brethren in presidential democracies.\textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{The Case of India}

A May 2015 tour of Indian think tanks provides an opportunity to make some observations on these relative differences.

As a framing, I will quote a recent report from the Takshashila Institution, a national think tank with a headquarters in Bangalore. In an essay on Indian think tank experience they note that

\ldots the success of think tanks depends as much on the consumers of information as the producers. While the Indian government has made welcome efforts in recent years to reach out to think tanks, it is still incredibly limited in doing so. Serving diplomats, bureaucrats, and military officers are often unable or unwilling to make presentations, limited by their own capacity constraints, their own research abilities, the possible political consequences, and strict limits to their jurisdictions.

\ldots the Indian media has not yet produced a public debate in India that clamors for greater information and insight on international and security affairs. In a media environment dominated by political theatre, Bollywood

gossip, cricket scores, and corporate quarterly returns, there is little appetite for world or defence news, which is often sidelined in favour of reporting that generates higher ratings or readership. 14

Taken together with the inherent limitations of the think tank sector in those parliamentary bureaucracies that lack structural relationships with think tanks, this observation suggests that Indian think tanks have, and will continue to face, material challenges in trying to achieve impact.

With a few notable exceptions, the think tank sector in India is a relatively young industry. Certainly some organizations, like the Observer Research Foundation, NCAER and the Centre for Policy Research, have been around for decades. Others—like the Centre for Public Policy and the Institute for Social and Economic Change—are affiliated with universities, and have also been around for a long time. But according to the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, India has 192 think tanks—the 5th most in the world. Most of these organizations are either less than 10 years old, or have been self-identifying as think tanks for less than a decade.

**Traditional Relationships and Lack of Understanding of Think Tanks**

One observation that is certainly not a universal critique of Indian think tanks, but is true of most of the think tanks with which we visited on a May, 2015 7-day tour in Bangalore, Chennai, and Mumbai is that the Indian think tank sector is—either in widespread perception or reality—very much a part of traditional, activist-oriented Indian civil society. While this is to be expected—these nonprofit policy research organizations are, in fact, civil society groups—they tend to adopt similar impact and policy-influencing tactics as advocacy organizations.

Issue advocacy organizations in almost every democracy naturally take on an adversarial or semi-adversarial posture when relating to many government officials. This is a natural outcome and an impact-maximizing strategy for organization dedicated to the advancement of a narrow policy interest. Naturally, nearly every advocacy organization has validators and supporters within government with whom the relationship is not adversarial. But even in these cases, the

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advocacy group is arming the ally with offensive and defensive rhetorical weapons with which to use in an adversarial relationship with other legislators or other parts of the government.

An example from the US is Americans for Prosperity, a group known to question the human-causes of climate change, and their efforts to curtail energy conservation and pollution-curbing investments. They are working with Rep. Fred Upton (R-MI) and Ed Whitfield (R-KY) on a bill to repeal EPA power plant pollution controls. On the other side of the issue, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) came out strongly in opposition to Whitfield’s “Ratepayer Protection Act,” arming their side of the debate with fact sheets and sign on letters from prominent advocates and validators of carbon control policies. Both Americans for Prosperity and NRDC played direct adversarial roles against their foes in Congress, and played direct helpful roles for their issues’ proponents in Congress. But even their positive interactions were conducted against the backdrop of a partisan issue being driven by both ideological and issue advocate actors.

This kind of constructive and positive relationship, based on a more strident approach is entirely appropriate for an advocacy organization, but it is not, alas, entirely appropriate for think tanks. In those countries where the think tank sector has not developed robust and mature relationships with the governments they are seeking to influence, this confrontational relationship tends to be one of the default modes into which the think tank professionals fall. Think tanks that adopt entirely adversarial relationships with governments limit their short- and long-term impact, in that as they are not seen as purveyors of good ideas and sound policies, but rather as traditional issue-advocates. This, in turn, limits the development of the whole think tank sector, as government officials will not see the think tank professionals as helpful and constructive practitioners of applied social science, but rather as strident activists.

In our small sample of Indian think tanks, there is both an awareness of this dynamic, and of its unintended consequences. In the Indian context, given that many NGOs adopt an adversarial

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tone when engaging government, and given the relative youth of the Indian think tank sector, for most Indian think tanks, widespread perception or practice of this “traditional relationship” affects the ability for think tanks to achieve impact.

For example, the groups we met in Bangalore on May 1 and 2, 2015 have been working principally on urban development issues. They were at the time focused on “trifurcation”—or rather, a proposal to split the city of Bangalore into three administrative units. There was a great deal of skepticism about the merits of trifurcation amongst all think tank representatives with whom we met. Their proposed tactics of addressing the issue that included standard think tank impact tactics—op-eds in the newspapers, issuing reports—but also included training grassroots activists to mobilize, issuing public denunciations and organizing protests. The latter tactics are not typical think tank activity in the US (although there are exceptions), and they are a far more confrontational approach than typically seen in think tank activity.

There was consensus amongst all the groups with which we met in Bangalore that they lacked any sort of constructive relationship with the local political establishment, and they were therefore seeking to influence policy by changing public opinion. While changing public opinion is a tool used by every think tank, the more effective institutions compliment this mechanism with direct contact with government. This has clearly not happened in Bangalore in general, and on the issue of trifurcation in particular.

When, on May 3, 2015, we met with Siddaramaiah—the First Minister of the State of Karnataka—and his staff, a set of stakeholders at the heart of the trifurcation issue, they expressed a total lack of understanding of the role think tanks would play in this debate. They started the conversation with a vigorous defense of trifurcation and a direct expression of exasperation with the activists mobilizing against it. When we engaged them on a broader discussion about the role of think tanks in general, they expressed mystification with the concept. They drew no distinction between traditional activist movements and policy research organization offering dispassionate views on relevant policy matters. More troubling, they

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fundamentally did not understand the need for independent policy analysis and suggestions in a political debate.

The First Minister and his staff believed that they had done all of the appropriate research for trifurcation. They had conceived of the idea, set the agenda for discussion, and were in the process of shaping the debate. They saw it as their principle role to craft the implementation, should it pass the political hurdles. They saw “dispassionate policy analysis” as their job, and had little notion of how “outsiders” would add any value to the process.

The Karnataka state executive staff clearly viewed think tanks as activist organizations and political actors with a clear agenda, and therefore are simply one more bar to clear in the politics of making policy. They viewed the groups as political gadflies as opposed to serious, influential organizations that could be constructive in crafting the policies and navigating the politics of a very fraught approach to Bangalore’s urbanization challenges.

This anecdotal experience is in itself troubling. However, if it is indicative of a universal dynamic between Indian think tanks and the various levels and parts of the Indian government, then the implications of this disconnect are deeply troubling for Indian think tanks’ effectiveness. Other conversations, including with a number of think tank representatives in Chennai, suggest that the dynamic is widespread in India.

In a May 4, 2015 meeting with six think tanks in Chennai, there was a universal admission that their relationships with government officials at any level are either nonexistent or quite fraught. The experience of their think tank colleagues in Bangalore were a very common experience. None of the think tanks had any substantial relationships with government officials in Chennai city, Tamil Nadu state, nor the Indian national government. The organizations with which we met lamented their lack of capacity to convene policymakers, and they had little influence with opinion leaders.

**Successful Models in the Indian Context**

This lack of substantial relationships and the perpetuation of a hostile or contentious dynamic undermines think tank effectiveness in India. Much of this is structural and due largely to the
differences in incentives and relationships for policy research organization in parliamentary and presidential democracies. Part of it is cultural and a function of the very unique Indian bureaucracy and the relationships between government and civil society in the Indian state. These are both beyond the scope of this paper, but they have some significant implications for the business model Indian think tanks will choose to adopt and of their expectations when looking for mentor or model organizations outside of India.

Two models in the Indian context appear to be exceptions to the general rule that think tanks are largely alienated from government officials. The for-profit and the university-based institutions are both proven successes in India and may be a good template for other organizations to follow. Insofar as government officials are an important clientele of think tanks, and that many Indian think tanks are severely limited in their access to this cohort for a variety of reasons (traditional NGO-government relationships, the impact-moderating effects of a parliamentary system, a general lack of understanding of what think tanks are, etc.), evaluating the models that have demonstrable success in this area would be a useful exercise in evaluating the promise of the think tank sector as a whole.

It is interesting to note that both of these successful models are not, technically, nongovernmental organizations. Most Indian think tanks are Section 8 nonprofit corporations—a legal definition that is the same as most activist NGOs yet fundamentally different from universities and their affiliated think tanks. While the intricacies of the Indian corporate legal code is itself immaterial, the reality is that classification simply codifies a widespread misunderstanding about think tanks and their role in the Indian political economy: they are viewed as traditional activist NGOs and not as serious, independent policy research organizations (as the moniker “think tank” would imply). The most successful think tanks are viewed not as think tanks, but either as consulting firms or as universities.

The for-profit think tank model seems to be the most broadly-successful when appealing to government officials. Government officials at almost every level seem to understand the role of a consulting firm, and they work with consultants from the largest international firms down to small local firms. The conceptual challenge of working with a think tank is circumvented by working with a known type of entity, even if the relationship and deliverables are the same. These organizations are hired by government entities to conduct a set of outsourced policy
analysis tasks, akin to some of the work completed by government contractors in other countries, such as RAND, NORC and the Urban Institute. Some think tanks, like Synergia Foundation in Bangalore and Okapi in Chennai, have built successful businesses providing policy analysis for government entities.18

The other model—university based—is probably larger and more widely known than the for-profit model. There are substantial university-based policy institutes in many Indian cities—we met with the Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC) and the Center for Public Policy at the Indian Institute of Management in Bangalore, the University of Mumbai, and St Xavier College, a tiny sample of this vast universe. Many—indeed, likely most—are producing high quality research. The formats that we saw in on-campus presentations in Bangalore suggested that the research output was quite academic. The titling was quite appropriate for the academy and for students, but was perhaps more esoteric than the government and general public consumers were accustomed to. In addition, the output volume was rather modest by think tank standards based on the size of the program, which also suggests an academic production schedule. While this is by no means an indictment of the quality of the research product, it does reinforce a sense that the consumers of university-based think tank product may not be aware of the differentiations between the think tank and the other parts of the university.

There is clearly widespread acknowledgment of the university-based think tank value proposition, insofar as they provide valuable continuing education and training to India’s vast bureaucracy. While our small sample is not nearly large enough to allow for general statements on this part of the Indian think tank sector, it allows for some anecdotal observations. One observation is that it is not immediately clear whether the university-based think tanks are utilizing their alumni networks in government to maximize their impact. They have access to government officials unlike most other policy research entities in India and that access represents a formidable competitive advantage. However, it is not evident that they are using the contacts they have to promote their policy ideas and impact agenda outside of the traditional boundaries of the classroom. This is an easily remedied self-limitation.

As is the positioning of their policy papers and research output. Whereas other Indian think tanks were very modern in their use of communications tools and packaging their research to be most effective with their target audiences, university think tanks seem to use the same academic titles and long-form academic style. While this does provide a strong analytic validation on the topic, and bolsters the issue-expertise reputation of the institution and the staff, this is not an impact-maximizing strategy for a think tank. While remaining true to their academic standards and environment, university think tanks should also consider adopting some of the communications techniques of independent think tanks.

**The Challenge for Other Indian Think Tanks**

The rest of the think tank community in India lacks the advantages of university-based and for-profit think tanks. There is a general sense, borne out at the first annual Indian Think Tank Summit in April 2015, that New Delhi-based organizations dominate the think tank scene. While that may be true, it is clear that many think tanks in other provinces are evolving and growing into successful organizations. Some of the non-Delhi based groups have fascinating and potentially robust business models.

The Hindu Center for Politics and Public Policy is an example of an organization with a very unique business model.\(^\text{19}\) Based in Chennai, the Hindu Center is located in the offices of The Hindu, a national-scope newspaper published in Tamil Nadu. The Hindu Center uses the newspaper’s back-office assets and infrastructure, like computers, photography, digital media production, etc., while maintaining a sturdy firewall between the think tank and the editorial/newspaper production. While the newspaper and the think tank cross-market, there is no apparent adulteration of either the newspaper or the think tank’s product. The result is an imaginative leveraging of institutional assets that enhances the effectiveness of the think tank.

Another model is the Takshashila Institution based in Bangalore, which has a presence in Chennai and other cities.\(^\text{20}\) Neither a university nor a for-profit, Takshashila mimics many of the offerings from those successful Indian think tank business models. They provide trainings for

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\(^{19}\) The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy, http://www.thehinducentre.com/.
government, NGOs and corporations, offering a graduate certificate in public policy and various leadership development programs. They conduct research explicitly on behalf of government and NGOs (they published a chapter recently in an Amnesty International publication), but also independent subjects ranging from nuclear energy production to regional security to urban planning. They have, despite the odds, managed to forge a widely respected reputation for quality and independence. Their challenge, like others, is to project their brand, and make their institution and its admirable reputation more widely known by potential consumers and constituents.

A third model is Gateway House,21 officially known as the “Indian Council on Global Relations.” Gateway House is a relatively new organization, founded in 2009 by a charismatic leader seeking to build in India an analog to the Council on Foreign Relations. Like CFR’s home base in New York City, Gateway House is located not in New Delhi but rather in the business capital of India, Mumbai. Like CFR’s membership base, Gateway House is building an elite membership program that will free it from some of the fundraising challenges facing other Indian think tanks. And like CFR’s foreign policy research agenda, Gateway House seeks to become the go-to foreign policy think tank in India.

It is still too early to tell if Gateway House will succeed. It faces many of the same headwinds that many other think tanks in India face, including those mentioned here (plus others, like over-reliance on a founder and a handful of individual donors, and a challenge in projecting their brand into the corporate and government sectors). But it has taken a potentially fruitful model from the US and applied it in a creative and potentially successful way in Mumbai.

**Models for the Indian Think Tank Community**

Gateway House successfully identified a workable model from a very successful US-based think tank. The instinct of many of the new think tanks in India (and most are relatively new) is to do the same and look for applicable and successful business models to try and replicate. For those who have not already thought to do so, as these think tanks mature, they will invariably

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look to examples of successful think tanks to use as a model for their own institutional development.

Our visit to India provided an opportunity to offer advice on this matter. In fact, the advice was openly solicited by most think tanks with whom we met. At a Mumbai think tank roundtable organized by Gateway House, on May 5, 2015, at least 10 think tank representatives openly solicited advice on operating models from the American think tank representatives. A derivation of the same happened in multiple think tank meetings in Bangalore and Chennai. Even those organizations that had demonstrable relationships with government—the older/well established, for-profit, and university-based organizations—solicited advice on reaching new audiences, crafting output to meet a different set of impact priorities, and seeking new areas for funding.

Given these questions, coupled with observations about the Indian think tank sector and what is well known and documented about think tank sector in general, it is safe to say that there are some business models that would be worth emulating by Indian think tanks, and others worth avoiding.

For the success stories—university-based, for-profit or really unique think tanks—the principle goal is expanding their reach, and establishing a well known brand for themselves as think tanks. They are already known as consultants and universities. The product differentiation is important, and they could look to the intense branding efforts by some US-based think tanks to glean ideas. The Center for American Progress—which itself is just 12 years old—is a case study in brand development and projection. The Heritage Foundation has also done an effective job at rebranding since their leadership change in 2013.

This is part of the broader goal—and deeper challenge facing all Indian think tanks—which is to make the concept of a think tank more broadly known and accepted amongst the actual and potential consumers and constituents in India. The lack of this widespread understanding affects all Indian’s think tanks’ impact, funding and growth potential, and is the single biggest challenge facing all other Indian think tanks. The need for this education work is most keen for the independent, nonprofit think tanks that are neither affiliated with a university nor any other entity (like a newspaper).

In the meantime, independent think tanks can and should look for successful models, but they should be cautious in the models they choose. While it is absolutely appropriate for the smaller independent think tanks to aspire to achieve the impact and financial stability of large US think tanks, to get there they need time and a strategy. Emulating the business models of these large and mature organizations straightaway is likely not a winning strategy.

So where should they look? One opportunity lies with successful organizations operating in developing economies that are also parliamentary democracies. One example might be the South African Institute of International Affairs. SAIIA survived apartheid, reinvented itself, and helped define think tanks in South Africa. Operating in a manner appropriate to a parliamentary democracy, SAIIA draws from experts across disciplines and from many countries in Africa. Insofar as India is a polyglot, pluralistic state akin to Africa as a whole, SAIIA provides an excellent template.

As does Breugel. Founded in 2005 and based in Brussels, Breugel has in 10 years become one of the world’s leading think tanks, working principally though not exclusively on EU related issues. It is a relatively new organization, servicing a relatively new and immature political system (the European Union). Although it is based in a developed country, Breugel could also be a good model.

There are many other that may be offered as examples of good models to follow. There are also not good models to follow as well. It is very tempting for a struggling small think tank to want to become another Brookings Institution, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, or RAND Corporation. These entities and many of their peers all do work in the Indian context, and are well known amongst Indian think tank staff and contributors. The aspiration is admirable, but the model…at least in the short term…is not one to follow. Most of these role models are large, independent, interdisciplinary organizations, which is difficult to replicate in the Indian context. They are all based in the US, so they are operating in the context of a presidential democracy where the role of think tanks is much more broadly understood. The US also has a far different donor community. Indians are very philanthropic, but they tend to not see policy research as a priority. Because of the more broadly successful socialization of the think tank model in general, the various types of funders in the US both understand and value the work of think tanks enough to channel substantial resources to them.
The Future of Think Tanks in India

The absence of high impact, independent think tanks in India is both noticed and lamented by many, particularly public policy practitioners. That said, the sector is growing, which is a good sign. Despite the many challenges, there are many high quality think tanks in India doing outstanding work. The proliferation of think tanks in India is an indication of the potential impact of the policy research sector in India, and should be seen as a sign of hope for think tank professionals. While there are limitations that are both structural and cultural, there is a bright future for think tanks in India.

Future research should explore the boundaries of these limitations, to see if think tanks in India and elsewhere can in fact mature into large organizations. Can a parliamentary democracy sustain a large think tank sector, particularly when think tanks are not well known or understood? Can India’s think tanks grow in the absence of a significant validator like Xi Jinping in China or the many high profile former government officials that staff and run think tanks in the US? Can a vibrant, diverse, multilingual confederation with a large professional bureaucracy develop a strong enough common understanding of the roles and value of think tanks to sustain the sector? Given the vast amount of philanthropy in India currently being channeled to villages, temples and development projects, can think tanks develop a broad enough value proposition to attract more significant philanthropic support?

These questions hold the key to the future of think tanks in India.

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Engage - Explain – Enable: A 3E Strategic Framework for Think Tanks

By Subir Gokarn
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Introduction

Think tanks have been a visible feature of the Indian public policy landscape for many years now. The first institution of this kind is believed by many to have been the United Services Institute, which was set up in 1874. After Independence in 1947, the development policy framework that the government put in place provided a natural opportunity for institutions that evaluated the impact of public programmes. The National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), where I worked from 1999 to 2002, was set up in 1956. In the corridors, I came across stacks and stacks of dusty reports from techno-economic surveys of districts. I opened a few, to find that these were preparatory studies for the implementation of several welfare programmes that had been proposed over the years.

The ultimate success or failure of such programmes notwithstanding, I thought then that this was a really important role for a research institution to be playing in the policy formulation process. While the institution made a similar contribution to policy evaluation based on primary surveys when I worked there, an additional emphasis emerged by way of more “market-oriented” use of surveys data. Household expenditure surveys became a very popular input for marketing strategies of companies introducing new products in the aftermath of the big liberalization initiatives in the early 1990s.

Over the past thirteen years, I have had the privilege of working in the corporate sector, the central bank and, for the past couple of years, in a think tank start-up. This has given me the opportunity, besides working in think tanks, to, compete with them as a corporate economist and very importantly be a consumer of their output as a regulator and policymaker. During this period, I have closely observed and been involved in a whole range of transitions – in business, in government and in the think tank world itself. In this article, I try and bring this range of

23 The views expressed in this paper are personal and do not reflect those of the institution.
perspectives to bear on developing a strategic framework for think tanks in India, which I believe, will help them to achieve their primary objectives more effectively.

**Primary Objectives**

What are, or should be, the primary objectives of a typical think tank? To some extent, this question cannot be answered independently of the domain(s) in which these institutions operate. Different domains will obviously have stakeholders with different characteristics and, different requirements. However, I believe it is possible to abstract from these very real and important differences some essential elements of think tank activity. As in any situation, clearly defining objectives is the first step to designing an effective strategy. In this section, I propose a simple portfolio of two objectives.

1. **Knowledge aggregation and translation:** In my abstraction, the distinguishing characteristic of a think tank is its priority and emphasis on two critical knowledge creation activities: aggregation and translation. “Aggregation” refers to bringing all relevant forms of knowledge onto a common platform. Research methodologies in different disciplines are typically defined by certain rules, procedures and protocols which segregate “relevant” from “irrelevant” knowledge. While the rules may vary from discipline to discipline – for instance, “hard” data vs. the importance of survey responses or focus groups – the fact is that virtually all disciplines make such a distinction. In the “real world” context in which think tanks are expected to operate in, this distinction is both somewhat constraining and often somewhat irrelevant. The value of such distinctions is that they allow for generalizations, which is the core contribution of disciplines to knowledge. But, in the real world, generalizations need to be complemented with the angularities and peculiarities of specific situations. These may arise from a whole range of factors – historical, cultural, political, organizational and so on. Because these situations are specific, the best knowledge about them resides not in research studies but in the minds and memories of individuals who were directly involved with the activity in some capacity or the other.

How do we deal with these complex knowledge issues in a tractable way? Let me use the standard distinction between “disembodied” and “embodied” knowledge, also described as explicit and implicit or tacit knowledge. Disembodied knowledge is reflected in
generalizations, typically communicated in the form of academic or similar research papers and available in the public domain. Embodied knowledge is in the minds of individuals and is the superset of learning, experience, insight, intuition and other things that are unique to the individual and, hence, not generalizable.

A key objective of think tanks should be to bring embodied and disembodied knowledge together to inform issues and problems that have a bearing on the public interest. A defining feature of think tanks in virtually all countries is their keenness to hire or otherwise use as resources, people with policy experience. This is certainly a manifestation of the status that is given to embodied knowledge, which this group of people is presumed to possess in abundance. Their insight into what inputs feed into policy decisions and how and why these decisions are taken, combined with the generalizations emerging from more traditional research activities is how think tanks see themselves as adding value.

This is an entirely legitimate characterization, but it draws on a somewhat narrow perception of who a think tank’s core target audience should be. I will argue later that, as popular as the notion that the core audience is the policy establishment may be, an ability to combine disembodied and embodied knowledge potentially enables think tanks to reach out to and influence a wider set of stakeholders.

The second aspect of the knowledge role, translation, is self-evident. To be effective, a think tank must have the ability to combine disembodied and embodied knowledge and communicate it in ways that are reasonably intelligible to the entire range of stakeholders of an issue. In effect, a core body of knowledge is being translated into different “languages”, one for each stakeholder group, with language representing the combination of content and form. The better a think tank gets at this the less of the knowledge is lost in translation. In turn, this achieves the aim of communicating with different groups of stakeholders, each of which can use the language it is best equipped to understand to influence the public debate on a particular issue.

2. Partnership Development and Management – Convening Power: I mentioned the importance of multiple stakeholders in defining and shaping think tanks’ knowledge
objectives. Let me elaborate on this in describing the second primary objective. Just as it is important to combine embodied and disembodied knowledge in contributing to policy and public debates on any issue, it is equally important that such knowledge does not typically have a self-evident quality. In other words, it is not enough to disseminate the findings and recommendations emanating from a body of research, however rigorous and practical it may be. I would argue that for such knowledge to have maximum impact, it has to flow through channels that have developed the capacity to receive it and assimilate it into their evolving pool of ideas. This capacity rests on the basis of mutual trust and respect between all the components of the engagement and dissemination network.

Developing and sustaining such a network is then a key objective of a think tank. What it should consist of and how it should be managed are essentially context-specific questions. I will provide some sense of how we are going about this in my current institution by way of illustration later. However, the general principle that needs to be emphasized here is that the network that a think tank is able to develop is not merely a regularly updated and accurate mailing list, which is a difficult enough challenge to meet. It is, more accurately a set of partnerships, in which each participant sees the think tank as providing insights and solutions to policy problems that they are interested in and must feed into any meaningful debate.

The term “convening power” is often used to describe the special attributes that think tanks bring to policy debates. It connotes the ability of such an institution to bring diverse groups of stakeholders onto a common platform, while being trusted by all to let them articulate their particular perspectives. This particular objective is about building up that convening power and sustaining it.

The 3E Framework

In the previous section, I argued that the objectives of knowledge generation and dissemination are both primary and important to value addition by think tanks. This equality of status must logically be reflected in the strategy of an institution, which then flows into organizational design and resource planning. I do not venture into these two aspects of strategy implementation in this essay, but, needless to say no strategy however brilliant, can be executed without the right
structure and resources in place. In this section, I present a simple framework that an institution can use to simultaneously pursue the two primary objectives.

As the title of the paper indicates, the framework comprises the components Explain, Engage and Enable.

1. **Explain**

It may seem a simple task for knowledge institutions like think tanks to provide explanations for complex phenomena. However, any explanation is itself a conditional statement based on the raw data or information used, the paradigm or conceptual framework which is used to find patterns within the data and the context in which the explanation is placed. In very rare instances is the conclusion so clear and so obvious that every single stakeholder, regardless of perspective and interests, can be persuaded with a simple, straightforward explanation. The far more normal and typical scenario in which think tanks operate is that extreme complexity must be reduced into an infinite number of lesser complexities. Some may be more appealing to one group of stakeholders than to others; some may be simpler to grasp than others; some may satisfy epistemological criteria better than others. Eventually, however, even after all the “inferior” ones are weeded out, there is still room for multiple interpretations and, consequently differing, even contradictory implications for action.

So, how do we narrow down the “Explain” component of the strategy? A few principles can be thought of. First, there has to be a clear articulation of the conceptual framework and methodology that is being used to provide the explanation. The nature of this articulation may vary across disciplines, but the objective is the same as far as providing an explanation is concerned; the explanation is rooted in a particular methodology. This in turn determines which “facts” or pieces of evidence are deemed relevant and which are not; these might figure in an alternative approach and the scholars involved need to acknowledge this.

Second, the distinction made earlier between embodied and disembodied knowledge is important in this context. Once a basic approach has been decided on, embodied knowledge can, and should, play a very important role in challenge and validation. Often, the value of people’s experience and insights will lead to diagnostics of problems that more formal data cannot. Given the inherent limitations of formal information, its value needs to be constantly enhanced by
subjecting it to the filters provided by embodied knowledge. For this to be done effectively, a robust process that brings both embodied and disembodied knowledge into play is necessary.

This process is perhaps best reflected in the setting up of expert groups or steering committees for research programmes and projects. Of course, merely putting such a mechanism in place is no guarantee that any value will be added. Frequency of meeting, substance of material being presented at meetings, the authority to insist and sign off on research outputs, and dissemination efforts are important attributes of successful combinations of embodied and disembodied knowledge; however, all these and more are probably necessary but unlikely to be sufficient. Success is really a matter of perseverance and constant refinement of the process and the selection of individuals. Some individuals add more value by being a direct part of the research process, while others add value by acting as referees. This has to be done by trial and error and evolving discovery.

The main point, though, is that it has to be done, no matter how much effort it takes. At a minimum, it lends credibility to any results and recommendations emerging from the project. At its best, it leads to explanations which are rich in both analytical and institutional content, making it that much easier to translate them into specific action recommendations.

Third, the time horizon is of critical significance. While there is a long term, strategic dimension to policy making, that can afford to take time in an iterative process of dialogue between stakeholders, there is also the unavoidable aspect of immediacy. Many decisions need to be taken in response to unanticipated developments, sometimes to mitigate threats, sometimes to exploit opportunities. In the absence of adequate time for analysis and reflection, there is a high probability of the wrong decision being taken in such situations; a risk that can be contained by either readily available knowledge inputs or quickly generated ones. Within government, crisis management committees are an example of a mechanism that is designed for this task. In the think tank context, the capacity to very quickly assemble a combination of embodied and disembodied knowledge resources in order to provide a coherent diagnosis, assessment and a sequence of action recommendations would be of immense value, directly to the policymaking process and, more broadly to the public interest.
One could lay down more such principles, but I believe that these three are sufficient to highlight core attributes of the Explain component of the strategy.

Looking back over the past two years that the Brookings Institution India Center has been active, there are a few instances that reflect the conscious application of some of these principles. One significant resource that our affiliation with the Brookings Institution provides us is a global network of scholars. In 2014, when a summit meeting between India and the USA was proposed, the institution collectively saw this as an opportunity to bring a wide variety of intellectual inputs into play in informing stakeholders about the range of issues that might be on the summit agenda. Given the short notice, all concerned scholars were requested to draw on work done, either directly on bilateral issues or on broader, context-framing issues and produce a short essay on outstanding concerns and possible solutions. Put together, the volume provided a comprehensive perspective on the state of the bilateral relationship, as seen by scholars from both sides. This gave it both visibility and traction with policymakers.

When a second summit was announced a few months later, it provided an opportunity for roughly the same group of scholars to take stock of progress after the first meeting and identify gaps and priorities for the second summit. These two volumes now provide a ready reference point for both internal and external stakeholders to track progress in different aspects of the relationship.

One of our focus areas is renewable energy. Assessing the performance and prospects for this very important source requires understanding not just technology and economics, but also the very complex and fragmented Indian regulatory environment as well as the strategic motivations of businesses venturing into this space. Much of this rich landscape simply cannot be understood from secondary data analysis. Bringing embodied knowledge into play in a systematic and organized fashion was seen as necessary to drawing a meaningful picture of the constraints that the sector is dealing with and potential solutions to these. This was done by producing an anthology of essays from contributors with varied backgrounds within the sector – academics, former policymakers, technologists and businesspersons. What an effort like this succeeds in

26 Brookings India (2015) Blowing Hard or Shining Bright: Making Renewable Power Sustainable in India
doing is defining a “feasible set” of solutions that all stakeholders are likely to agree to. If this is a substantial set, quick progress can be made. If on the other hand it is a null set, the government has to focus on persuading some or all stakeholders to change their conditions. Policy and policy reform initiatives can emerge from this kind of intellectual input.

On the issue of health policy, the publication of a draft national health policy by the government with a request for feedback gave us an opportunity to draw on a number of different stakeholders to shape a response to the policy. In order to provide some structure to our response, we first internally analysed the policy and developed a simple framework within which we categorized the main proposals. We then used this framework to have both one-on-one discussions with a range of experts – administrators, practitioners, advocates, researchers – and collective interactions with groups. These groups included representatives from a whole range of stakeholder groups, representing health care deliverers, researchers, consumer rights organizations and business interests. The result was a feedback report, which in our assessment, reflected the priorities of multiple stakeholders; but when placed in a framework provided a set of explicit and neatly categorized set of recommendations, both reinforcing and supplementing proposals in the draft document.

On primary education, another priority area in our research agenda, we followed an iterative process of interaction with a variety of stakeholders to arrive at an organizing framework. We fleshed this out into an introductory chapter of a volume of collected contributions, divided into the three components of the framework. In each category, we had contributions from a range of stakeholders, virtually all of whom were in the delivery domain. Most importantly, we had short but extremely valuable contributions from school teachers and leaders as well as people who had ventured into voluntary teaching programmes. Apart from creating what will hopefully be a robust network, the substantiation of the framework by meaningful contributions from practitioners provides us the basis of carrying out deeper research on what makes delivery models work best and the roles that different stakeholders should be playing in successful delivery.

2. **Engage**

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27 Brookings India (2015) *Accelerating Access to Quality Education*
As I argued earlier in the paper, the establishment and management of networks and partnerships should be one of the two primary objectives of a think tank. Who should comprise the network, what should be the basis and terms of engagement of partnerships and so on are institution-specific questions. However, as in the Explain component, some generic principles can be laid out here.

The basic question in this component of the framework is who to engage with. Institutions often believe that their primary target audience is the policy establishment, however it is structured. While research products are put into the public domain, the emphasis and effort is typically focussed on getting the attention of policymakers. This may be entirely appropriate, but as is often the case, it rests on an unarticulated “theory of knowledge” about how policymakers assimilate and use research products.

The immediate point is that all institutions need to base their engagement strategy on an explicit theory of knowledge. Whether a specific one is right or wrong will only be confirmed by experience and track record. It is also quite plausible that different theories will be reasonably effective in a given social-cultural-political context. What the best theory is for a specific institution is a debate that is beyond the scope of this paper. However, let me articulate the theory that my current institution bases its engagement approach on.

An important difference between the think tank environments in the US and India, which the Brookings Institution straddles, is the depth and breadth of the “revolving door” mechanism in the former. Scholars move seamlessly from think tanks into policy roles and back, allowing for the smooth transfer of, specifically, embodied knowledge into policy making and then back into research. While mobility of this kind is visible in India, it is the exception and numbers are small in the case of entry from outside into policymaking. The reverse is much more significant – on completion of tenures, policymakers frequently associate with think tanks. So, some of the benefits of embodied knowledge transfer do accrue in think tanks. However, the situation is clearly and substantially different from the US.

Our theory of knowledge presumes that transmission of research product, either in the form of published work or informal briefings and responses to queries is an important but incomplete form of knowledge dissemination. Based on observation and experience, the premise is that
policymakers are sensitive to the wider discussion and debate amongst the whole range of stakeholders on particular issues. Focused engagement with them is, therefore more useful and effective if it is done against a backdrop of a wider debate, particularly if it appears to be coalescing around some identifiable policy implications.

Consequently, we work on the basis that engagement has to go beyond just communication targeted at policymakers. We have categorized the universe of stakeholders into five groups:

1. Government (which may further be divided into the political and bureaucratic/regulatory components)
2. Business
3. Civil Society – NGOs representing various interests, engaged in delivery, advocacy, etc
4. The Research Community – think tanks and academics
5. Media

All of these groups have stakes in policy issues, from their own perspectives. In the Indian context, all of them are vocal and constructive participants in any policy debate. But constructivism needs to be facilitated. Getting stakeholders onto a common platform with a view to identifying the boundaries and contours of the feasible set of options is integral to this facilitation and it is a role that think tanks have traditionally played. But, I would argue that there needs to be foundation for this to be done effectively. This foundation is laid by a continuous process of engagement in a variety of forms. Dissemination of research products, in different formats but each highlighting key messages, bilateral engagement with different stakeholders to understand specific concerns and domain technicalities – these and other modes of engagement are all essential components of an engagement strategy.

In effect, we are attempting to map out each stakeholder group with the appropriate channel of communication and the best way to convey both our research objectives and our research products. The former is being done with the intent of seeking inputs and perspectives on the questions to be asked and, particularly, the timeframe within which answers are being sought. This, we believe, will help us balance importance with urgency. The latter is to ensure that the core messages of any research product are communicated in a “language” best understood by the stakeholder. In fact, this is really the most important building block in creating a common
platform that is the larger objective of think tanks – the meaningful exercise of “convening power”.

3. Enable

Here again, one could make a simplistic interpretation of the concept of enablement, equating it to, for example, training and capacity building. Used more broadly, the term certainly encompasses these two very important activities. Both politicians and bureaucrats can and do benefit from regular exposure to new ideas, new ways of analysing policy problems and new ways of dealing with them. However, it would be restrictive to correlate the enable component merely to capacity building. Even think tanks that do not have a formal mandate and, therefore, the resources to train, can participate meaningfully in enabling policymakers.

One part of this component is to flesh out as realistically as possible the institutional and incentive structure within which recommended policy actions are most likely to work. As has been mentioned before, the ability to do this comes from the special combination of embodied and disembodied knowledge that think tanks can uniquely create. Of course, this is not to say that other entities – public policy schools, consultancy firms and so on – cannot perform this function. They can and do so with great visibility and effectiveness. Given this, think tanks may see themselves as competitors in the enablement space and choose not to do it. This, in my view, is an error and risks diluting the overall effectiveness of the product that think tanks provide to both policymakers and other stakeholder groups. The value that think tanks can add is to see enablement in the same way as they see engagement; to offer this particular dimension of enablement to the entire range of stakeholders in ways in which they can be appreciated. Schools and consultants, by definition, are focused on “clients”. Even if they do recognize the importance of other stakeholder groups, which they undoubtedly do, their product is tailored to their clients and not always equally accessible to all stakeholders. Think tanks can and should use their broad platform convening power to find ways to enable as well.

The second part is more aligned with the mainstream view of training and capacity building. Even if think tanks do not focus on creating formal training structures, scholars should participate regularly in programmes organized by other institutions. This is an essential part of any network and partnership framework and provides think tank scholars an opportunity to articulate both the broader context in which their recommendations are being made and the
relevance of the recommendations to the immediate objectives of the audience they are addressing.

Training and capacity building is a historical mission of the Brookings Institution. It started off primarily as a capacity building institution and, over the years, even as it has evolved into a research and engagement driven organization, it continues to train both US and foreign public officials. The India Center is as yet too new to focus on this set of activities, but there is active participation by scholars in a whole range of capacity building programmes being carried out by other institutions, both domestic and foreign.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Looking across the Indian think tank landscape, I observe that most, if not all, institutions are doing virtually all the things that I have written about in this paper. Many of them go through periodic strategic reviews, along the lines of those conducted by corporate organizations, to identify missions and strategies. However, I also feel that, for many of them, these become formalities, at the end of which, things go back to business as usual. What I am attempting through this paper is to make explicit a simple framework around which such strategic exercises could potentially be organized. Making explicit the primary objectives and then identifying the institution-specific aspects of each of the strategic components is, I think, a stepping-stone to high-quality research with maximum impact across the stakeholder spectrum.
Creating a Sustainable Future for Think tanks in India –
A Case for Regional Think Tanks

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Introduction:

Based on the recent global reports on the ranking of think tanks, only one Indian think
tank is in the top global fifty, while India is number five in terms of number of think tanks (Mc
Gann, 2015). At the same time, there is a domination of the Asian list by China and some
research institutes from the national capital Delhi with complete absence of regional think
tanks. The consequence of this is the lack of alternative inputs and strategies to the government
as policy recommendations. In addition to this, the provision of alternatives to the regional
issues is dominated by the national capital based think tanks in the absence of quality regional
think tanks. Since the national capital based think tanks are isolated from other regions of the
country, the viability of the alternative strategies suggested by them is debatable. The small
regional think tanks in India are also finding it very difficult to conduct ground level research
due to the lack of funding and support coupled with lack of understanding about think tanks.

Given these scenarios, it is very relevant to examine the reasons for the lack of regional
think tanks in India. The current status of the regional think tanks in India in terms of their
organizational constraints, various challenges faced by them and the policy influence of these
think tanks are examined here in this paper. The concrete strategies, plans and programs to
address the constraints on the effective performance of the regional Indian think tanks that
ensure their sustainability and the high value impact are discussed based on the evaluation.

Literature Review

Definition of Think tanks

It is difficult to get a universally accepted definition for think tanks due to the contextual
existence of think tanks across different countries. Moreover, the boundaries between think
tanks and the advocacy groups have become very vague with the significant growth of think
tanks in many countries focusing on policy advocacy contrary to the older academic think tank
models (McGann and Weaver, 2009). Based on the definition of Economist, good think tanks
are those where intellectual depth, publicity flair, political influence, comfort in surroundings are combined (McGann, 2015).

Though the definitions of think tanks based on western concepts demand the need for complete independence of think tanks from state, firms' and other interests for thinking in a free manner, this might not be appropriate in the contexts of other cultures. Thus there can be differences in the operational definition of think tanks across different countries. Think tanks in the Indian context for this paper are defined broadly as organizations that are involved in research and analysis of policy issues, which are significantly autonomous from government, corporates, political parties or other interest groups and are not based on the interests of state, corporations or any lobby groups. Regional think tanks are defined as think tanks which primarily focus on sub-national issues outside the national capital of Delhi, which are autonomous from government, corporations, political parties and other interest groups.

There are two schools of thought for think tank analysis. One is those that focus on think tanks' organizational components for analyzing their emergence, reason for success and influence (Weaver, 1989; Smith, 1991). Other is those that focus on think tanks as vehicles for broader questions about the policy process and how ideas and expertise influence decision making (Denhame and Stone, 2004). In this study, the regional think tanks in India are evaluated from both perspectives.

**Models of regional think tanks:**

Three main reasons are identified in the literature for the limited effects of think tanks at the sub-national or regional level in different countries, which include the following (Stone, 2000). One is the focus of the think activities at the most important level of decision making, due to the limited funding for think tanks, which is apparently the national level in most countries (Stone, 2000). Second is the need for governments with significant powers at the sub-national level for think tanks to influence public policy significantly, which is not the case in many countries (McGann et al, 2014). Third is the need for regional economic centres to sustain think tanks at the sub-national level (Radaelli and Martini, 1998). Moreover, one main disadvantage with think tanks outside national capital is the decreased visibility in the national media and the fewer chances for access to policy makers at the national level compared to think tanks at the national capital.
Think tanks are found most influential in the United States (US) compared to the other western democracies mainly due to the American political system's unique features including the division of power between the executive and legislative branches of government, parties with relatively weak ideologies, the high degree of media freedom, the tax structure favouring think tank funding and the domestically based intellectual elite development (Arin, 2014). In the US, the growth of most think tank activity recently has been at institutions focused on local and state issues, outside Washington D.C. (Weaver, 1989). There are however, examples of regional think tanks in the US having national influence despite of their focus on sub-national issues (Weaver, 1989). All think tanks in the US are ideology based which fall into four main categories namely Conservative, Libertarian, Centrist, and Progressive (McGann, 2005).

Along with the US, other countries which have substantial influence of regional think tanks include Germany, Switzerland and Canada, where governments are operating in a federal system and funding structures are decentralized. Italy is another example of this phenomenon. Despite the lack of a federal government system and the relatively recent creation of the regional government system, due to the presence of regional economic centres (Radaelli and Martini, 1998) regional think tanks in Italy are influential. Most of these regional think tanks have worked on national level issues also partly along with the regional issues.

In the United Kingdom (UK), the emergence of regional centres occurred very late with the initiation of power devolution to regions like Scotland and Wales. In spite of efforts for power devolution by the regional funding of European Union to the UK regional policy, studies show that the influence of think tanks at a sub-national level was not significant in the country with the focus of think tank activity on national policy (Wells, 2012). In Central and Eastern European countries, except Poland, there is limited development of think tanks at the sub-national level due to the absence of a federal government, a lack of regional economic centres and the limited development of regional tier governments (Sherrington, 2000).

The above discussion demonstrates that significant influence of regional think tanks is unlikely to occur in countries which do not have either regional economic centres, decentralized power, regional governments, or a federal government. In the next section, think tank culture in India is discussed in detail.

**Think tank culture in India**
Compared to western democracies where there is a significant think tank culture, India has no comparable think tank culture historically. This is primarily due to the economic and developmental model in the country driven by the state. Thus the government had a powerful influence on think tanks in the period before the 1990s. This power was demonstrated through the control of funding available through the Planning Commission to them or through different partnerships. Along with the Planning Commission, the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) also supports think tank activities in the country directly and indirectly. In spite of the strong influence of public funding for think tanks, think tanks are supposed to be autonomous functionally through managing the retention of operational freedom (Sobhan, 2000).

The expectations of people could not be fulfilled to a large extent by the state resulting in the development of many grass root initiatives such as action based think tanks in the country. In addition to these, in the initial years the government depended mainly on universities for the analysis of policy issues. The response time for the universities to produce outputs, however, was found to be very high due to the system in the universities. This necessitated the government to depend on the alternative private sector think tanks to analyse the policy issues with low response time for the effective implementation of the policies.

There are tax incentives for think tanks in developed countries. In India, with the implementation of the draft direct taxes code, the exemptions from income taxes for non-profit organizations will be cut off. Moreover, the permitted welfare activities and the requirements for registration will be put under bureaucratic scrutiny with the implementation of the Draft Direct Taxes Code with the associated significant costs of compliance. All these might undermine the private initiatives financial viability, as suggested by think tank leaders. In this regard, the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act 1976, which was amended in 2010, is found to be not consistent with the DTC in aspects like income from consultancy, mutual fund or land investment etc, as suggested by the experts. The implications of these include instances like capping of the administrative expenses to fifty per cent, and government control on suggesting the foreign donors of funding.

Compared to think tank models in countries like the US, think tank culture in India is found to be developing gradually due to the state dominated paradigm in the country and the restriction of the private parties in the thinking space for a long period. This is unlike the
system in the US where there was high trust in the private parties by the government for the analysis of policy issues. The perceptions on reliance of private parties are now changing in India with the failure of state to meet the expectations and the privatization and the liberalization policies in the 1990s. The socio-economic political transformation in the country contributed to the development of greater space for the private sector think tanks to engage in the research based advocacy on national and regional issues.

**Regional Think tanks in India:**

**Emergence of Regional Think tanks in India**

In the pre-independence period, some think tanks were established in India outside Delhi with the goal of a knowledge pool development to address the requirements of the country. These include the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics at Pune, Indian Statistical Institute at Kolkata and Tata Institute of Social Science, Mumbai (Srivastava, 2011). These think tanks, however, were mainly established based on the interests of the government and hence the output produced by these think tanks was influenced accordingly.

In the background of the opening of the Indian economy, following the emergence of globalization, liberalization and the reforms following these in the 1990s, the global power shift related debates as well as the rising insurgency and conflict problems in different Indian regions especially the North East and the tribal belts, many regional think tanks emerged in India particularly devoted to the studies of conflict and peace in the framework of different regions in India (Gold et al, 2011). The policies of privatization and liberalization in the 1990s increased the space for the private parties in the thinking arena in the country resulting in the emergence of many regional think tanks.

Another factor which can be identified as the reason for the emergence of the regional think tanks recently is the rapid dynamics of the urbanization process in the country. There are estimates of the migration of around 380 million people from rural areas to the metropolitan areas in India in the coming two decades. Thus, the rapid dynamics of urbanization can be considered as a primary factor which has resulted in the auto emergence of the regional think tanks in different parts of the country.

There is a federal system of government in India with distribution of powers between the centre and the state which is conducive to the significant influence of regional think tanks,
which has not fully materialised to the benefit of generating independent regional think tanks or intellectuals. Most of the existing regional think tanks are dependent on funding from the government with few independent regional think tanks.

**Classification of Regional Think tanks in India**

Regional think tanks in India can be classified into pure social science research institutions where there are academic programs along with the policy focused works and an affiliation with a university, think tanks established by different state governments and independent think tanks which focus on the analysis and research of policy issues. Among these, the majority are the pure social science research institutions, which run the academic programs along with the policy oriented works.

The Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) estimates around 860 think tanks in India, which do social science research although the quality of the output is not necessarily very good (ICSSR, 2007).

In the first and second categories, the policy focused works are mainly done for the government or government agencies, though they claim to produce completely autonomous or independent research outputs. Such outputs largely follow in a unstructured manner and especially on the individual interest of the people heading the institution.

There are in contrast, very few think tanks in the independent think tank category, which do works for private sector clients along with government agencies. This space has largely been dominated by consulting firms; especially the big four; Ernst & Young, Deloitte, KPMG and McKinsey. This is mainly due to the state dominated culture in the country which restricts the space for private parties in the policy making decision process for a long period. Thus, whether the state governments can be advised by private parties remained a debatable issue in India for a long period. At the same time perceptions are changing with the growth of the economy and the accessibility of information especially with the implementation of the Right to Information Act in 2005 by the Government of India.

There has been a slow shift in the attitude towards regional research institutions and think tanks especially after the recent government pushing for larger role of think tanks in India. This can be gauged from Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s words “the input of intellectual think tanks” should be substantially enhanced for better policy frameworks”. 
**Issues Associated with the Regional Think tanks:**

**Identity and uncertainty Problems**

There is an identity problem with think tanks in general and the regional think tanks in the country. This is because all think tanks in India are either registered under the Societies Registration Act of 1860 – as trusts, or under Section 25 – as charitable companies. Thereby belonging to the non-profit sector but not in a distinct “think tank category.” This is unlike in the US where they can be registered as think tanks. All non-profits including the NGOs and think tanks are grouped together with regard to the rules and regulations for donations. These include the exemptions on income tax, permitted welfare activities, and unique requirements for registration. In India public perception of think tanks is therefore limited and confused owing to the categorisation of all such activities under the NGO head. This is in contrast to the US where think tanks have separate clauses for the donation purposes. The non-profit independent think tanks in the US file 990s and as such the funding data for these are possible to be generated. The university-based think tanks in the US do not file independent 990s from their parent academic institutions making it impossible to generate the funding data for them. The research departments of consulting firms are classified as for profit think tanks for example McKinsey Global Institute and A.T. Kearney Global Business Policy Council. There is also a lack of clarity on what think tanks in India need to do based on the constitution while it is largely defined in countries like the US. Regional think tanks suffer a larger ignominy on being considered an NGO than a specialised institution carrying out policy research and think tank business unlike Delhi based national think tanks.

**Focus of Activities**

The majority of regional think tanks focus on national issues in addition to regional issues. At the same time, many regional think tanks focus only on national and global issues and not on regional issues. For example: Centre for Asia Studies in Chennai works largely on strategy and national security subject areas. Similarly Alexis Institute of Public Policy in Lucknow focuses on national governance and public policy issues. This can be considered a
major constraint since it results in the absence of alternative solutions for the local issues by the local think tanks.

Staffing and Infrastructure

A large constraint affecting think tanks is the significant human capital shortage in India. This has been a major impediment for regional think tanks that face talent shortage or high attrition rate. There are few higher education institutions that are competitive globally in terms of world rankings and those that are tend to focus on science, engineering and management disciplines. Moreover, there is a lack of intellectual talent in the different social science areas like sociology, anthropology and political science as shown by the insignificant contributions given by the Indian scholars in these disciplines. This is coupled with the small number of students interested in working in think tanks.

Non-Delhi think tanks will have a talent challenge if they don't hire non-traditional staff. It can be seen that in many of the independent regional think tanks, there remain a number of vacancies. The reason is that Delhi has a much larger of people wanting to work in think tanks. Bangalore is the only other major city with a large cluster of non-profits and think tanks.

The infrastructure of the regional think tanks (library facilities, computer and seminar facilities) is significantly higher in think tanks which are associated with academic institutions and state government run think tanks, compared to the independent think tanks. This is mainly due to the funding constraints associated with the independent think tanks.

Social Media Engagement

Only very few think tanks have active engagement in the social media like Facebook and twitter. Some have recently started their accounts in the twitter and Facebook which highlights the disconnect with new generation who largely rely on online mediums for seeking information. It is found that for the regional think tanks which are actively engaged in the social media have more attractions for region wise issues. For eg: Jannagraha’s I Pay Bribe platform have most representations from Bangalore given the larger role played by the institution at the region. Interestingly, many leaders of regional think tanks have more followers and engagement than the institutions they represent the social media.
Funding Issues

Non-Delhi think tanks may have a funding challenge as many donor agencies are based in Delhi. There is also a lack of significant efforts from the financial centres in India and the companies for helping in the funding of the regional think tanks. National think tanks get funds from multiple sources such as the central government, the private sector and foreign donors. There are multi-donor programs like the Canada based “Think Tank Initiative” which helps many Delhi based think tanks like NCAER and IIDS to explore models for independent policy research, which are sustainable (Young et al, 2013). At the same time, the regional think tanks do not have access to these multiple sources of funding mainly due to their inability to attract the attention of donors especially when compared to the national think tanks. Regional governments fund projects of primarily pure social-science research institutions and government run think tanks. There is a lack of regional government funding for independent think tanks. Most independent regional think tanks depend on short term project funding which has the fault of often creating donor driven priorities of research instead of addressing local needs based research.

Quality of Output

In most of the regional think tanks, the findings are published as policy briefs, books, working papers, press releases and also through seminars and workshops. There is however, the lack of a good quality control process found in many of these regional think tanks. Most regional think tanks do not have a rigorous peer review process resulting in the analyses subject to significant errors, claims that are not substantiated with proper evidence and rework on out-dated theories. Moreover, in the pure social science research institutions and think tanks established by the government, the business model consists mainly of contract research with the government. This is found to result in many problems like delay in the output by bureaucrats, withheld payments for even works completed and differing opinions on the disclosure of the findings of the work published in public. Thus, though these institutes claim to be functionally autonomous, all these issues show the non viability of this business model. This again shows the significance of the independent regional think tanks based on ideology for the analysis of regional and national issues.
Policy Influence of Regional Think Tanks

Lack of Space for the Conveyance of Policy Findings

Many regional think tanks outside Delhi work on many issues -- local, regional and national. There are several of them, many in Bangalore, Chennai, Mumbai and a few other cities like Pune and Kochi. There are a few regional think tanks which have done quite well in different fields such as education, and urban issues. There are also many regional think tanks which work purely on state or local issues. It is only understandable however, if these don't make news as regularly on the national stage, for that is irrelevant to them. Unlike in the US, where there is a larger audience for the regional think tanks through congressional hearings and other opportunities for idea and expertise conveyance. Indian regional think tanks do not have much space for the conveyance of the policy findings. Regional think tanks also do not have much access to the national media based in Delhi, the national capital, which restrict the space for publicizing their policy findings.

Access to Policy Makers

In most national think tanks, it is noted that there are regular columns by the senior researchers in the national dailies, publicizing views and increasing their access to government officials easily. This is not the case with the regional think tanks due to their lack of access to the national media. Thus, the viewpoints of the researchers in the regional think tanks are not widely read by the policymakers as compared to the Delhi based think tanks.

The government and think tank engagement are not strong in India compared to the countries like the US where there is a more significant think tank culture. In the case of regional think tanks, this engagement of government and think tanks is even lower mainly due to the political power focus in Delhi. There are instances of occasional invitations to the Parliamentary Steering Committees for the scholars of the Delhi based think tanks. In the case of regional think tanks, the scholars of pure social science research institutions and the government run think tanks get occasional invitations to become members of many state government appointed Expert Committees. For example, the senior research faculties of the Centre for Development Studies in Kerala get invitations for becoming members of expert
Committees appointed by the Kerala Government. At the same time, the scholars from the independent regional think tanks hardly get any invitations like this. Among the regional think tanks, the academic and the state run think tanks have collaborations and partnerships with other think tanks for policy analysis purposes. This is in contrast to the collaborations and partnerships among the independent think tanks are low.

**Policy Impact Assessment**

The assessment of regional think tanks policy impact can be done using the representation of think tank experts in various committees, the citations of think tanks and the website visits. Regional think tanks might find less 'glamour' and be less able to attract elite attention, which in fact, does matter for the profile of a think tank. The pure social science research institutes of the academic type fail to perform well with respect to the citations and representation of the experts in committees. They are also subject to public funding, which in turn affects the research in these institutes. Regarding independent think tanks, those institutions which deal with more subjects especially political and social issues have more site visits than others. Students tend to visit sites which have more academic content and have internship or academic opportunities.

**Challenges**

The above discussion shows that there is lack of space, lack of talent and the lack of regional initiatives in supporting the funding of the regional think tanks. The majority of the regional think tanks are pure social science research institutions with low quality output on policy issues. There are few independent regional think tanks in the country. There are constraints associated with infrastructure in independent think tanks compared to the pure social science institutions and government run think tanks. There is a lack of interdisciplinary research among both national and regional think tanks. The absence of rigorous quality control process is a major constraint affecting the quality of output in regional think tanks especially, independent regional think tanks. Moreover, access to policy makers for independent regional think tanks is low compared to the Delhi based think tanks. The lack of access to the national media fails to bring regional think tanks into the limelight. The low level of social media engagement among regional think tanks is found another constraint affecting the sustainable
future of regional think tanks. There is also very less state government and independent regional think tank engagement, which needs to be improved for the improvement of the policy impact of the regional think tanks. At the same time, the lack of regional economic centres and lack of strong regional initiatives to support the funding of regional think tanks constrain the significant performance of these think tanks.

**Recommendations:**

There needs to be more independent regional think tanks in the country since most policy initiatives are done by social science research institutions and government run think tanks, where there is a state dominated think tank culture. Many problems in India like the disposal of waste, scarcity of water, food insecurity, nutrition issues, biodiversity problem, transportation issues, and deforestation require local solutions rather than centralized solutions.

Though there are numerous reports in the form of theses and dissertations made by the universities in different regions, they are more scholarly and academic in nature rather than aimed at the provision of prescriptions for policy or alternative solutions to the government as policy recommendations. The scholars from numerous backgrounds can be brought together by these think tanks enabling idea and dialogue cross-pollination rather than universities and academic institutions, where there are academic discipline defined structures of organization.

There is a lack of independent and quality think tanks in many cities and sub regions except in cities like Bangalore and Mumbai. The state government need to encourage regional think tanks by involving them in policy discussions which will enable a better informed opinion. State funded think tanks will emerge to supplement the government initiatives while independent think tanks will work in tandem to identify and critically examine policy initiatives especially in subject matters like budget, welfare initiatives etc.

Funding sources are largely limited to NGOs thanks to the latest CSR norms which have very little scope for think tanks to seek funding opportunities from companies. Collaboration between the regional think tanks for the development of different models of think tank funding is recommended a best option for effectively addressing the funding
constraint. For a sustainable future for the regional think tanks, they need to seek different funding sources and private endowments. Philanthropy at the individual and institutional level is key to support the initiatives of think tanks. Funding can be built on policy impact assessment systems which will be a key driver for performance.

The talent constraints need to be addressed effectively in the regional think tanks. If there is a lack of quality inputs and talented hands in regional think tanks, then the only option is to hire scholars from the national level. This is very essential for ensuring the high quality of the findings by these think tanks. The credibility of regional think tanks needs to be improved through high quality outputs, research in a timely manner and the improvements in the political process understanding. In this regard the importance of a rigorous work culture, research which is methodical, and investigation scientifically in the regions is very significant. The quality control process in regional think tanks needs to be improved. For example, there needs to be a strict mechanism for the review of the issued product quality regularly in regional think tanks including in house seminars and assigning responsibility for the quality of the final product to the author of the product and the reviewer. The peer review process helps in protecting think tanks from damaging their reputations.

High online media outreach is essential for a sustainable future for regional think tanks. This is because social media is an effective option for enabling the engagement and involvement of citizens in the policy dialogue. Since the cost of investment in social media is low compared to that in the traditional media, this can effectively help in the reduction of operating costs of the fund constrained regional think tanks. Targeted engagements can be planned effectively through social media.

The development of standard indicators for determining the policy impact of the research findings is critical for improving the influence of regional think tanks. These include checking the recommendations of regional think tanks considered by policy makers, user perceptions, website traffic, product utilization by policy makers and other elites and media references of the findings of regional think tanks. In this regard, think tank leadership plays a very crucial role. Regional think leaders need to have personnel attributes like good vision about the organization, good communication skills, strong networks and contacts with the policy makers, strong communication and innovation skills, some degree of entrepreneurism and flexible style of operations and interests.
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Role of Think Tanks in Policy Making and Overcoming Communication Challenges

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Center for Study of Science, Technology, and Policy

Introduction

In a think tank, sharing and communicating information and research has become an important aspect, primarily to bring visibility to the organisation. What is important is: how often does a think tank consider communication strategy to be a component of a research agenda? In the last few years building the communication capacity of the research staff or identifying the right talent and people with appropriate skill has become an important part of HR strategy.

To complement this, in today’s improved world of technology, access to information, stories and data has become easier. Many think tanks have leveraged this opportunity and have begun to build a strong communication strategy. This becomes the first step in the agenda of building an effective strategic plan.

Some think tanks have well-formulated vision and mission statements, which ideally form the basis for building a viable and doable strategic plan. The exercise of building or developing a strategic plan should involve the entire staff and evolve as a consultative project. The reason being, the staff who are the internal /primary audience need to believe and understand the mission and vision statements of a think tank. This will help in building ownership and understanding of how each one can contribute to the strategies defined.

Research Process

The process of impacting the policy making process through research varies based on the objectives/goals of a think tank. Broadly it can be said that it involves planning, engagement, outreach and measurement.
In the **planning phase** it is very important for the researchers to dialogue with policy makers to primarily understand what challenges are being faced by the policy makers, how best can these issues be prioritised and addressed. Based on the understanding, a clear proposal needs to be written. The proposal can ideally include the purpose of the research, key challenges, clear identifiable solutions (either by building tools or models), inputs from engagements with experts and advisors to primarily guide the project, and a budget for key activities to include staffing, administrative costs, policy engagements costs, cost for communication materials, event organisation, dissemination costs and staff costs. This phase will also require a timeline to showcase to all stakeholders the various aspects of the research project. As an example, a timeline could include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gathering Information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Concept Note</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial Meeting</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Conducting Research</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Analysing Information</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Presenting 1st Draft to Stakeholders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revisiting Research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Releasing Final Report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissemination Activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The timeline is represented in the diagram.*
In order to have a complete picture, the research project can include an estimate which will primarily ensure that the think tank is serious about the research/topic. A sample budget could include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Costs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honorarium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printing Costs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops/Meetings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Engaging and Outreach is the next phase.** Broadly this will include research and analyses, meetings and conferences, establishment of a mechanism for review and feedback, and dissemination of information through publications (Policy Briefs, Op-eds, articles) and communication channels (websites, social media, and presentations to stakeholders in a small group).

The **third phase**, which is measuring, will involve tracking the quality of published outputs, what type of media published this information, what and how many comments were received (where applicable), if articles were cited by others, if so, on how many occasions, did traffic on website increase, did social media platforms receive hits and so on.
**Need for Marketing and Communication Strategies**

Think tanks across the world work on diverse topics and have different objectives. Based on the needs and importance, think tanks need to plan effective and workable marketing and communication strategies. The following table outlines different communication outputs and their purposes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Output</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy Briefs</td>
<td>A short document which presents research findings and provides recommendations, specifically for a non-scientific audience. A way to provide policy advice. A platform to explore a research topic and share the results of the research.</td>
<td>Audience context specificity, Actionable Recommendations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brochure</td>
<td>Provides more details on a specific topic</td>
<td>Detailed information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept Note</td>
<td>A prospectus to provide ideas of a project</td>
<td>Summary of a proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reports</td>
<td>Present specific information and evidence which are analysed and applied to a particular problem or issue.</td>
<td>Inform facts, Present arguments. Help make a well-informed decision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsletters</td>
<td>Regularly distributed publication generally about one main topic</td>
<td>Disseminate information, Motivate performance, Promote unity, Improve morale, Supplement company records.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podcasts</td>
<td>A form of audio broadcasting on the Internet</td>
<td>Basic communication for a specific audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Speaking to someone who is a domain expert</td>
<td>Get an opinion from someone who has a sound knowledge on a topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webinars</td>
<td>Provide knowledge virtually</td>
<td>This can be viewed in different formats and at a convenient time suitable to the audience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
communication strategies.
Broadly, this can be segmented as direct and indirect. These options will be based on the purpose of the communication, the audience or stakeholder and the need and importance of the information. Questions such as: "Is it an important piece of research and a relevant topic? How will it benefit the national or state level governments? Will it be useful in the policy making process?" are important to be asked.

Direct communication is typically used when addressing policy makers or decision makers. A think tank needs to understand the thought process and background of the said policy makers, administrators. For example, “What is the background of the decision maker? Do they have the required technical knowledge? Do they have sufficient time to understand what is being communicated? Is the information an important topic which has been identified in their political manifesto?” are some of the questions for which answers need to be found. Once there are clear answers, the think tank or the researchers in the think tank can plan how best they can convey the knowledge and information to ensure that it is understood in the right perspective, and if it provides a solution for the existing problem.

It is necessary to acknowledge the importance of being proactive with policy makers. By being proactive, think tanks will be in a better position to know what policy makers seek, how would they like to receive information and most important why and when do they need this information. Meaningful proactivity not only helps a think tank realise and understand the needs of a particular audience but also provides guidelines and ideas to customise the communication material. Some of the popular communication materials that can help a think tank in communication are given in the Table below:
**Challenges**

One of the key challenges that a think tank faces is measuring the success of the marketing and communication strategy. Often think tanks never receive the credit due to them. Often development of public policy for government undergoes several iterations when it is being researched and analysed. The contributions of a think tank surrounding the impact story often goes without a mention. This could be because inputs could be derived from several stakeholders.

On the other hand, when a policy has been enacted, credit is often not given to a single body (think tank) since several organisations and partners were involved in the various stages of development. However, perhaps one way of garnering ownership for a policy input by a think tank could be organising workshops, seminars, meetings, stakeholders consultation, and publishing papers, articles, and blogs to name a few.

Using platforms like meetings, conferences and seminars, think tanks can build contacts and network with key stakeholders (like government personnel, policy makers, academics, industries, civil society organisations, other like-minded bodies and media). Other important methods to overcome this challenge are to conduct training programmes to develop a next generations of policy makers, diplomats and bureaucrats and organise webinars and podcasts.

For outreach through news media, think tanks must employ skilled communications specialists to create and send news releases written in journalistic style, and personally follow up with journalists with whom they have developed relationships through regular contact. Other channels of communications include social media, newsletters (including email newsletters) and annual reports — each suitable for a particular audience. Good communication plans use a combination of all of these channels to achieve the greatest impact.

**Best Practices for Strategic Communication**
Often some think tanks have a well-planned communication strategy but may not have included an approach to market the same. Sometimes a lot of time, effort and money are spent on developing marketing collaterals, but often these communication materials are either not disseminated to the right audience at the right time or have become redundant. Hence it often becomes very important to plan and devise a strategic plan that can be re-visited, altered so as to add a new fillip, especially with the changing scenario. But before a think tank enters into the planning stage, a few basic points need to be borne in mind.

Purpose of strategic communication and marketing strategies:
- Why does your organisation want to develop a marketing and communicating strategy?
- Will this be applicable to all the stakeholders that you work with?
- Are you expecting a specific outcome from this?
- Will there be a dedicated team/spokesperson who will manage this or will the existing researcher/s manage this?

Appropriate answers identified and discussed and understood will form the basis for developing a communication and marketing strategy. So the first step would be to understand the following:
- Strategic planning - How will this help a think tank? Will it involve a lot of effort?
- Fundraising - Will this help in garnering funds for projects and the organisation?
- Marketing and communications - what methods and modes should be adopted?
- Measurement - can parameters be developed for measuring the same?

A think tank can plan and build a communication and marketing strategy that includes:
- Development of ideas to ensure that there is a focus on increasing visibility and expanding the sphere of reach to various audiences. This will typically include constant engagement with identifying, researching and developing ideas, models and strategies
- Provision of a platform to stakeholders with information that will help them to think outside of the box and also have access to new and innovative ideas
- Adoption of a global perspective, especially since several think tanks have begun to work in consortiums to make research more meaningful and topical
o Inclusion of monitoring mechanisms to ensure that the organisation meets set objectives and goals and also to help find new opportunities

o Planned research approaches and methodologies to ensure that the work is evidence-based and also meets the expectations of the audience/stakeholders

o Establishment and generation of good work relationships with other organisations like the government, academia, industries or other think tanks.

While there are still no golden rules established with reference to best practices in communication and marketing in think tanks, an overall approach and effort could include:

**Revisiting Communication and Marketing Strategies**

o Conduct a critical audit of the existing marketing collaterals and plan how information can be updated and re-worked to suit new initiatives

o Understand what other think tanks are working on similar topics that your organisation is studying

o Quantify achievable goals; for example in the next two years we will engage with 3 new partners or we will expand and diversify into new research areas

o Identify what is unique in your research even if it is similar to another research

**Re-inventing a Concept**

o Review your earlier communication and marketing strategy and identify what worked and what did not

o Continue to engage in activities that worked

o Activities that did not work need to be addressed by:
  o Clearly identifying why it did not work
  o What needs to be done to rectify this?

o Conduct a SWOT analysis if required

o Put all concerns on the table for a meaningful discussion with all members in the organisation involved in this activity

o Use previous experiences/strategy as a reference point
Choose Appropriate Channels to Communicate

- One of the most important activities is choosing the right mode of communication for the right audience
- Developing various formats of information will be important to be used appropriately
- Upload information on the website, so that it can be a central location for all types of information generated in your organisation
- Optimise the option of producing materials by taking decisions on when and how to use hard copy and when and how to use soft copy.

Creating Content

Creating the right type of content for the right audience is imperative. An important point to keep in mind is that most readers/audience may not have sufficient time to read an entire document. It is very important to ensure that the information published is simple and does not have readability issues. The flow of content should be clear and concise; in today’s fast-paced world, brevity has become the key word in documentation. Addressing the key issues right at the beginning helps set the expectations to the audience/reader.

Using appropriate graphics/images to complement text to further explain complex issues can be useful. An image well-designed and appropriately used can convey important ideas. Most importantly, communication material with jargon, probabilities, vagueness and wordiness will never be used or understood.

Importance of Social Media

In today’s world of technology the use of social media is an important platform to communicate research activities and findings. What can ideally work well is to ensure that a robust and practical communication strategy includes the use of social media. For example how and when will Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Pinterest be used? Who or why would anyone access information from these platforms?

There have been several studies where opinions on media platforms have been discussed. For example, some people are of the opinion that Facebook appears more personal and can ideally be used for sharing information that may not be very serious. However, it can be used for announcing events, sharing important information since it will reach a wider audience.
LinkedIn has a niche audience who ideally use it to search for experts, personnel, expertise and also for a specific domain and area. Twitter is used as a search engine to identify and locate information on specific businesses. Pinterest is becoming another important medium, since think tanks have started using info-graphics as an important element in their outputs.

**Focus on Specifics**

Using a focused and specific approach on social media platforms will bring in the required results and also ensure that the right information has attracted the right audience. For example, often many think tanks follow and retweet information and posts of interest. This ensures that you have already established a group of like-minded people who may be interested in what you are conveying. So it is very important for a think tank to follow the right kind of person and organisation. Another important aspect is to know what type of information can be shared or tweeted and retweeted. Using hashtags has become very useful; since the information uploaded on twitter is limited, by using a hashtag people can access all the information that is relevant.

Since connecting with the news media to disseminate information has also become an important activity for think tanks, social media has become an opportune place for representatives from various media to access information that they may have, otherwise, not found. This also has a cyclic effect on improving and broadening outreach activities of think tanks.

The most important aspect to remember while using social media platforms is to ensure that it is official and professional since it represents an organisation/think tank.

**Improving Social Media Engagement**

**Pinterest**

- What - a virtual pin boarding platform
- Who can use it? Any user who creates, designs graphics
- Why should you use it?
  - Engage with other people who have similar interests
  - Create a theme board so that others can add their pins to it
- Helps in collaborating with like-minded people

**Facebook**
- What – the most popular social media platform
- Who can use it? Anyone who wants to
- Why should you use it?
  - Increase engagements
  - Highlight and share important milestones achieved
  - Know what others are engaged in

**Tips to increase visibility**
Determine the best time of the day to reach the target audience for maximum effect
Post content on a daily basis
Like other postings
Try and use images
Tag individuals, organisations and stakeholders

**Twitter**
- What - Another platform to showcase your work/activities/interests
- Who can use it? Anyone who wants to
- Why should you use it?
  - Engage with followers
  - Contribute to a debate/discussion
  - Showcase your interest in a topic

**Tips to Increase Visibility**
Use minimum characters; add images, links or photos
Follow other handles
Use hashtags appropriately
Tag others
Split tweets between announcements and updates
Post at least twice daily

LinkedIn
- What - a nice way to network
- Who can use it? Anyone who wants to
- Why should you use it?
  - Content is focused based on the audience
  - Professional
  - Images are not always necessary

**Tips for Increasing Visibility**
Use it as a platform to promote ideas
Actively participate in discussions

A website proves to be a useful way of communicating with the larger public. For example, newsletters, annual reports, and important documents like reports, policy briefs, etc. can be uploaded on the website and the links can be shared with stakeholders (old and new) and other organisations. Using the news media as another platform will also enhance outreach activities.

**What goes into making social media an important part of a communication strategy?**

In a country like India, several think tanks have yet to understand and fully utilise social media as a means to communicate. In fact one can say that social media is in its infancy stage. Many think tanks are not aware of the benefits of using this technology. For example, if used well,
social media can help build a brand for a think tank. Many think tanks, when using social media, often do not use the right kind of people to ensure that this activity can be handled well. If the right kinds of people with appropriate skills are employed, outreach and social media activities can become effective and meaningful. Such an investment usually pays off because the primary task of these experts is to be tuned into social media discussions and understand and follow current trends. This can help the organisation in enhancing its brand image through maintaining regular and constant presence on these platforms. Social media can also be used to engage with stakeholders. For example, comments and feedback can be invited by making a statement on a research topic.

Thus social media should be integrated into the communication strategy of a think tank. In addition to this, the constant flow of information will garner interest from stakeholders when they continuously access this information at their convenience.

**Milestones and Steps to Ensure Success**

It is important for a think tank to identify and list specific groups and people who could be tracked and/or followed. Sometimes having numeric data and targets helps in planning the strategy effectively. For example, the following ideas could be followed as a matrix to quantify and analyse outreach activities:

- What are the accounts that need to be followed?
- How many new accounts have been included in the last three months?
- How many tweets can be shared per day/week/month?
- How many followers would we like to add in six months?
- Can the website traffic be monitored from these platforms?

By leveraging social media, a think tank can build a successful and strong presence in social media platforms

**Using New Technologies for Communication**

In the new world where technology has become a way of life, interactions between groups and individuals has become simple and easy. Creating a meaningful and simple strategy for
interactions has become the norm of the day. For example, in some think tanks a webinar is primarily used to encourage young researchers to share their research outcomes with people from across the globe. Since this is a timed and focused interaction, interest is often elicited by the audience and for the presenter it becomes even more important when useful feedback is provided instantaneously, rather than several days later.

While using social media think tanks have to understand that by using this they are conversing with others, conveying important information, hence it should be backed with strong evidence. It also allows people/audience/stakeholders to respond immediately and hence information should be straightforward, honest and planned in an open dialogue format.

Using a medium like podcasts has simplified the task of sharing knowledge. Some think tanks have also begun to use short films on their complex researches as an effective and evocative means of communication. For example, the Center for Study of Science, Technology and Policy (CSTEP) produced a short film to showcase their work in energy. For some stakeholders watching this short film was more helpful to them to understand the research the organisation is working on and was preferential to reading a large and dense report.

Another effective way of communication is the use of blogs. They serve as an important medium to help increase the validity of a communication strategy in a think tanks. In addition to this, think tanks can also leverage their presence in media. For example, an increased presence in media is important, to bring maximum visibility by showcasing relevant case studies on social platforms and also brand activities.
In India, it will be relevant to engage with broadcast media so that the rural audience can be reached. Hence think tanks should make a conscious effort to introduce blogging and live chats as part of research projects. Create fact sheets, policy briefs and other accessible communication materials that summarise research issue in a context they will be understood and accessed easily.

**Conclusion**
In conclusion, think tanks should accept the fact that clear communication strategies are required to engage with stakeholders and also bring credibility to the organisation. New technologies are being introduced every day; being flexible in using these technologies for maximum visibility should become an important aspect of a think tank’s inherent character.
Rethinking the Indian Think Tank: From Retirement Homes to Ideation Hubs

By Samir Saran & Aniruddh Mohan
Observer Research Foundation

The Indian think tank is undergoing a transformation. The days of think tanks being continuing education programs for university researchers by day, or retirement homes for former bureaucrats and army officers, are behind us. Think tanks are gaining increasing relevance in the Indian context and are providing platforms where government, civil society and private business can discuss a wide range of issues. The first realisation dawning upon many is that the state no longer has monopoly and control over information, governance and national objectives. This has resulted in a more open dialogue on issues and policy options and has increased the agency and influence of non-state actors such as think tanks.

In India, there is a lack of a structural interface between policy and research. The dependence on disembodied knowledge systems has resulted in a systemic lack of expertise in the creation of policy. Globalization, technology, resource scarcity challenges, new knowledge systems, changing values and emerging ideas challenge the perverse separation of thought leadership and policy formulation in India and are forcing many of the traditional attitudes that shaped this relationship to be recast and rethought.

The growing realisation of the importance of knowledge-based economic and political systems has also led to competition between institutions worldwide for the best ideas and people that will allow for strategic benefits in the creation and propagation of preferred narratives on a range of issues. This relationship between ideas, institutions, and policy making is becoming increasingly more important in a globalised world managed through multi-stakeholder arrangements. The limitations of state machinery are more acute and far more evident today as countries seek to formulate specific responses to manage new domains and opportunities. This capability and capacity shortfall in turn allows for far greater participation of think tanks and civil society in the

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process of governing societies. And, finally, technology and ease of communication in the virtual world have allowed for a more level playing field, which challenges the propositional advantage of structure and agency enjoyed by established powers and elite institutions around the world\textsuperscript{29}.

As India slowly defines its role in a dynamic, evolving region and world, the Government of India will have to address its own capacity deficits and engage in consequent arrangements that can benefit from the talent outside the formal governmental and political institutions. This will enable India to prosper in an age of information-intensive governance. As the new ideation hubs of the Indian story, the journey of Indian think tanks has been steered by three concrete drivers: the increasing importance of Multi-stakeholderism; the pressing need for more creative capacities; and the wave of globalization that has characterized the late 20\textsuperscript{th} and early 21\textsuperscript{st} centuries. Each of these is discussed in subsequent sections and this paper concludes with their implications for the role of Indian think tanks going forward.

**Multi-Stakeholderism**

The term Multi-stakeholderism (MSH) has gained much traction in recent years. MSH is about creating partnerships for collective action or problem solving for concerns related to public goods or services or even private initiatives. The concept is to tie together stakeholders who pool in resources and assets to address problems and challenges. Ideal global policy networks are characterized by collaboration between governments, representatives of civil society, and the private sector. These collaborations are meant to promote a better and more holistic approach to governance and policy objectives. Each stakeholder brings on board unique, complementary strengths and core competencies.

The ‘MSH moment’ has been brought about in large part due to the technology and information revolution that has swept the world in the past 25 years. The nature of business, governance and the role of civil society have changed. For the private sector, people are now central to business. In the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, human capital is the biggest asset for companies competing in a digitalised, specialised and fast changing world where innovation is the key to staying competitive. For governments, citizen participation in policy debates is increasingly a norm rather than an exception. The advent of the digital era has meant that citizen engagement with political and

\textsuperscript{29}McGann, James G. "2014 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report." (2015)
social issues has never been easier. The openness of governance regimes has meant that matters earlier outside the domain of citizen participation are now household issues in many countries. People are thus increasingly empowered and they are playing crucial roles across the spectrum of business and governance.

From the public sector perspective, the multitude of issues facing government departments today, combined with resource and capacity constraints, is forcing them to seek partnering opportunities with private sector organisations or civil society groups to best leverage knowledge, skills, and capacity. On the business side, multi-national corporations operating in different environments, countries, and cultures as a result of globalization are under increasing pressure to partner with government agencies and civil society groups that are familiar with the locality. As a result, the size and influence of the “third sector”, i.e., civil society, has been increasing in the last two decades. In developed countries, where a significant portion of social services is delivered through such civil society organizations, their economic contributions have sizably grown. Likewise, in developing countries, non-governmental organizations are playing an important and expanding role in delivering vital development aid.

Conventional business-to-business strategic alliances reflect the potential of multi-stakeholder partnerships; the principles of the former can be effectively applied to the creation of the latter to meet the challenges of governance, sustainable development, international relations and other social goals. With their ability to influence policy, provide independent analysis and be responsive to the needs of both the public and private sector, think tanks are a key part of this multi-stakeholder world. The MSH moment has thus been responsible for the increasing relevance of think tanks in both the Indian and global context.

**Creative Capacities**

The democratic-deficit and lack of confidence in governments and elected politicians around the world have led to increased calls for independent analysis of public policy. The Indian government and other institutions are facing an increasing pressure to improve economic and bureaucratic performance. Specialised institutions and think tanks not only help create policy solutions to highly complex problems faced by states, but also, can take on the mantle of leading

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30 Ibid.
conversations on foreign trade and diplomacy; thereby addressing a major deficiency of the Indian state and its foreign service.

States no longer possess the capacities to pursue sovereign objectives alone. The private sector, media, academia and think tanks offer governments a platform which can be integrated into the normative policy making processes of states. Policy makers and private sector decision makers have acknowledged this need for increased collaboration\textsuperscript{31}. Think tanks in particular occupy a crucial juncture in-between the world of politics, economics, academia and the media\textsuperscript{32}.

Traditionally, publicly funded research has had a focus on scientific and social excellence and has been funded by governments without sufficient thought being given to the potential application of research results\textsuperscript{33}. Private sector interaction in public research policy definition and execution was limited\textsuperscript{34}. Intersections between both sectors have grown with the increasing understanding for the value and potential of such collaborations. It has been increasingly understood that research outcomes are the basis for innovation processes, leading to marketable technologies, products and services\textsuperscript{35}.

A shortfall of capacity and capability is also fueling this increased cross cutting interaction between governments and individuals from the private sector and academia. The public sector in India continues to lack the ability to attract top talent. But the challenges facing governments have grown exponentially as a result of the political and technological transformations of the late 20\textsuperscript{th} century. There is an increased need for governments to be able to harness the brightest and sharpest minds and skills for policymaking.

An interesting point to note is that in its nascent stages, India had little problems with sourcing outside expertise. Patrick Blackett, a British experimental physicist was a significant contributor


\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
to Indian defense and military policy during the Nehru years (1947 to 1965). However, as India’s stance of non-alignment and its aversion to foreign interventions and involvement in domestic affairs evolved, such expertise was disregarded in favour of domestic capability and bureaucracy. This was true especially in the domain of foreign affairs and military policy. Although India has always remained open for economic advice and expertise – from Manmohan Singh to Arvind Subramanian and Raghuram Rajan - in the domain of defense and security, leveraging insight from outside the ambit of government has proved difficult. The strategic affairs domain however requires similar interventions and this is where the role of think tanks, leaders of the private sector, and scientific experts is important.

There is significant talent out there, ready to be leveraged both in terms of the impact they will have in other countries thereby increasing India’s soft power, but also in terms of the academic and intellectual excellence that is available for policymaking. Just as an example, the CEOs of Google, Microsoft, Pepsi, MasterCard and Adobe are all Indian born. Last year it was estimated that there were 134,292 students from India studying in the US alone, accounting for the second highest number of foreign students in the US after China. Indians are also increasingly pursuing higher education. In 2007, India produced just over 20,000 PhDs, up nearly 80% from the 12,000 in 2002. We have already seen examples of the power of India’s diaspora during negotiations over the Indo-US civilian nuclear deal in 2008. The deal was thought to be passed in Congress after significant lobbying by the Indian-American community.

India must harness its broad base of numbers to shape its narrative. Conventional international processes and platforms are not the solution. Creating alternative platforms where such talent can be mined for influencing and shaping policy is therefore essential if government policies are to be in tune with the dynamics of an interconnected and fast changing world. The human capital

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and knowledge outside India’s borders are a resource that must be tapped into. The country’s capacity shortfall will then turn into a surplus.

**Globalization**

The globalization phenomenon has affected the role of think tanks in two distinct ways. Firstly, while globalization has helped engender further competition, it has also broken down cultural barriers. Trade, technology, finance, and the media enable and propel globalization in their unique capacities\(^40\). Some of the imperatives that drive globalization are the need for countries to create new markets, secure critical resources, acquire new information and technology, and address critical transnational and non-traditional threats.

Networks and think tanks have several unique qualities and functions that distinguish them from other civil society organizations and entities. Networks have boundary-transcending qualities that allow them to act as mediators. These networks can place issues of global importance on the agenda and demand accountability from formal government structures. Global policy networks facilitate the transfer and use of knowledge in the public sphere, preventing a monopoly of information on policy on the part of the government. The formation of networks that incorporate actors from developing countries is important. As fragile civil societies develop, these networks can help foment and solidify the strength of institutions in these societies by transferring knowledge and technical expertise. Creating and preserving multi-sectoral integration and flexibility in global think tank networks ensures continued relevance on a global scale. It allows Global Policy networks to avoid time lags that often complicate reaction and adaption times in response to emerging issues.

One of a think tank’s specialized functions at a global level is the translation of international governance codes and laws for domestic applicability. Global think tanks and public policy networks also have the capacity to implement policy in distinct areas through contracting, training, and project work.\(^41\)

Secondly, globalization has led to the creation of wealth outside national borders. India Inc. has made acquisitions worth $126 billion between 2003-2013 and last year, overseas FDI from India increased by 8% compared to 5% growth in GDP. Indians are also investing in realty. Indians are the largest non-Arab investors in Dubai, between April 2013 to March 2014 Indians spent USD 5.8 billion to buy properties in the US and in Ethiopia, Indians have been responsible for 70% of all land acquisition by foreigners since 2008. There is no state body in India that creates, sustains or thinks about the creation of wealth outside the borders of India. Who should plan for that and how would that be done given economic planning institutions are staffed by personnel not adept at doing so? The state needs to start integrating these new possibilities into its economic policies. There exist similar questions on the creation of wealth in the virtual domain, where a large part of Indian economic growth is now being generated. India is adding roughly 5 million new internet users a month and by 2018-2019 is expected to have a user base of 500 million. As per projections by the Boston Consulting Group, the economy from this internet growth could be worth as much as $200 billion. Roughly 25% of India’s GDP growth over the past two decades has been created in the IT and ITES sector.

The post-colonial South was created from an impulse of aggregation and sovereign protection. This resulted in countries looking inward for decades as they tried to industrialize and develop their economies. Today, most growth prospects available to these countries reside outside their boundaries. However, state apparatuses are not adequately geared to exploit the opportunities offered by globalization. Post-colonial states like India simply do not possess foreign services designed to be exploratory, pioneering frontier services like those of Europe and the U.S. This impulse was and is missing. The lack of this exploratory impulse has become a lacuna in the state capacity of India to traverse the new economic and political landscape. The talent pool in

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43 Ibid.


45 Ibid.

46 Samir Saran, Seminar Magazine, March 2014, *Reframing the Cyber Governance Debate for India*
traditional planning bodies will be overstretched to engage with these realities. This is where the role of think tanks becomes crucial.

**Conclusion**

The harsh official face of diplomacy is no longer palatable or acceptable in many international processes. Instead, the onus is on expert institutions outside the ambit of officialdom, such as think tanks, to move the agenda forward and introduce new ideas into stagnant debates. Capacity constraints of governments in both the developed and developing world are forcing them to look outwards to harness the expertise and knowledge available in policy research organisations. Think tanks have the advantage of being able to ‘think the unthinkable’ and challenge conventional wisdoms, norms and practices.

Think tanks also have the power to define the ideation quadrant. A multiplicity of voices from different vantage points (political and ideological) all contribute towards sectioning off the creative space within which countries similar to India can discuss and dissect relevant issues. Debates will encourage an acknowledgement of India’s larger goals in the global sphere and allow India to rely on its think tanks and individual experts to pursue and influence agendas in areas where the state has lesser influence or space.47

Going forward, as the role of the Indian think tank evolves, it is likely to face three important challenges. Firstly, there will always exist an inherent tension between the credibility of intellectual independence and political access. Think tanks must be able to demonstrate that their research agenda is not socialised and conditioned by government group think. Ideological traps have to be avoided whilst maintaining a meaningful level of access to policymakers.

Second, think tanks have to become a useful medium for communicating policy to an impatient populace. There is a need to make available simple, thought-provoking and real-time analysis to the public. Conversely, the average citizen has been empowered by technology and the digital world to participate in every policy debate. In India, democratic ethos along with a huge number of internet users, result in an even bigger challenge to meaningfully engage the demands of the

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public to participate in policy making. Think tanks are central to connecting this two-way process.

Lastly, India’s needs and aspirations are uniquely placed in the global order. Its imperatives and objectives have a different texture to both the G7 and OECD nations on the one hand, and to the G77 group of developing nations on the other. India is in the process of jostling for space in international fora, eager to claim its place at the policy high table, yet lacking many of the attributes of those already there. India must challenge the existing status quo, without calling into question the relevance of the very system it seeks to be part of. As a nation in transition, India needs all the resources it can muster. It must make its weight of numbers felt in international fora. The official diplomatic space offers limited room to do so. For example, India has only 950 diplomats against Singapore’s 639. India’s GDP however, is 7 times that of Singapore’s and its population 250 times more. Structures and rules of international meetings also constrain the Indian viewpoint from making its presence felt. Think tanks, on the other hand, bring convening power to the table and can influence the policy agenda along Indian lines. India has the fourth largest number of think tanks in the world after the US, UK and China. It is time those numbers were leveraged and brought to bear on international processes.

For Indian think tanks to successfully surmount these challenges, they must begin to position themselves globally. Competition in the marketplace of ideas will require means and resources that are comparable to those in the West. It will be necessary for Indian think tanks to invest in cadres of communication and business development experts to increase their stakeholder base effectively. The core output of intellectual excellence also needs to be constantly refreshed by bringing on board talent and expertise from abroad. Entrenchment in the global ideas factory will only be enabled by an outlook that is sufficiently outward looking.

The idea of India has now moved beyond that of the entity bounded by the Himalayas and surrounding water bodies. Indian think tanks must do the same. The 21st century has redrawn the real and virtual footprint of India; planning and government processes need to follow suit. The inclusion of Indian think tanks in the policy space is the significant gain of the past decade.

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Going forward, Indian think tanks will only be able to contribute to the imperative of helping India shape the rules of the road in the 21st century if they can transcend their original localities and successfully compete in the global marketplace of ideas.
A Strategic Approach to Impact

By Andrew Selee
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India is a country of ideas. There is no shortage of intellectual debate, historical studies, or political and philosophical exchange across the subcontinent. Perhaps it is the country's newness as a nation state that encourages this, but I suspect that the depth and breadth of Indian intellectual thought is anchored in the country's history, a way of maintaining a degree of conceptual unity amid diversity and sewing threads of common conversation in a large and plural society. It is something that many of us from outside India admire and envy, though I doubt it could be replicated elsewhere.

Think tanks play a specific and useful role amid the larger field of Indian intellectual life. They are specifically created to foment conversations that link research, ideas, and dialogue to practical policy issues in a systematic way. They are conduits for thought that can help find the solution to practical problems or frame pressing policy issues in new ways. As a result, they have a pragmatic purpose within the larger current of public debate that takes place around the country.

In India, as in many countries, think tanks come in a variety of different shapes and sizes, with differing origins and purposes. We can separate out at least four strands that seem to be dominant. The first are the research centers created by governments (often ministries of the national government but also provincial governments) to advise around specific issues. A second set of think tanks are policy centers that have sprung from universities seeking to provide practical research amid their colleagues more academic pursuits. Most, though not all, of the older think tanks seem to fall into these two categories.

However, there are at least two newer categories of think tanks as well. One is composed of think tanks created or supported by the efforts of the business community. In some cases these

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are the creation of a single entrepreneur or business group, but in other cases they are created by thought leaders who then seek out the support of the business community. Finally, there are a number of think tanks that have emerged from activist non-governmental organizations and remain closely aligned with other activist organizations in their field.

Of course, there are many hybrids and exceptions among these four different models of think tanks, but the categories help understand the different origins and approaches of a very diverse set of organizations in India that today can be called think tanks. It is worth noting that many organizations in the country that could be considered think tanks do not necessarily call themselves that. They identify as research centers or as NGOs. But any organization whose primary goal is to influence policy thinking through research and dialogue — essentially any organization dedicated to the premise that it is worth investing in ideas to shape policy — can be said to belong to the category of think tanks.

All think tanks, regardless of origin or purpose, seek to have an impact in the world of policy ideas, but each one defines impact a little differently according to its mission. Some think tanks want to influence specific kinds of policies, some prefer to change the terms of public debate, and others monitor and assess the implications of policies. Each think tank has different strengths which influence what it chooses to do and needs a different configuration of resources — both human and financial — to carry out its work. Finally, each think tank has different primary and secondary audiences. Some are focused mainly on policymakers, often in specific ministries or sectors, while others seek to influence opinion leaders or the general public rather than policymakers directly.

A strategic approach requires parsing out these different choices that think tanks make in implementing their vision so as to maximize their impact in their particular field with their intended audiences. All think tanks, in one way or another, have to ask a series of similar questions:

(1) What is the purpose of the think tank and what does it want to achieve?
(2) What does the organization do best?
(3) Who are the key audiences and how can they best be reached?
(4) What financial and human resources are needed to carry out the mission? and
(5) How does the think tank evaluate impact?51

In the rest of this chapter, we explore these five interrelated questions as they relate to think tanks in India. Each organization will find quite different answers to these questions, so the goal of the discussion that follows is to lay down a few thoughts about how these questions might be explored and possible answers that show the variety of different possibilities among organizations that can be called think tanks.

**Mission and Goals**

The starting point for any discussion on impact is the organization's mission and goals, and this discussion should usually have three levels. The first is the most basic: what is the organization's fundamental purpose, its mission, which is its aspirational goal. The mission can usually never be fully realized, but it serves as a beacon which drives action towards a particular purpose and gives coherence to all of the organization's work. Mission statements change only rarely, but reviewing the mission is usually a useful place to start a strategic conversation.

Next come the goals, the specific things that the think tank wants to achieve, but it's often useful to divide this exercise into two parts. Often organizations go straight from broad discussions of mission to specific goals for deliverables. But first it is worth looking at overall goals for the organization. In the case of think tanks, this means looking at what specific issues the think tank can make a difference on. Out of an infinite universe of possibilities, what are the issues that the organization will play a role in shaping thinking (and possibly decisions) around?

So the second level of analysis is around broad goals — what specific issues does the think tank want to influence. Here a degree of specificity is helpful. It is too broad to shape thinking around "the environment," "public security," or "foreign affairs," but it may be possible to shape thinking (and action) around specific debates within each of these fields, such as water-energy tradeoffs in Kerala, or improved policing in Mumbai, or India's strategic position in Asia.

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Then the table is set for the third level of discussion on specific goals, the actual deliverables that will help shape thinking in the areas chosen and deliver on the aspirational mission. What exactly will the organization produce over the next year or few years that will drive the agenda forward.

In think tanks, we are usually so busy with pressing matters that we often skip over the steps of reviewing our mission and examining our goals — or we only do this in the context of specific initiatives which we are seeking funding for, and we go straight to the specific deliverables for the project itself. But it is almost impossible to set a strategic direction for the work of an organization without knowing what it is we want to achieve up front, and it becomes quite impossible to evaluate impact afterwards if we don't do this.

**Comparative Advantages**

The second set of questions for every think tank comes around its comparative advantages vis-a-vis others. In short, what does it do best? Think tanks have different strengths depending on their origins, purpose, location, funding, and size. Nowhere is this more true than in India, where policymaking is complex and fragmented with multiple loci of power and influence. It is impossible just to influence policy ideas in general. Think tanks have to choose what they can do best within a very complex universe of options.

Let us start with geography. Think tanks based in Delhi often have comparative advantages in reaching cabinet ministries and the Lok Sabha, but less flexibility in reaching provincial governments or thinking outside the box of current policy options (much like think tanks in capital cities everywhere around the world). In contrast, think tanks located outside Delhi often have comparative advantages in reaching provincial governments and addressing regional issues, and at times they may be better suited for creative thinking outside of the usual parameters of policy debates.

But since India is a country where power is diffuse and fragmented — both by levels of government but also by a historic distribution of power among different cities and regions — any location can present a different kind of comparative advantage for influencing thinking on key policy debates. The question is not that one is better than others, but that it is a factor worth considering in strategic positioning.
The think tank's internal makeup is also important. Is the organization primarily technical in nature, able to carry out rigorous modeling and analysis, or is it primarily conceptual, able to influence frameworks for understanding policy issues? Some think tanks gain credibility through their meticulous research, while others champion new frameworks for approaching issues. Knowing the organization's strengths is critical. Does it do better at original research, opinion pieces, or convening dialogue? Does it rely on internal research staff or on non-resident fellows to produce its outputs. Understanding the institutional culture and strengths can help position the organization for success in a crowded field.

Another set of questions has to do with the ideological culture of the organization and its relationship to key outside constituencies. Does the organization have natural constituencies in business, government, or civil society groups? Is it tied historically to a particular ideology or political party? Some organizations do well in positioning themselves as leading proponents of a particular outlook on issues or as the key reference point for specific constituencies separate from others in the field.

Taking a hard and realistic look at all of these factors helps understand the organization's strategic position from which it can build on its strengths and, in some cases, address its weaknesses. In most cases, think tanks do well by playing to their inherent comparative advantages rather trying to be everything to everyone, although there are times when strategic thinking can lead to a conscious decision to invest in new institutional capacities that were not there before. Comparative advantages can become unique launch pads to distinguish the organization from others and occupy space in the intellectual and policy world that no one else can quite occupy equally well.

**Audiences and Outreach**

Think tanks also have different intended audiences, and identifying and prioritizing these up front helps position the organization for the greatest success. In an ideal world, a think tank could pick up a big idea that could shape policy and make sure it reached everyone equally who needs to be part of the discussion. In reality, we all make choices about which sets of audiences we start with and that implies a set of choices about output and outreach — how we communicate what we want to get out to the right audiences in the ways that they can use it best.
Identifying key audiences has at least two components. The first is defining who do we need to influence to be effective on a particular issue, with some notional idea of priorities among them. The second is looking at who we are best positioned to reach out of these preferred targets. Deciding on intended audiences is a mixture of the aspirational and the realistic; everyone we wish we could get to and those we think are most likely to be open to our ideas. In the language of marketing, this is often called "market segmentation," a systematic look at target audiences in order of priority and likelihood of impact.

Some think tanks focus almost exclusively on policymakers themselves. In India, think tanks set up by government ministries or autonomous agencies often have these as their primary target audiences. Still others, however, look at influencing public opinion — and, therefore, the press and key opinion leaders — as their priority. However, between these two extremes there are often a variety of options and choices.

And a single think tank may choose different target audiences on different issues. Some efforts may lend themselves more to a targeted set of stakeholders who care about a particular issue or are in a position to make a decision about it, while others may lend themselves more to shaping the overall framework of discussion by targeting a more diffuse set of public and private audiences. A targeted campaign around a specific policy proposal will require a more targeted set of audiences than a general policy idea that is meant to shape public debate for the future.

The choice of audiences, of course, shapes the strategy for outreach. Books and long reports are read by specialists and often help generate the ideas and gravitas that establish credibility, but they are unlikely to reach most other audiences. High-level policymakers in both the executive and legislative branches (whether national, provincial, or local) require in-person briefings and short summary documents. Opinion articles, news stories, and social media work best for the general public, with significant variations depending on who you want to reach in the general public.

Often a single major piece of research can be "sliced and diced" in order to reach multiple audiences in different ways, so that a report is translated into two-page memos and briefing documents for policymakers; opinion articles for the general public; tweets, interactive web tools, and social media outreach to drive people to the original ideas; and a series of meetings
with key stakeholders set up around the ideas. Rather than just throwing a report into the ether and hoping that people read it, it is helpful to find the ways that it can be made accessible to the right people in the right formats that they can use.

Obviously large think tanks with budgets for outreach and communication platforms are ideally placed to do this kind of segmented outreach, but even small think tanks can be nimble and creative in how they reach different constituencies effectively, especially if they make decisions up front on who they most want to reach and how best they can reach them.

**Human, Financial, and Other Resources**

Probably no area preoccupies think tank leaders more than the search for the right resources, both human and — for those organizations that don't have set funding streams — financial. The quality and extent of these resources determines, to a large degree, what a think tank can do, although there are also other equally important resources that are worth mentioning. Let's start with financial resources and then move to the even more important question of human resources and finally to a discussion of some of the intangible resources that help think tanks position themselves.

Think tanks in India have a mixture of funding models. Government-created think tanks often have a secure income stream from their sponsoring agency, while university-based think tanks may sometimes depend on a combination of university resources and competitive government grants. A handful of non-governmental and non-university-based think tanks have major single corporate sponsors, but most have to seek out funding from a variety of sources, which often include private donors, corporations, foundations, and government support. In recent years, it has become noticeably harder to get international funding for think tanks (and other organizations) in India, given increased scrutiny and control over donations from foreign foundations and governments, while the proportion of individual and private sector support appears to have increased dramatically.

Fundraising in its most basic sense is about finding people who share your mission and are excited by your goals and can support them through financial means. For think tanks that pride
themselves on independence, establishing a diverse funding stream, where no single donor or even set of donors dominates the organization's bottom line, is often a good idea, but there are reputable think tanks that depend primarily on a single source of funding or a handful of donors.

Unique purposes often drive funding decisions. A free market think tank is more likely to get corporate donors than a transparency and accountability-focused think tank, which is likely to get foundation funding, though there are notable exceptions in India in both of these cases. Some think tanks refuse to accept government funding or corporate funding on principle, while others find these streams helpful to guarantee independence and stability. These choices are embedded in the mission and belief system of the think tank and its leadership.

Convincing donors to support not just specific projects but the overall infrastructure of the think tank — solid administrative and financial management, cutting-edge communications platforms, and other needed areas — is another challenge faced by many organizations. Often donors prefer project-by-project funding and expect the organization to have installed capacity for managing its resources and conducting its outreach. However, convincing donors that these other functions are an essential part of a successful project is immensely helpful to ensuring impact over the long-term, as we will see below.

There are no single answers to the dilemma of seeking financial resources to support a think tank's work. There is, however, a basic truth to the notion that organizations which have clear mission and goals, a strategic approach to how they carry out their work, and an ability to articulate their impact tend to win over the hearts and minds of potential funders far better than those that don't or can only talk about a specific project.

In terms of human resources, the intellectual capital of a think tank and its internal management capacities help determine its ambition and its impact. The intellectual capital — the leadership and support team that sets the agenda, conceptualizes the initiatives, conducts research, convenes others, provides expert commentary, and uses their network to conduct outreach — is central to producing original content that has an impact on ideas with the intended audiences.

Most think tanks depend, at least in part, on some in-house talent to produce ideas. At a minimum, it has to include some in-house leadership that sets strategic directions, but it usually includes a base of researchers and experts. However, increasingly think tanks also extend their
reach beyond their installed capacity by having affiliated fellows or researchers, often academics, journalists, entrepreneurs, or former policymakers who can contribute to specific projects and provide expert commentary and analysis. Often a think tank affiliation allows people with research skills and expertise an opportunity to be part of the policy debate, and it gives the think tank a way of expanding its capacity without having to hire additional staff. In some cases, affiliated fellows and experts are paid as consultants, and in other cases these are honorary appointments.

The impact of a think tank around a specific issue often depends not only on the new ideas it can bring to the fore, but also the perception among policymakers and opinion leaders that the organization is the "go-to" place on this specific issue. Therefore, it becomes critical to have staff or affiliated experts who are seen as central thinkers in the field, those who bring credibility, original thinking, and networks of contacts to the issues that the think tank works on. The quality of the intellectual capital in a think tank almost always determines its presence and, therefore, its impact on specific issues.

This does not mean that the staff or affiliated experts have to be famous or the most important names in the field. People often build reputations at think tanks through original research and insightful commentary regardless of whether they were a recognized name to start out with. And, conversely, recognized names in the field that produce little output will not maintain their reputation over time, though they may still have a useful network of contacts. Indeed, think tanks are an ideal place for intellectual entrepreneurs to build a reputation over time.

It is worth noting that finding the right intellectual capital in think tanks is often difficult. In looking for a person to lead an organization or an initiative, the think tank often has to find someone with an unusual collection of skills, both an institution-builder, who understands strategy, fundraising, outreach, and management, and an expert, who has intellectual heft, policy savvy, and the ability to communicate effectively. Rarely do single individuals have all of these talents in equal measure, but the hope is that the organization over time is able to have as many of these skills in as many people as possible, whether resident or non-resident experts.

In the end, think tanks require more than intellectual brilliance and policy savvy. It is almost equally important to have the right back-office structures in place to manage finances, ensure
good administrative functioning, have clear human resources and financial procedures, and create the right outreach platforms. Investing in in-house talent to manage these functions can often help shape the character and capacity of a think tank to achieve its intended purpose, and weaknesses in these areas can hold back its progress. While the intellectual capital is crucial, all forms of human capital within an organization are critical.

There are other resources that help think tanks achieve their objectives and generate impact and often, that help them seem larger and more powerful than they really are. The first of these is reputation. Even a small think tank that establishes a reputation for credibility in the field can play an outsized role as a reference point and idea-generator on key issues. James McGann has noted that the character and reputation of a think tank may be as important as the specific expertise it contains. In many ways, organizations that establish a reputation for credibility, originality, and thoughtfulness in their field can often position themselves as a constant reference point and ensure that their researchers and experts get a hearing on whatever issue they choose to address.

Investing in reputation is, in part, a question of brand management and getting the organization's name out to the right audiences, but it is also a question of substance and trustworthiness, intangibles that can only be built in practice over time. There are no shortcuts for doing this, but establishing a solid reputation organizationally can be a key effect multiplier that positions the think tank for impact.

Another resource that is sometimes overlooked is derived from the multiplier effects of partnerships with other organizations. Frequently think tanks can position themselves in new spaces — or enhance their impact in existing spaces — by partnership with organizations that have slightly different strengths and constituencies. Sometimes these involve crossing geographical, ideological, or substantive boundaries, partnering with organizations that are quite different but give you a new reach into different groups that might not otherwise see or use your research and ideas.

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52 Comments by James McGann in a recent gathering of North American Think Tanks, July 21, 2015, used by permission.
There is always a danger in partnerships that they will dilute either the freedom of your ideas or your brand, and partnerships are often complicated to fund and to manage, but frequently the benefits far outweigh the costs and the challenges in terms of getting good ideas in the hands of new audiences.

**Measuring Impact**

In the world of think tanks and policy research generally, measuring impact is not easy. Almost any idea that is adopted into policy has multiple impulses. In rare cases, policy ideas from a specific think tank may find their way into legislation, but more often than not there are several permutations along the way that reflect the influence of other actors in the process. In other cases, think tank efforts may spur public conversations or reactions from policymakers, but it is hard to measure what influence this ultimately has on policy decisions going forward.

To understand impact, it is often useful to track three different measures: inputs, outputs, and outcomes. Inputs and outputs are the easiest because they are quantifiable, but they are also the least effective for understanding impact. Still, they help tell a story about how the organization is developing and what it is doing, so they are worth tracking systematically.

Inputs include things like total budget (or program budget), the number of staff, affiliated experts, and other inputs into the think tank's success that help tell a story over time about how the organization has developed. Outputs are basic data on what the think tank produces, including books, reports, articles, commentary in the news, briefings, meetings, conferences, twitter followers, and the like. In and of themselves, they say little about impact, but they provide a snapshot of how the organization is evolving, and together with qualitative measurements of outcomes, they may help paint a picture of the organization's overall impact.

Finally, outcomes are the actual results of what the think tank has produced on policy ideas. It is worth noting that the starting point for understanding outcomes (i.e. impact) is having clear goals in the first place. If the organization does not have clear goals, it's almost impossible to have a sense about whether it was successful at doing what it set out to do. With clear goals, however, it does become possible to see whether the think tank had any impact in the areas that it said it aspired to do so.
Jim Collins, the famed business author, has observed that measuring outcomes is a bit like building a legal case. "What matters is not finding the perfect indicator, Collins writes, "but settling upon a consistent and intelligent method of assessing your output results and then tracking your trajectory with rigor." He suggests thinking like a lawyer who has to present an airtight case to a judge or jury, and recommends that organizations find a regular way to present their impact to a specific group of trusted advisors, usually a board or advisory board. Even if this is hardly a failsafe way of evaluating impact, it develops a consistent habit of thinking in terms of impact and having to make the case to others who can question our assumptions.

Ultimately, there is no hard and fast way of measuring impact in the terrain of policy ideas. Think tanks, by their very nature, address issues in which ultimate success can never be traced to a single organization. And most of the time we pursue more modest goals anyway — not necessarily to upend existing policy decisions but to nuance the debate and introduce a new way of looking at issues. However, the exercise of collecting inputs and outputs systematically and regularly presenting outcomes to a third party helps sharpen our skills and the probabilities of success.

Thinking in the language of impact — what we've actually achieved, whether partially or fully — also helps make a compelling case for the think tank to outside constituents, including policymakers and donors. Great leaders inspire not by talking about outputs but by talking about impacts — both the strategy to create impact and the actual successes that can be traced back to the organization. While there may not be a failsafe methodology for measuring impact in the terrain of policy ideas, the systematic exercise of setting clear goals and then evaluating outcomes against these helps develop a language of impact that sharpens our focus and inspires others to believe and invest in our work.

**Final Thoughts**

India is living through a time of intense change. It is on the verge of becoming the largest country in the world by population, and its economy is growing at a pace that few other countries in the world can match. It has developed highly productive sectors that range from traditional manufacturing to cutting-edge information technology, and geopolitically is positioning itself as

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a major global power. At the same time, many of the most basic problems of class and caste, poverty and exclusion, remain at the heart of India's development agenda, challenging policymakers to think creatively about the country's future.\(^5\)

Think tanks can play a critical role in positioning India for success and helping policymakers, civil society organizations, the business community, and the general public think through the practical options for the future. There is perhaps no society that has a greater need of creative ideas — and perhaps also no society with a greater capacity to do so — than India. Think tanks are one of the critical bridges between these ideas and the practical policy decisions that have to be made.

The think tanks that will be most successful as proponents and conduits for original policy ideas are those that can position themselves strategically, addressing the range of organizational challenges that think tanks around the world need to face to be successful. While a strategic approach hardly guarantees success, it certainly increases the chances that a think tank will have the impact it wants on the issues its leadership cares most about.

Strategic Communication and Human Resource Development For Indian Think Tanks

By Tobby Simon
Synergy Foundation

Plato, the renowned philosopher, in 400 B.C started an academy that attempted to translate theoretical ideas about governance into practice. The academy consisted of a group of thinkers who wanted to alter the way states were governed. This academy is considered to be one of the first think tanks of the world. Around 300 B.C, another remarkable institution came into being, a great library and museum at Alexandria. It became the hub for scholars from all over the world to continue their intellectual pursuits. The members consisted of noted writers, poets, scholars and scientists. Alexandria, a new city then, needed intellectual institutions to drive its growth and eventually became an important centre of the Hellenistic civilization.

Despite several other factors that can guarantee success, it is only intellectual pursuits that drive innovation and growth as seen in the ancient Hellenistic world.

Modern think tanks began playing a pivotal role after the Second World War. They were regarded as non-partisan organisations that took a scholarly approach to public policy issues. Think tanks were instrumental in rebuilding war-ravaged Europe by helping to design the Marshall Plan.

More recently, the co-authorship of the 9/11 Commission Report by independent think-tanks in the U.S demonstrated how policy-makers rely on bipartisan research.

Think-tanks are crucial in a democracy, where government policies reflect the will of the people. Think tanks provide people with analysis and constructive critique of government policies in a non-technical and timely manner. They facilitate interaction among researchers, scientists, economists, academicians and media to impact society.

Ancient India is replete with treatise on governance, philosophy, science, and politics. Works of literature like Arthashastra by Kautilya, the Bhagavad Gita, and Thiruvalluvar's Kural among many others dealt with philosophy and governance. Ancient India's think tanks were
the monasteries and gatherings that allowed such discourse among its scholars.

The first modern Indian think tank started in the pre-independence era, the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI), a prominent think tank, was established in 1930. The founder of ISI, Prof. P.C. Mahalanobis, was instrumental in making the blueprint for India's Second Five-year Plan.

The 1970's and 1980's saw the birth of think tanks working on environment and sustainable development. A generation of grass roots level, action based think tanks emerged, perhaps because international funding agencies believed that policy goals would be better delivered through the involvement of civil society and gave increasing importance to considering local realities.

Economic reforms in India, starting in 1991, saw the birth of action based think tanks that supported social movements against globalization and its symbols, i.e. large dams, multinational corporations, special economic zones, and land acquisitions. Other think tanks were set up to counter their actions and promote research that supported the government's policies.

**Why are think tanks important in India?**

> The legitimacy of think tanks lies in the power of their ideas – Mr. Tobby Simon, President, Synergia Foundation

India faces a host of critical challenges like endemic poverty, poor infrastructure, shortage of critical human capital, lack of affordable healthcare, poor sanitation, gender inequality, terrorism, proxy wars, internal strife, and the threat of conventional war in the shadow of nuclear weapons.

Think tanks hold enormous potential for participating in affecting change in public policy and assisting in the creation of policies where there may be lacunae. They can achieve this by garnering the attention of the public or the government and drawing it to neglected issues. Think tanks play a vital role as informants on policy issues. They play a role in evaluating the effectiveness and functionality of an existing policy, which might result in a change to the ongoing policy. Finally, think tanks may also develop policy ideas and recommendations based on the social milieu of the country. This is critical in future policy-making. Ultimately, think
tanks play the role of facilitators of public discussion, impartial voices that provide independent judgments and highlight neglected issues. Think tanks have been described as “one of the main policy actors in democratic societies.” (McGann 2006). They are regarded as the intellectual and knowledge-based “soft infrastructure” of the policy community, assuring a pluralistic, open and accountable process of policy analysis, research, decision-making and evaluation.\(^5\)

There is a growing expectation that India will play an important role, in the emerging world as it is a major economy in Asia. However, in India, the role of think tank continues to be unrealized. In order to be a leader in the emerging world, it is important that India has adequate intellectual tools to meet challenges. The country can justifiably claim that it has some institutions of higher education which can compete with their peers on a global basis. However universities instruct and conduct research in a manner which is not effectively transformed into action. Think tanks play a crucial role here as they provide independent analysis, critical assessments, new perspectives, insights and innovative ideas. They act as a bridge between ideas and action, by creating better networks between university lead research and industry needs, thereby allowing policy makers, media and citizens to make informed decisions.

**Indian Think-Tanks Face Many Challenges:**

- While the country has many centres of excellence, these institutions mainly focus on science, engineering and management. With the exception of economics, there are a dearth of talented researchers in sociology, anthropology, political science and international studies. Few, if any, significant contributions to these fields of intellectual endeavor have emerged from India in recent decades. This has lead to an increasing reliance on international publications for localised issues.

- Insufficient funding also limits the growth and development of Indian think tanks. Many think tanks in India are primarily supported and funded by the government. The close relationship between the polity and think tanks may sometimes deprive think tanks

from pursuing independent research and publications. Think tanks are sometimes perceived as NGOs, this might act as a deterrent for collaboration between thought leaders from industry and government.

• The inability of think tanks to effectively communicate its raison d'être and the value it can bring to potential donors, policy makers and civil society is a major challenge. The reality is that today people get their information from the internet requires organizations to reexamine how they disseminate and discuss policy issues. These dramatic changes have transformed how policies are analysed, debated, and made. Think tanks need to keep pace with these changes in order to reach more people. With ineffective marketing and communication strategies, some of the best research goes unrecognized, which in turn demotivates good research talents.

• Access to data is another challenge that hampers quality research. Government departments are often reluctant to share data they collect. Though the Right to Information Act addresses this lack of access to some extent, it is still a reactive and time-consuming mechanism for obtaining data. With the absence of data, it is difficult to publish quality research articles.

• For a think tank to thrive, it is important to attract, develop and retain top research talents. The current academic environment in India, however, is not conducive for the development of interdisciplinary skills which in turn hampers good research publications. Prospective candidates are also not aware of potential career growth in a think-tank and therefore are reluctant to work in such organizations.

**Human Resource: Problem and Strategies:**
The success of any think tank depends on the quality of its human resources. Think tanks require top intellectual talent, and talent is their only real asset. They are handicapped by the lack of talented young researches equipped with the necessary skill sets. India has many renowned educational institutions, however the academic environment is not conducive to promote interdisciplinary learning leading to the scarcity of the much needed skill sets. This is reflected in the fact that articles from India rarely find a place in a top international journal.
Established careers like engineering, medicine, and civil services are the most sought after by the country’s young graduates. The decreased popularity of the humanities and social sciences takes a toll on all reflective institutions. This lack of popularity is attributed to the scarcity of well-paid job and the nature of the work associated with humanities degrees. Humanities subjects have always been a prevalent choice for students in other countries. However in India, it has been viewed as an option suitable only for the less intelligent.

The lateral entry mode into government service through research has not been explored widely in the country; though there are eminent personalities who have taken advantage of this course and made an impact. For instance, Dr. Montek Singh Ahluwala, who shepherded the economic reforms in 1991, became the finance secretary and later vice-chairman of the Planning Commission, despite not having the requisite IAS qualifications.

Prospective candidates are not completely aware of the work done by a think-tank. Unclear job descriptions are one of the prime recruitment challenges in a think tank. Job descriptions are important not only in hiring new staff but also in managing existing staff. Detailed description of roles and responsibilities, values, and competencies expected from employees will help candidate make better decisions. Working in think tanks involves intense research, which candidates are not necessarily aware of. This can lead to dissatisfaction and employee demotivation.

The ability to attract, develop, motivate and retain talent is critical for think tank effectiveness. Such talent, according to the head of a research institution in India, operates in a global market, making it difficult for Indian think tanks with funding constraints and possible anchoring to “University Grants Commission pay scales” to attract and retain the kind of talent they require. Instead think tanks are forced to settle for what talent is available.

Retaining and recruiting the best talent alone is not enough. While researchers are important for a think tank, it is also equally essential that the organization has the right mix of skills and disciplines. A team of an economist, a political scientist, an engineer, a designer and an anthropologist will allow the organization to work across sectors and contexts. Their capacity
to explain complex problems and find the most appropriate solutions would surely benefit from this combination of disciplines. A homogeneous staff will not help with innovation and originality.

Think tanks rely on external funding to meet their expenses hence providing competitive remunerations is often unsustainable. Think tanks should instead provide incentives, for example, coupling research work with other activities (teaching, consulting), flexibility in choosing research work and freedom in decision-making. A streamlined appraisal system goes a long way in retaining motivated staff. Regular feedback, appreciating great performances, support for presentation at various conferences, participation in different trainings, and mentoring can be instrumental in engaging employees.

**Strategies to Overcome the Challenges:**

- Providing adequate support in regard to skill development, research methodologies and a charted career growth motivates staff to continue their work. Having a team with the right mix of skills can be beneficial to an organization. The team should have: content knowledge, context knowledge, and expert knowledge on key issues like management, finance, accounting, fundraising, communications, human resources, and other relevant areas. Mentoring programs and individual development plans for each member of the team are additional incentives that can inspire employees to work better.
- Good performance appraisal systems, clear roles and career growth opportunities will give a sense of direction, which in turn encourages employees. Individual initiatives can give employees a sense of belonging in the organization.
- Organizations should also consider hiring internationally. Experienced researchers, strong communicators and experienced managers can work anywhere. If a think tank needs an economist and cannot find one locally, they should widen their search to other countries. There are many excellent economist, sociologists, public health experts, scientists, communicators, and managers very keen to work in developing countries for local (or only slightly higher) salaries.
- Pro-bono services can also bring high quality human resource support to
significantly impact the organization’s performance. Another strategy could be to recruit interns for a short period of time on an as needed basis. This will give the organization and personnel an impetus in their professional growth curve.

- A key criteria in ensuring lower attrition rates is to provide adequate work-life balance. While young researchers are used to working long hours, it is imperative to provide an environment where employees can adjust their hours to meet personal needs. This will create better performing think tanks in terms of initiatives and research output. Research capabilities and the ability to publish in recognized journals can only be strengthened with high-caliber researchers.

**How can the Government and Private Sector Help?**

- Government should encourage an academic environment that provides freedom to think, imagine, and question. Universities should motivate students to engage with their counterparts in different parts of the world to inculcate a scientific temper and passion to explore solutions to various problems faced by society.

- Access of data is an important area where government assistance can go a long way in influencing dissemination of information. The government recently announced the National Data Sharing and Accessibility Policy (NDSAP). It aims to provide a platform for proactive and open access to data generated by various Government of India entities. The objective of this policy is to facilitate access to Government of India owned data (along with its usage information) in machine readable form through a wide area network all over the country in a periodically updatable manner, thereby permitting a wide accessibility and usage by the public.

- The Indian government also launched the National Knowledge Network (NKN) in 2011 for data and resource sharing amongst education and research institutions. The NKN provides services such as collaborative research, grid computing, sharing of computing resources, and a virtual library. It has already connected 950 institution and 14,000 colleges covering agriculture, education, governance, healthcare, and science and technology research. Such domain knowledge and resources are high in demand within the think tank community.

- The Indian government has often been quite open to outside experts and advice,
especially in the field of economic policy. A stellar bunch of economists, KN Raj, Amarty Sen, Sukhamoy Chakravarty, and PC Mahalonobis, were all hugely influential in laying the economic groundwork for post-independence India. This should extend to other fields of public policy too. It will also be beneficial if young graduates are encouraged to join government service after completing a stipulated period of time with think-tanks.

- Private sector can assist think tanks by providing sufficient support in terms of funds and relying on think tank produced policy reports to make strategic decisions.
- Establishment of tertiary education schemes like the Young India Fellowship scheme of Ashoka University can help foster necessary interdisciplinary skills in young graduates.
Best Practices and Models for Indian Think Tanks

By Commodore R Seshadri Vasan IN (Retd)
Chennai Centre of China Studies

While conceptualizing the role of think tanks, the background paper provided by the Lauder Institute of the University of Pennsylvania has identified some very important issues. These include getting the right human resources, mobilizing funds, and using and optimizing the right communication channels. The challenge therefore is to provide meaningful, timely, and actionable recommendations to policy makers and other stake holders and remain relevant. From the examination of the present practices and ethos it appears that India has a long way to go before it can harness the potential of think tanks in a meaningful and productive manner. A concurrent observation that was widely debated after the publication by Rand in 1992 was whether India has a strategic culture. This stirred up a hornet’s nest as many was felt that India’s Kautilya, who predated Machiavelli by at least 1800 years, and who had already written the Arthashastra which provided the guidance to the Kings of those days on governance, administration and security. Many felt this proved the existence of a strategic culture.

Coming to the think tanks, the track record of think tanks both aided by the Government of India and those who are supported and financed by private houses is a mixed one. As per the report published in Times of India on the 18th January 2014, only five think tanks from India have made it to the top 150 in a survey. Centre for Civil Society (CCS) was ranked at 50, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) was at 102, The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) was at 107, Observer Research Foundation (ORF) at 114 and Development Alternatives (DA) at 140.

There is even a perception that the role of think tanks and their usefulness has thus far been limited as many recommendations have not been implemented. The system also lacks effective feedback to the think tanks in terms of action taken by the stakeholder on recommendations made by the think tank as a result of a serious study. So the fruits of labour are

56 George Tanham, RAND 1992, Indian Strategic Thought an Interpretive essay
57 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niccol%C3%B2_Machiavelli
58 http://www.britannica.com/biography/Kautiliya
not clearly visible. It is also maintained that little effort has been made to remain relevant in terms of being able to provide policy prescriptions, directions, alternatives, and workable solutions to various challenges faced in different sectors in the country.

This may not be entirely true as many of the classified projects are undertaken by the think tanks in consultation with the Governments and such work will not be publicized due to various reasons including national security clauses. Notwithstanding this observation, there are many issues that plague the functioning of the think tanks. This paper aims to address the challenges of creating a sustainable future for think tanks in India. Since the comprehensive background paper covers the ground realities and has brought out the issues succinctly, any repetition of the same would not be in order and thus is avoided. The attempt therefore will be to primarily address the challenges as identified in the paper and then offer tangible solutions for consideration. Only sample think tanks are taken up to support the author’s arguments.

**Catching the Bull by the Horn**

First it is important to note that the culture of respect and understanding of the value of think tanks, especially in regards to providing recommendations and recommendations on important issues is not prevalent in India. The exceptions, as mentioned earlier in terms of providing quality recommendations, are only when a think tank is specifically tasked for a project and the team has the ears of the policy makers (read those in corridors of power or those who are influential) listening to the recommendations of the team. This is entirely due to the structure of the Government that is very different from the practices in the private sector.

The Government of the day has its own priorities and structures and is not normally comfortable with changing any structure. It can be asserted that there is a great reluctance to look at the think tanks as providers of solutions.

The Indian Government resorts to its own practice of forming committees, boards and commissions to provide the requisite input. There are both advantages and disadvantages in this system. For example the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) is comprised of eminent persons from diverse backgrounds on its board and, as such, bring wonderful expertise to the table. However, despite the regular meetings and discussions, personal accounts of past members allude to lack of implementation even on very important issues. This indicates that the impact even of such formally constituted bodies on policy making is quite minimal. The most recent
example is of the Naresh Chandra Committee on Higher Defence Restructuring which has yet to see the light of the day though there were high expectations as reported by The Hindu. Some of the salients of the report are also available online at a site which covers issues for civil examinations. The recommendations made by the Naresh Chandra Committee are very relevant to the theme of this paper.

Some examples from the committee report and recommendations are discussed under the headings Advanced Projects Agency (APA), Bureau of politico-military affairs, Defense University and Think Tank are of great importance. The portions where there is scope for think tanks or constituted bodies to work in tandem are highlighted in bold letters. A sample detail of the recommendation that is in the public domain is given below:

**Advanced Projects Agency (APA)**

- To undertake high-risk futuristic military research.
- The head of APA will act as Scientific Advisor to Defense Minister. [Scientific advisor to the Raksha Mantri (SA to RM).]
- APA will be assisted by
  - UGC (University Grants Commission)
  - CSIR (Council of Scientific and Industrial Research)
  - BARC (Bhabha Atomic Research Centre)
  - TIFR (Tata Institute of Fundamental Research)
  - Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore.
- APA would fund research in institutions like IITs, universities and private laboratories.
- APA will not be involved with DRDO
- DRDO must assume responsibility for managing the DRDO’s laboratories and research centres and ensuring the on-time delivery of projects undertaken there.

**Bureau of politico-military affairs**

- Defence ministry should set up a bureau of politico-military affairs
- This Bureau would be liaison with the ministry of external affairs (MEA) on issues and actions having foreign policy applications

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60 http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/marching-forward-on-reform/article3646651.ece
61 http://mrunal.org/2012/09/diplomacy-naresh.html#13
• Ministry of external affairs (MEA) should not work in isolation from other ministries, particularly with respect to securing access to strategic materials, hydrocarbons etc.

**Establish Defense University and Think Tank**

• A National Defense University (NDU)

• Create a *separate think-tank on internal security*.

• A sub-group on defense technology, comprising representatives of DRDO, military, private sector, *academia*, military and other stakeholders.

Even a cursory analysis of the recommendations made as above by the concerned committee highlights the fact that there a much lower chance for a think tank to succeed where a government commission such as the NSAB, has not. The report in Indian Express which was released when the previous government was in power is indicative of the challenges in implementing the recommendations when multiple stake holders are involved. The archaic procedures and bureaucratic delays contribute to the delays as multiple agencies are required to examine the proposals and their intent before agreeing to a new proposal.\(^\text{62}\) It is pertinent to mention that the Naresh Chandra Committee was not the first nor will it be the last when it comes constituting a committee for examining better options to serve national interest in diverse spheres. Nor is this the first such report that was made on higher defence organization and restructuring. It has already been forgotten that the Arun Singh Committee released a similar report which again addressed issues of Higher Defence Management. This repetitiveness indicates the lack of attention to these recommendations and their futility.

The *Niti Ayog*\(^\text{63}\) was conceived as a Policy Think Tank of the Government of India. In terms of sustaining a future for think tanks in India, this suggests that the Government would like do a lot of thinking on its own without the aid of think tanks in the traditional manner as practiced in the west.

The Boards by and large are composed by using parliamentarians and at times retired judges and other former members of who have held influential positions. Think tanks have had limited role in formulating policies or providing policy options since constituted bodies such as commissions and boards take over the role of think tanks effectively. This is not to say that the


\(^{63}\) Details of the NITI aayog are available at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NITI_Aayog](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NITI_Aayog)
government never acknowledges think tanks. The Government will occasionally ask for a paper from a think tank to support a policy initiative, but this is not the norm. It is also a fact that some of the work that is assigned to think tanks also comes under the category of classified work and as such references to such work would not be in the public domain. Some of this kind of work has found its way to the decision makers who needed quality inputs by experts though not necessarily in the Government service. It again needs to be reiterated that action taken if any is not sent back necessarily as a feedback to the think tank that may have been tasked to work on a project. The only way to ascertain if some of the recommendations have found their way into the decision making process is by seeing the results in terms of policy formulations by the Government.

In June 2015, there was an indication by the Government of India that they are now inclined to enlist the support of academia to work with the Ministry of External Affairs as consultants. The intention is to actively engage academics in the discourse related to public policy and research related to bilateral and international relations. There are both views for and against the proposal as highlighted by the Times of India on 2 July 2015. The views for and against such an initiative, indicate that there are two schools of thought. However, even this proposal is in itself a clear indication that think tanks were not integrated until very recently in formulating of policies and directions in the Government.

Last but not the least, the Times of India Blog authored by Indrani Bagchi sums up the present day challenge as far as an institutional involvement of anyone other than the Indian Administrative Service officer being involved in the process. One can safely include the think tanks in this category from the experience of the past, which clearly illustrates that even Government sponsored boards and committees have not been able to change the system. The blog which was also published as a full-fledged article in the Times of India on 06 July 2015 convincingly put across the point that India has a long way before it can catch up with the practices of the West in terms of finding policy alternatives and options from someone other than from the Government.

China is actively promoting the concept of using the think tanks in an effective manner more so in the recent past. The example of the South Asia Think Tank Forum which was formally launched in 2013 is a clear example of how China wishes to engage with the think tanks of the South Asian community to promote and hard sell their concept. During such interactions, there is plenty of effort to try and seek some sort of endorsement for their projects. So the themes selected are the Maritime Silk Road, One Belt One Road etc., which are all the pet projects of the present leadership of China. So by floating ideas and getting other think tanks involved in the process of discussions, China has tried to enlist the support of academia to their projects by highlighting the advantages for the region as perceived by them. Initiatives with similar intent are few and far between as far as the Indian Government or the private think tanks are concerned. Even formal organizations such as the IORA or the IONS have not made much progress in demonstrating the results in a tangible manner.

**Human Resource Challenges**

When one looks at the current practices, by and large, the think tanks in India today will have a mix of some academics, retired bureaucrats, defence personnel and interns. Not all the think tanks are in a position to provide adequate pay and allowances coupled with a career progression assurance. The loose structure and the lack of incentive attracts only those who are either very passionate about what they want to contribute or the ones who are using this as a stepping stone before they can move on to greener pastures. It finally does boil down to the availability of funds which will be discussed while discussing funds.

**Recruitment Strategy.**

Majority of the aspirants of jobs in think tanks do have a good profile and many would like to contribute to the cause. However, unless there is a clear-cut career progression graph and satisfaction in the job content, it is unlikely that jobs in think tanks would attract the best talent. A cursory examination of the openings of some of the think tanks and the packages offered are illustrative of the importance being given to Researchers. For example, the Research Fellows in National Maritime Foundation with reasonable experience for whom there is a notification for Associate Fellow\(^6\) which carries an all-inclusive pay of Rs 27,000 (less than 500 USD) per

\(^6\) [http://www.maritimeindia.org/View%20Profile/635693968172558670.pdf](http://www.maritimeindia.org/View%20Profile/635693968172558670.pdf)
month. For the Research Associate for which post NMF has advertised\textsuperscript{67}, it is a mere Rs 18,000(about 300 USD). This package is hardly offers any incentive for a qualified candidate to apply for such a position. Likewise, the advertisement in the website of Centre for Air Power studies again has a pay band from 16,000 to 35,000 for different categories\textsuperscript{68} as advertised in their website.

The issue of the pay package is a major one as other sectors do pay a substantial sum for work in the think tanks. For those who are well established, it is not a difficult proposition to continue in think tanks for various reasons including job security, financial security, location etc., Most of the young scholars who join initially as interns have a different kind of challenge. Very few of them find paid jobs. From the point of view of the Intern, he or she is essentially adding to the CV. It is evident that a lot of importance is being given to internships as an attribute while hiring.

The Brookings blog which has the figures are self-revealing about the importance attached by prospective employers to this facet of having experience as an intern in varying institutions and environments. This aspect has been highlighted, though in an American context, but it can be safely said that the situation is no different in India where exposure as an intern in diverse environments is seen as an advantage from the perspective of a recruiter.

\textsuperscript{67} http://www.maritimeindia.org/View\%20Profile/635693968490057860.pdf
\textsuperscript{68} http://capsindia.org/vacancy
The descriptive graph\textsuperscript{69} clearly demonstrates that greater exposure as an intern in different institutions confers a distinct advantage. Since this is an important component for a job seeker in the creation of a CV, there would be no lack of interns. So the challenge is to see how think tanks can utilize the pool of expertise that is available. The advantages of an energetic young mind trying to prove his or her credentials and move forward are enormous. So a good career progression plan needs to be drawn up to incentivize the scheme of retention in the think tanks which will attract and retain the bright ones looking for a career in think tanks and want to grow.

\textbf{Study of Government Supported Think Tanks in India.}

A sample study would throw up some light on the way the think tanks function when supported by the government. By and large, while the financing is done by the government or a corpus, these institutions do start working on lines dictated by the Government or the concerned ministry. Also, the top posts have been invariably given to former IFS or IAS or Military (for NMF, CAPS and CLAWS) officers who have retired from service. Quite frankly, in many cases these posts have become parking slots or at times given to someone well known to the ministry.

\textsuperscript{69} The descriptive graph was brought out by a study on Chronicles of Higher Education undertaken in 2012 and used in the blog of Brookings in July 2015.
not necessarily as an academician but as an able administrator. This really does not serve the purpose of the think tank where it is not the skills of administration that is required but also acumen to understand the nuances of working in a think tank that has to deliver in terms of policy formulations and being able to provide policy alternatives by critical analysis.

**Private Think Tanks.**

The private think tanks are few and far between and in most cases do serve the agenda of the top brass. The best example is of Observer Research Foundation which was established in the 90s, thanks to the visionary zeal of late RK Mishra who was very close to Late Dhirubai Ambani who brought about many dynamic changes as a successful industrialist. The ORF was given a corpus fund and was given a fair degree of freedom to interact with the think tanks of the world and provide quality deliverables in terms of publications, conferences, and seminars. The close proximity of some of the members of the think tank to those in the corridors of power also ensured that there was substantial coordination in some of the works undertaken. The ORF also was utilized by the Government of India to provide quality inputs and generate white papers that would aid in policy making. It must again be reiterated that some of the work was again classified and not found on the website of the ORF. In the form of acquiring human resources, it also had formalized the induction of serving Government officials who wanted to add to their academic qualification while on study leave for working with ORF. It was also seen as an effort by ORF to work closely with important officials who would be in the decision making process of the Government of India. It did not hesitate as a matter of policy to employ former Ambassadors, Service personnel, Bureaucrats and academia to ensure that the work done by it was supervised by eminent persons.

The kind of initiatives taken to educate the researchers during attachment to Delhi office of ORF and also during retreats which provided the forum for both the young and the senior researchers to rub shoulders. The essential difference between policy research and academic research is brought out in the initial stages itself so that the intern is clear about what targets are to be achieved with in the time allotted depending on the importance of the project.

**Center for Security Analysis (CSA)**

CSA is another think tank based in the south that rendered yeoman service while it was functioning. However, due to constraints of funds, it closed down. General Raghavan was

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engaged in some outstanding work that examined various issues related to security, social issues, and other similar issues. CSA also ensured that the high quality publications were brought out in time. The success of CSA is both due to the leadership of General Raghavan and also the availability of funds from foreign sources. CSA is also a clear example of how availability of funds along with dynamic leadership would ensure that quality of work undertaken is of top order.

Center for Asia Studies (CAS)

Another think tank based in Chennai came in to being in 2008 and was the brain child of Dr. S Narayan. This was funded by a private charitable trust and again was in the forefront of activities till funds began to run out a few years ago. While the think tank is still functioning, it is largely by collaborative efforts with other likeminded organisations and universities. In addition to bringing out many publications, CAS also engaged in topical discussions by working with the Universities in South India. CAS has also routinely joined hands with the US Consul General in South India and other educational institutions to conduct major conferences and events. The most recent such activity was a major seminar on “Developments in Middle East and Impact on Regional Stability” conducted in September 2014. The edited volume was brought out within three months thus preventing any lag in reaching out to the audience.

Chennai Centre for China Studies

The Chennai Centre for China Studies was founded in 2008 by late B Raman an internationally acknowledged counter terrorism expert. He wanted a China focus in the studies and started this think tank with minimal support from the government. Today, the think tank has more than a dozen members from diverse back grounds and is actively engaged in the study of China related issues. Again, the funding has been a constraint and the members have been voluntarily supporting the activities of the centre by generous personal donations. This think tank has been providing support to interns from all over India whose research skills are honed under the supervision of the highly experienced members with diverse background.

Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF)

This Delhi-based think tank in its own words is “a New Delhi-based think tank set up with the collaborative efforts of India's leading security experts, diplomats, industrialists and

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71 Based on observations of the author, during his association with the ORF from June 2005 to August 2008 as Additional Director Projects and Development and Head Maritime Security Programme.
philanthropists under the aegis of the Vivekananda Kendra. The VIF’s objective is to become a centre of excellence to kick start innovative ideas and thoughts that can lead to a stronger, secure and prosperous India playing its destined role in global affairs.\(^73\) This think tank has many stalwarts from different strata of India’s strategic and thinking community and has become more relevant with the linkages with the BJP led Government. The present National Security Advisor Ajit Doval had a major role to play in shaping the activities of the VIF.

**Need for Restructuring**

A formalized structure supported by the Government would go a long way in helping think tanks and also the government and other stake holders who are looking for quality inputs. This is even more necessary as the governments are employing dedicated consultants for their work. The present pattern is that a post graduate with a degree in international relations looks for an employment in a think tank and invariably begins as a research intern and starts learning the ropes under the guidance of another experienced researcher. He could work on specific projects and invariably he or she is assessed for the competence and potential while doing internship. The intern would be engaged in data mining, writing of articles, and monographs, preparation and attendance of conferences and workshops. The interns are not paid much and in some cases not paid at all. The IDSA pays about Rs 10,000(160 USD) after two months for a total duration of six months of internship.\(^74\) It is again important that the process of grooming a researcher is given the necessary support. It can hardly be a motivation unless one is very serious about pursuing the carrier and building a base for better prospects.

The structure by and large is a loose one though most of the think tanks try to follow this structure to the best of their ability. Also, the output of the intern or the academic is entirely due to his or her own efforts and the interest taken by the guide to groom the researcher. Yes, the process does help to separate the grain from the chaff and over a period of years. The reputation of the researcher is built on his or her work and also the output which would be visible to the academic community. Since the new Government appears intent on using the rich talent in the country, it could perhaps also lay down guidelines for the career progression of a researcher who is trying to make a mark in the research field. Proper incentives by way of recognition of outstanding work by interns and researchers would help in drawing the talented scholars.

\(^72\) [http://www.c3sindia.org/aboutus](http://www.c3sindia.org/aboutus)
\(^73\) [http://www.vifindia.org/AboutUs1#sthash.HBx8uPe5.dpuf](http://www.vifindia.org/AboutUs1#sthash.HBx8uPe5.dpuf)
**Digital India and Communication**

Most think tanks are already quite active in using the advantages of the information age. They reach out and have active websites and also publishing current analysis to remain relevant. Blogs, discussions and forums have helped think tanks to remain relevant. The existing barrier between think tanks and the government would largely be reduced when the government goes fully digital in governance and administration and provides the linkages to enable interaction in real time. This is a great advantage in India which has taken to digital processes like fish take to water. The transformation in the social, economic, political, and cultural communication means has long term impact on the way a country of the size of India progresses.

**Recommendations**

While statistics demonstrate that there are a number of think tanks in India and in some cases do contribute to the larger good of the nation, they are not integrated in an institutional manner to be productive and contributing to the process of strategic thought process. Private think tanks do have their own agenda to promote their business interests and cannot be blamed for working with a plan for using the institutional resources for engaging in studies that would benefit them in the long run. Well, it cannot be held against them as these business houses are not there for charity but to obtain quality inputs that would also promote the business interests. This gives them the visibility that is required and increases the foot print of their association with such activity. Reliance Industries is a classic example of the association with Observer Research Foundation which has a good track record of engaging in policy studies.

As brought out earlier, there is a need to revamp the existing structure for utilization of the right talent in think tanks by greater involvement of the government and the private houses. The norms for taking up positions in think tanks should also be more stringent and not based on just administrative ability.

**Lateral Entry**

The recent initiative of Ministry of External Affairs Ministry to bring onboard accomplished academics and other subject experts is an idea worthy of implementation. What is being considered is at the level of the individual. This needs to be expanded include dedicated think tanks which could be tasked by the government for specific time bound policy research.

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74 http://www.idsa.in/InternshipProgramme.html
The identification of the think tanks with vertical specialization would immensely help the structure and formalize the process of integration of the think tank activity with nation building. In addition, it would be a good idea to have an association with the concerned ministry to ensure that the relation with the government agency is formalized. The fear that it may become a mouth piece of the government need to be allayed by ensuring that the rules of business are clearly enunciated which leaves no scope for any misinterpretation.

**Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)**

As per the existing norms, major houses are required to discharge their duties towards the society by engaging in the CSR program. Most of the big houses take this seriously and allocate substantial money towards programs that are aimed at improving the overall standards of living, education environment health etc. The use of think tanks when included as a CSR function, would make it easier for the business houses to invest in think tanks. Such interface could be monitored by a nodal agency in the government without the bureaucratic hurdles.

**Collaboration with Other Think Tanks Around the World.**

There are many likeminded think tanks which are engaged in similar kind of work in different parts of the world. It should be the endeavour to identify such think tanks for synergizing the efforts and minimizing the expenditure by working together on ideas, proposals and sharing of resources to make the world a better place.

**Remuneration for Researchers.**

There has to be some rationale for employing and compensating the efforts of the Researchers at different levels. It is hard cerebral task by any standards and requires stamina and a will to excel in the tasks assigned. Therefore there is an immediate need to ensure that these pay and perks are enhanced. If in India and in many other countries we can have minimum wages for the type of work, it may be necessary to apply these norms for the academic community which has a big role to play in the shaping of the policies for the country.

**Funding.**

This remains the most challenging part of any think tank’s existence. The example of the Center for Security Analysis quoted above clearly brings out the harsh truth that even those think tanks started with the best of intentions will fail if not supported financially. However, in a report

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filed in Economic Times on 08 April 2012, it has been shown that one a foreign think tank was able to raise 10 million USD in India and some of them were looking to establish think tank extensions in India. However, the Indian think tanks somehow have not been able to get the same kind of support from Indian donors. Unlike in the US where there many think tanks supported by private initiative this culture is yet to take roots in India. However, as stated in the recommendation above, if it can be included in the scheme of Corporate Social Responsibility with appropriate and attractive Tax Deduction clauses, it would serve as an incentive to the big houses to promote this concept of supporting think tanks perhaps patterned along the same lines as in Observer Research Foundation.

There is another related issue of funding of NGOs which has been a debated issue in the recent years. The NGOs have come under greater scrutiny due to some of the agencies misusing the funds and also for embarking in alleged anti-national activities. India needs to clearly lay down the guidelines for such agencies including think tanks which are funded by foreign agencies. Also, on the part of the NGOs and think tanks there should be total openness in terms of work undertaken and financial transactions. This would result in benefits on both sides.

The other option is to follow the model of China where nearly all the think tanks are supported by the government. This unfortunately is not the best option as each think tank supported by the government would find it hard to go against the thinking of the government that is already saddled with remaining in power in a democracy. So it could be a combination of the Chinese model and the American model when it comes to funding and utilizing the expertise of the think tanks.

**Association with the concerned ministry.**

It would be of great help if the think tanks with specific specialisation have a parent ministry with whom there is a direct contact and communication. However, such association at times would be viewed as something that would unduly favour a particular think tank. Checks and balances are needed to ensure that the chances of corrupt practices are eliminated by laying down the rules for such interaction. There may be a requirement for an oversight body which has to provide the right kind of guidelines to see that the lines drawn are not crossed.

**Bottom Line**

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From the discussions above, it is clear that India has a long way in utilizing the large pool of talent in a structured manner by addressing the issues highlighted above. The new Government has shown keen interest in changing the way India thinks and acts using the hidden potential of the think tanks for the larger good of the nation. However, it is highly unlikely that the results will be evident too soon. Some of the initiatives will take time and effort to make them work and the results will be visible only after some years. The culture of using think tanks as a strong pillar for decision-making has to take deep roots in the long-term interests of a nation.
Role of Think Tanks in Emerging India

By Sabika Zehra with Debalina Ghoshal, and Marcel Korff
Delhi Policy Group

Introduction

Think tanks have emerged around the world as an interface between the informed public and strategic decision-makers, acting as markers of critical policy debates and researchers of policy options for governments and international or multilateral organizations. To put it simply, a think tank is a forum where a group of individuals can conduct research on policy-relevant issues and bring out analyses and recommendations that add value to national or global decision-making processes.

Though the United States (U.S.) was the originator of a wide variety of think tanks, over the past two decades think tanks have proliferated across Asia. India features at the fifth place in the list of countries with the largest number of think tanks, compiled by 2014 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report that is published by the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program of the University of Pennsylvania. Some of these think tanks are government-funded and run, some are industry-run or supported and some are independent with a range of funding sources.

However, it should also be noted that the Think Tank Index has a very wide definition of what constitutes a think tank, advocacy, capacity-building and development organizations as well as policy-research organizations are all taken under its purview. For the purpose of this paper, we distinguish them from lobbying organizations, advocacy groups, capacity-building organizations and social activist groups. For example, a lobbying organization differs from a think tank in its mandate. A lobbying organization’s mandate requires it to “influence a policy outcome for a

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particular interest group” while the think tank’s mandate is “merely to create innovative policies and hope to influence the policy outcome.”

Think tanks can be involved in advocacy or activism; indeed, there is today a debate in India on whether political parties should set up their own think tanks, funded by the taxpayer. Accepting that partisan think tanks do exist, their primary focus needs to be on generating credible and high quality policy research, not political promotion. Nor is there any justification for the Indian taxpayer to fund political or partisan think tanks: the idea is drawn from the German model where political parties are not allowed to raise their own funding, unlike India, and it is highly unlikely that Indian political parties would be willing to give up fund-raising.

This paper aims to canvass feasible options for Indian think tanks to overcome the funding, human resource and communication challenges that they face in order to create a sustainable future for themselves. We distinguish think tanks based on different sources of funding, size and organizational structure. The recommendations put forward in this paper are from the perspective of a mid-size, independent and non-partisan think tank.

The first part of the paper will attempt to provide recommendations for think tanks to augment their value addition to the process of Indian policy formulation. In the second and third sections, continuing challenges related to funding and human resources will be tackled and ways of overcoming roadblocks associated with scarcity of funds and skilled researchers will be explored. Finally, the last section of the paper will deal with ways in which Indian think tanks can develop effective communication and marketing strategies to survive the competition in the Indian think tanks world.

**Role and Importance of Think Tanks in India**

Think tanks play an important role in collecting, synthesizing and analyzing information to contribute to the debate around policy formulation. They act as catalysts by producing and disseminating persuasive evidence-based research for policy reform and social action. Working outside the system of governance, think tanks have an ‘eagle’s eye’ perspective of the domestic and international issues faced by the country. Unlike government agencies, think tanks do not have to grapple with the mundane nitty-gritties of administration and have the opportunity to conduct long-term research projects for policy planning and impact assessment. If provided with appropriate resources, think tanks have the expertise to carry out extensive fieldwork for identifying, articulating and evaluating current policy issues, proposals and programs.79

Think tanks are continuously involved in the process of ‘knowledge generation’ and produce a variety of information products, which serve a range of purposes, such as:

1. Providing an informed and independent voice in policy debates;
2. Mediating between the government and public to help build trust;
3. Proposing optimal solutions to problems in policy issues;
4. Interpreting policies and issues to facilitate public understanding;
5. Offering a constructive forum for the exchange of ideas and information between key stakeholders and policy makers; and
6. Auditing the performance of bureaucrats and elected officials.

These information products and activities function to strike a balance between outreach, analysis and research. They can be broadly classified as targeting three distinct audiences:

1. The general public – activities such as book launches, conferences, lecture series, interviews and collaborations with media outlets are targeted at improving the layman understanding of policy-related issues. The Delhi Policy Group (DPG), for example, organizes events like the Neighborhood Lecture Series, in which it hosts expert lectures on issues of interest for educated but non-specialist audiences, in order to advance public

discussion of the prospects and problems in India’s relations with its neighbors. Other think tanks conduct similar events, often with a wider range. The Government of India (GOI) also uses think tanks for public lectures by visiting dignitaries: generally GOI approaches government-funded think tanks for such events, but occasionally will also use independent think tanks. Publications including books, policy briefs and issue briefs are also made available for public perusal on different portals.

2. **Communities of experts** – activities such as round table discussions, simulations or panel discussions are aimed at generating informed debate among experts involved in different stages of the policy formulation process. The invitations to these events are sent to a select number of people who are directly or indirectly involved in the policymaking process. All participants are given the opportunity to voice their analyses and/or opinions. These interactions also serve the purpose of networking and brainstorming prior to engaging in projects and studies on particular issues.

3. **Restricted or limited audiences** – Information products that fall under restricted categories include commissioned reports, memos and papers submitted to various ministries and other organizations. Track II, bilateral and trilateral dialogues are also closed-door events where the proceedings of the discussion are not shared publicly or in full.

It is important to note that the access of think tanks to policy formulation has been very limited in India. Though this trend has changed considerably since the late 1990s, the lack of receptiveness of policymakers continues to pose a challenge for Indian think tanks, and access is often determined by personal contacts rather than quality of research. This is an especial obstacle to work done in strategic and foreign policy studies. When it comes to domestic or social policy formulation in India, on the other hand, the primary influence on policy formulation comes from social movements instead of the corpus of research-based recommendations put forward by think tanks. This is not surprising. India has a vibrant history of social activism at all levels of its society. Therefore, public policy issues in India come predominantly under the purview of advocacy groups and non-governmental organizations. As a result, think tanks in India tend to focus on issues of national security, economic and external relations, since the debate around policies in these areas tends to occur in small circles. Think tanks’ participation in these debates
has led to the questioning of previously unquestioned, arbitrarily-held and formed beliefs, and ensures that no one small group of people is able to dominate the policy agenda.

The performance of any organization is evaluated based on the profits it generates. Think tanks, by their very definition, are non-profit organizations; hence it is very difficult to gauge their effectiveness. In fact, assessing the exact impact of think tanks on policy is virtually impossible as noted by the head of a Canadian think tank; at the same time, it is possible to infer the broad impact by comparing the published output of a think tank with the policies adopted by the GOI (bearing in mind that such an assessment would be uneven since many think tank inputs comprise confidential notes for government). Even though there is incoherence between policy inputs (publications and recommendations of think tanks) and the tangible policy outcomes (the decisions made by policy makers), the value additions made by think tanks to the policy formulation procedure cannot be entirely discounted. At the very least, they provide the policy makers with informed points of reference prior to the decision making process, increase the number of policy options and enhance the quality of the policy debate.

Despite the complexities involved in measuring the effectiveness of think tanks, a few researchers have tried to develop quantitative and qualitative tools to rank think tanks based on their impact and performance. One such example is that of the Global Go To Think Tank Index, which has attempted to assess think tanks around the world using criteria that takes into account their ability to obtain resources and funding, linkages with policy makers, reputation in the media, quality and relevance of the information products delivered, and explicit or implicit impact on policy. The Think Tank Initiative, a funding program set up by the Canadian International Development Research Centre, also conducts its own review of think tanks based


on their independence, transparency, and research in order to ascertain which organizations to fund. Though these rankings have their own limitations, think tanks can use the reports as constructive feedback. A closer look at the criteria can provide think tanks with ideas on how to improve their performance, enhance their impact on policy and garner support from domestic and international donors.

As India rises to a prominent position in the 21st century, also termed as the Asian Century, Indian think tanks need to evolve to meet the growing demand for security, foreign and social or public policy research. Despite their high numbers, only six Indian think tanks are listed in the “Top 150 Think Tanks of the World” published as a part of the 2014 Index. Notwithstanding the challenge of insufficient funding, Indian think tanks need to come up with innovative strategies to step up their game and ensure a sustainable future. Some ways in which they can enhance their impact that do not require influx of substantial funds are:

1. **Collaborating with the media** – Think tanks can substantially increase their outreach by closer association with media outlets. They can improve the quality of information broadcast around the country by progressively bringing informed research into the media. They can help filter out ideology and opinion and replace it with informed data-based analysis in the debate on policy. For instance, DPG collaborated with several media outlets during their conferences on Comparative Peace Processes by providing them with the list of panelists and facilitating interviews, thereby transmitting the dialogue to wider domestic and international audiences.

2. **Getting involved directly with the government at the planning stage** – Think tanks have the capacity to carry out in-depth research on the ground. Based on empirical research, they can not only provide a blue print of best practices to respond to key social and political issues but also deliver prognoses on the effectiveness of the policies being designed by the government. There are a number of government established and funded research organizations that carry out studies for the government; recently they have also started using data-based studies produced by independent think tanks. For example, both ICRIER and the Centre for Policy Research (CPR) are contributors into the government’s ‘Smart Cities’
initiative as well as the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan for a cleaner and more hygienic India. Similarly, DPG has been contacted by a number of state governments for inputs on gender.

3. **Building on relations with the private sector** – Think tanks need to better demonstrate their utility and develop synergies with the private sector. For instance, most industries have faced considerable challenges in setting up factories in conflict-ridden Northeastern and Maoist-dominated areas in India. They can utilize conflict resolution experts provided by the think tanks to help them negotiate with the local stakeholders. The private sector, in turn, can contribute to capacity building by providing technical, software and management trainings to young researchers and personnel working in think tanks.

4. **Working together with universities to produce skilled researchers and solve public policy problems** – There is a pressing need for universities and think tanks to engage in collaborative research. Academics need to be involved in policy prescriptions and think tanks need to provide incentives for their staff to contribute to academic publications. Universities should take advantage of the practical insights that think tanks can bring to their academic programs, especially in the social sciences. Cooperation between the two groups of institutions can be mutually beneficial, as it will add policy relevance to academic research and inject theoretical and methodological meticulousness in policy research. Furthermore, it will enhance their respective negotiation capacity and autonomy from research commissioners over research agendas.

5. **Merging, expanding and collaborating** – The large number of think tanks in Delhi can also be counterproductive due to a dearth of coordination and communication amongst them and the scarcity of funders. Many think tanks end up wasting resources by engaging in redundant reinvention of the wheel. Some of them are one-man led think tanks that often cannot sustain a change in leadership. Others of them have an extremely narrow area of

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specialization. Thematic think tanks tend to be short-lived as there is little scope to expand, evolve or transform. In order to avoid undue pressure on the limited funding pool, think tanks need to seriously consider collaborations and mergers wherever possible. Indian think tanks should also try to find avenues to collaborate with one another on mutual topics of interest and specializations. Authoring joint papers or undertaking joint projects would allow the researchers to draw from a larger pool of resources and expertise, therefore augmenting the value of the research produced. For instance, the DPG and the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) published a joint report on *West Asia in Transition.*

6. **Including state-specific issues in their purview** – The majority of think tanks in India are located in Delhi. Most of these organizations provide policy prescriptions to the central government. As state governments have diverse policies, some think tanks have started shifting their attention to state-level policy formulation. Lack of coordination and resources to set up offices in different parts of the country has slowed down the process. Think tanks need to find ways to collaborate with state governments and smaller organizations to form regional centers. The coordination problem can be resolved by prudent utilization of available free VoIP technologies such as Skype and Google Hangout.

## Funding Challenges

Funding remains the single most important restraint on think tanks in India. There has been a clear shift in funding patterns, owing to the economic downturn and austerity in South Asia as a whole. The Indian government has also clamped down on some organizations receiving foreign funds, and has generally tightened the rules governing foreign funding. Without sufficient funding, think tanks cannot provide adequate remuneration to attract good researchers and scholars, which in turn affects the quality of the research being produced. Furthermore, even if a think tank is successful in attracting the best researchers, tight funds jeopardize their ability to...

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travel, network, use expensive data analysis tools and conduct primary research on the ground. Low quality, irrelevant, or banal research inevitably causes the funders to further question the logic of investing their resources in think tanks.

Government-supported think tanks in Delhi such as the IDSA, Centre for Land and Warfare Studies (CLAWS), Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS) and National Maritime Foundation (NMF) focus on different aspects of national security-related policy issues. Some argue that they serve as lobbyists for the service headquarters that fund them.85 A few think tanks focused on economic areas such as Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER) also derive their funding from the government or other multilateral bodies. From the perspective of the government and private sector, diversity in policy research and recommendations is desirable. Donors in India, both government and private, can significantly help capacity building of think tanks by committing to transparency and ensuring responsiveness in the operations of the think tanks. Favoring one think tank by providing funds and opportunities and neglecting others can be detrimental to research outcomes.

The philanthropy driven trend of funding by the private sector has also declined significantly. Charity endowments by great Indian industrialists that helped set up some of India’s biggest universities and hospitals have become a rarity. Charity has since shifted to project-specific, often implicitly profit-driven grants. Nonetheless, there are a few prominent think tanks that were established on single endowments such as Gateway House by the Mahindra Group, Observer Research Foundation (ORF) by Reliance and DPG by the Shriram group.

Partly because of lack of government and private sector funding, many Indian think tanks rely on grants from foreign foundations to maintain their programs. The debate on alleged repercussions of the undue influence of foreign funders on think tanks is not a new one and has resulted in new strictures by the Indian home ministry and revoking of licenses of nearly 9000 nongovernmental

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organizations. Critics chide the Indian government and investors for their negligence and apathy towards creating a strong culture of policy research in India. He held them responsible for driving think tanks to acquire funding from foreign government agencies like Canada’s IDRC, multilateral financial institutions like Asian Development Bank and foreign foundations like Ford, Rockefeller, Macarthur and Sasakawa.

Critics of foreign funding often make the following arguments:

1. Foreign funders tend to have their own agendas and attempt to forcefully negotiate with think tanks to balance between the funders’ priorities and what is important for the country.
2. They demand excessive and often unnecessary paperwork, monitoring and evaluations.
3. They are unreliable and often reserve the right to withdraw support whenever they deem fit.
4. They are not going to be available in the long run, hence dependency on them can be crippling for an organization.

In fact, most independent think tanks seek a portfolio of donors that combine government, industry and foreign funding. A multiplicity of donors prevents think tanks from heavily depending on any one particular donor and protects against undue donor influence. Government and private sector donors must be welcomed as long as transparency about funding and independence of research can be guaranteed. Autonomy of the think tanks in setting up their research agendas must be protected. As far as the Delhi Policy Group is concerned, we have not encountered pressure from any one of the donors that have funded or commissioned research from us, whether they were government or private sector.

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More than influencing the policy recommendations of the think tanks, core funding provided by the government or single donors, in general, exacerbates the problem of self-censorship. In light of the difficulties associated with acquiring funds, there can be a tendency in think tanks to keep the donors happy. To combat this trend there is an urgent need to alter the narrative so that donors, policymakers and the public begin valuing and supporting think tanks. Some ways in which think tanks can establish their importance in the minds of their ‘consumers’ and for good governance in a democracy are:

1. Ensuring that they provide policymakers with unbiased, well-grounded research, independent analysis, critical assessments, alternative perspectives, new insights and innovative ideas;
2. Clearly communicating their strategies and goals, using a few key messages, without the use of jargon to convince decision-makers of the relevance and novelty of their information products;
3. Interpreting issues, events and policies for the media, thereby improving public understanding of foreign and security policy issues;
4. Serving as a potential source of expert personnel for the government, the legislatures, industry and the media.

Think tanks in India also need to overhaul their financial management models. Structures should be in place to regularize or normalize funding patterns and sources. More often than not, lack of direction and organization is responsible for dwindling funds in any undertaking. Think tanks can reduce dependence on short---term flows of funds by judiciously investing a part of their core fund corpus and secure a regular stream of income that can be used for long-term institution-building activities. For instance, DPG’s corpus covers the costs of running the offices and maintaining the basic elements of its programs. CPR’s core corpus can generate earnings to cover at least one fourth of its yearly expenditure. Furthermore, when core funds are available, internal structures and external outreach efforts must be developed so that productivity is not

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affected in times of fund shortages. For example, amassing support and research contributions from policy experts and academics does not have to be expensive. Assured media coverage and proper dissemination of their work will suffice to garner support.

Communication and external outreach plays a very important role in coping with changing patterns of funding. Advocacy costs must be budgeted and should be part of think tanks’ basic functioning and strategy. It is imperative that all stakeholders and parties involved have a clear understanding of the requirements and roadblocks ahead. This would ensure faster delivery, thereby providing healthier influxes of core funding. Communication is also essential for think tanks if they want to appropriate funds from individuals and private investors. It is a misnomer to believe that individuals and private investors are not willing to provide endowments, but Indian industrialists appear to prefer to fund foreign research institutions. In 2010, Indian industrialist Ratan Tata announced a gift of USD 50 million to Harvard Business School, which was acknowledged as “the largest international donation in the 102 year history of the Ivy League university.”89 Sunil Mittal, the only Indian mentioned in the world’s 100 top philanthropists, preferred to assist the Carnegie Endowment rather than any Indian think tank.90 Therefore, it is up to the think tanks to market themselves in a way that the Indian investor realizes their worthiness. Think tanks’ role as providing expert human resource to government and industry has to be made apparent.

Furthermore, think tanks in India need to come up with innovative ways to generate revenue and locate alternative sources of funds. Some of these could comprise:

1. **Instating memberships and subscriptions** – Think tanks like the Ananta Aspen Center have started paid membership programs. Members have access to their events and publications. Many other think tanks derive some revenue by offering subscriptions to their

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periodical newsletters and publications, but thus far the earnings are a drop in the bucket of costs.

2. **Sale of publications** – Sales of publications by think tanks rarely amount to any tangible sum. However, it can be used to at least recover a part of the costs incurred on publishing and printing.

3. **New platforms** – Think tanks should try to experiment with novel and bolder platforms such as crowd funding to enlist more supports for their research and attract investors for thematic projects.

4. **Renting available resources** – Think tanks with their own buildings can consider maximizing the utilization of available resources such as their premises, library etc. For instance, the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations has been successfully renting out its premises for events. This is, however, applicable only to those think tanks that have had endowments in form of land, office space, or libraries.

5. **Funds through the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) route** – The new Indian Companies Act, which came into effect on 1st April 2014, has mandated CSR obligations (s.135) upon companies meeting a certain profit criteria operating in India. This rule applies to over 8,000 companies in India and is expected to bring in USD 2-3 billion as funds to undertake and promote a wide range of socially beneficial activities such as the promotion of education, gender equality and environmental sustainability. Representations have been made to the National Security Advisor and several ministers by twenty-one Indian think tanks including Indian Council of World Affairs, IDSA, DPG, ORF and Gateway House to specifically incorporate think tanks and public policy institutions as eligible educational institutions within the current definition of CSR. The Ministry of Corporate Affairs and other regulators have recognized think tanks and public policy institutions as “research institutions engaged in spreading education.” Since these institutions are neither pressure groups nor lobbying organizations, they should be brought under item (ii) of Schedule VII of the Act and be permitted to receive contributions from the CSR corpus of
companies. If this recommendation gets accepted, CSR could prove to be a very important source of funding for think tanks in India.

**Human Resource Challenges**

The inability of think tanks to offer attractive remuneration, employment benefits and advanced training to attract and retain bright young researchers is, in part, another manifestation of limited funds and resources. Think tanks are in competition with well-funded banks, universities, aid agencies, consulting firms and corporations that offer considerably higher salaries to the few competent researchers and graduates available in India. Even if think tanks are somehow able to lure the top lot of fresh graduates by offering them access to policymaking spaces or paths into prestigious post-graduate programs abroad, they particularly struggle to attract mature researchers with some experience in the policymaking realm and sound academic credentials.  

Think tanks are handicapped in this respect because India, in general, faces a crippling brain drain in which competent seasoned scholars leave the country to avail of better research facilities abroad, and thus are also unavailable to train the next generation.

Engaging in a race of higher salaries with corporations is not an option for think tanks. Some ways in which think tanks can attract the brightest young scholars are:

1. **Commitment to excellence in the quality of research produced** – think tanks should aim establish the quality of their research as their unique selling proposition.

2. **Exposure to policy and experts** – Working with a think tank that provides networking opportunities and mentoring programs is a highly desirable career option for junior researchers. Ambitious and enthusiastic young researchers vie for positions that allow them to work closely with experts in their areas of interests as they get a chance to learn in depth how to apply their academic skills for developing practical policy prescriptions.

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3. **Scope for publications** – In addition to displaying a higher quality of research activities, think tanks also ought to help their prospective scholars to publish in renowned and credible academic journals.

4. **Collaboration with other international organizations** – Some of the most sought after vacancies in think tanks are for projects done in collaboration with international organizations.

5. **Collaboration with universities** – Almost all post-graduate programs in India require a component of internship or practical work experience. Think tanks can use this opportunity to identify the best and the brightest by offering internship and training programs to students. Universities, especially private colleges, can also sign contracts with top think tanks to offer scholarships to their staff for their advanced degree programs.

6. **Collaboration with ministries** – Up until last month, there was no scope to work with relevant government departments such as the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in India without qualifying for the Indian Civil Service Examination. This was a major dead end in the career path of scholars with advanced degrees and policy-relevant research experience. However, the ministry has recently advertised job-openings for consultants. Think tanks that focus on foreign policy and national security should submit presentations to MEA to ask them to expand their eligibility criteria to include one to two years of policy research experience with credible publications. Owing to the fact that these positions are extremely competitive, scholars with advanced degrees will inevitably turn to think tanks in order to add policy relevance to their research experience. Think tanks can now serve as springboards for bright researchers to launch themselves as prospective candidates for consultants to the MEA.

**Communication Challenges**

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The very existence of any organization depends on its ability to communicate. Unless Indian think tanks are able to effectively communicate with all their stakeholders and disseminate their information products to their target audiences, their work remains fallow and inconsequential. Indian think tanks continue to struggle to establish a strong connection with policymakers, donors and the public, apprising them of their role and importance. They need to efficaciously proliferate their missions, value and impact to gather support for their work. While doing so, they have to prioritize clarity and resist the use of technical jargon. Branding is another requisite aspect of effective communication for sustainability. It is essential for enhancing visibility and creating a niche for think tanks as experts in a particular field from the perspective of the consumer. In some cases, particularly in small to mid-sized think tanks, the reputation of the directors or senior scholars serve as the key branding strategy. Another way for think tanks to enhance their branding is by utilizing search-engine optimizations techniques.

Communication can also be used as a tool of confidence and credibility building by think tanks if they take particular care to maintain transparency and open their activities and methods to scrutiny and questioning. Transparency, in terms of functioning, research and funding, will go a long way in ensuring sustainability of the think tank. Not only would it add credibility to the corpus of research, it would also serve as a tool to attract potential donors by offering them a chance to track how their donations were utilized. Some think tanks like the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) upload their yearly financial statements with details of the source and utilization of funds.


94 Transparency in functioning refers to sharing of information within the think tank or in public domain, including basis for deciding the research agenda, allocation of resources and work etc. Transparency in research refers to publicly spelling out the methodology and findings.

Prior to designing their respective communication strategies, think tanks need to identify their target audience or ‘customers’. Different types of strategies have to be deployed while targeting different groups – high-profile networking for policy makers, marketing strategies for donors, and mass and social media broadcasting for the public. In this digital age, think tanks need to communicate their message directly to different types of stakeholders. A targeted approach specific to each individual/corporation based on his/her/their contribution in the policy making process is required to give an impression of a personal touch. Some basic ideas for effective communication strategies include:

1. The first step to effective communication is by setting up a user-friendly website with an easily accessible feedback/suggestions page. IDSA, Gateway House and CAPS have a process of allowing an audience to interact with the experts and analysts working or writing for their think tank. Sometimes these suggestions and recommendations can be conducive to drafting a policy paper on a particular issue.

2. Think tanks need to make their information products visible, accessible and easily distributable.

3. They should make an effort to communicate their achievements. Highlighting the achievements of the think tank and its scholars can serve as a means to attract funds. Such practices also motivate the scholars to continue producing quality research work. Completion of projects and their findings should also be publicly announced whenever possible.

4. Circulating a periodical newsletter also helps in informing the consumers about the activities and publications produced by the think tank. For instance, the DPG brings out a DPG Newsletter, CAPS brings out a CAPS Weekly Sortie, and other think tanks do weekly alerts and briefings to inform the stakeholders of their daily activities.

5. Think tanks must establish ties with news agencies and use them as a vehicle to disseminate their research.

6. With the dramatic proliferation of instant messaging, think tanks need to be social media-savvy. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter should be used effectively to increase their outreach. These channels can be used to share information on recent research outcomes, events planned and held, as well as any important staffing changes instantly. Apart from these, partnering with social media campaigners or electronic marketing organizations would be beneficial.
7. In order to improve their sustainability, think tanks also have to provide a space for a two-way conversation with their general audience. One way to do this is by organizing interactive talks, for instance Ted Talks. This can be a dynamic way to be in live conversation with the audience unlike a static blog.

In addition to weak communication strategies, think tanks in India have underdeveloped and ineffective marketing strategies. Hence, they find it difficult to compete with consulting firms for funding and resources. The key to survival for think tanks in today’s competitive environment is to market themselves both nationally and internationally. Like any other organization in the service industry, the eight P’s of the “Marketing mix” marketing tools can be fine-tuned to formulate a basic marketing strategy for think tanks.⁹⁶

1. **Product:** In order to develop an effective marketing strategy, think tanks have to first clearly specify their ‘information products’ and their potential ‘consumers’.

2. **Place and Time:** The majority of Indian think tanks are located in New Delhi and marketing themselves should not be a challenge since most of the strategic community is based in the capital. A think tank that delivers on its commitments develops a positive reputation and tends to attract more funding.

3. **Price:** Publications must be priced at a cost that is affordable to encourage wider readership. Nonetheless, very low prices of publications can have an adverse affect on the reputation of the think tank.

4. **Promotion:** Think tanks need to promote themselves sufficiently through all channels of the media in order to catch the attention of scholars and decision makers. Promotion is also an effective branding strategy.

5. **Process:** Process refers to the standard operating procedure in delivering the services. Think tanks need to maintain a high standard of panelists and invitees that have the expertise to constructively contribute to debate on policy related issues.

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6. **Positioning:** This refers to the reputation that the think tank has earned in its research area. Using appropriate branding strategies and the superior quality of its products, a think tank can significantly improve its positioning vis-à-vis other think tanks.

7. **People:** As discussed, human resources constitute the think tank’s most priced assets. Researchers, advisors, experts also serve as marketing tools for the think tank. An internationally acclaimed scholar will automatically make his/her think tank popular.

8. **Productivity and Quality:** Commitment to excellence in quality and quantity of policy outputs relative to inputs are the primary marketing features of any think tank. Higher productivity and quality would directly translate into superior positioning and better access to funds.

**Conclusion**

Think tanks in India face formidable challenges: privation from adequate funding, dearth of skilled researchers, and lack of effective communication and marketing strategies. Moreover, India’s still largely unreceptive policy formulation process confronts them with the existential dilemma of remaining relevant and extending their outreach. There is inadequate traction between them and public institutions. Their foremost challenge, therefore, is to induce a change in the policy formulation structures of India, making them more research oriented and accessible. This task is too big for any single organization. India’s entire think tank community needs to come together to think of ways of changing the process of policy formulation in India. Simultaneously, there is a need for organizing collective brainstorming activities like the 2015 Indian Think Tank Summit that will help think tanks identify best practices and models for their sustainable future.
Think Tanks & Civil Societies Program
The Lauder Institute
The University of Pennsylvania

Appendix A

CALL FOR PAPERS June 4, 2015

Call for Papers on Creating a Sustainable Future for Think Tanks in India

The Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program at the University of Pennsylvania, in cooperation with its regional and global partners, is issuing a call for papers that will outline effective strategies, programs and plans that help create a sustainable future for think tanks in India. $1000.00 will be awarded to each of the top 10-12 papers that are submitted.

We hope to incorporate the input of a diverse set of institutions from across India in order to represent a variety of organizational types, political perspectives, and expertise in Public Policy Research Analysis and Engagement in the region. Think tanks are invited to submit papers that provide concrete plans and programs that will help assure sustainability and increase the profile, performance and impact of think tanks in India.

Deadlines

Deadline to confirm your intent to submit a paper: 22nd June 2015
Deadline for submission of papers (4000-6000 words): 15th July 2015

Prizes will be awarded for best submissions: 10-12 awards $1000.00-1500.00 in mid-July 2015

Background:

India boasts the largest population of think tanks in South Asia. Currently, India has the fifth largest think tank population in the world, closely following the United States, China, the United Kingdom, and Germany. According to the 2014 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report (GGTTI) issued by the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program at the University of Pennsylvania, India contains 15 out of the 50 top think tanks in the regional category that includes China, India, Japan, and the republic of Korea. Six Indian think tanks are featured on the list of the top 150 think tanks worldwide. At present, India’s status as a large and
heterogeneous democratic state makes it a powerful case study from which to analyze and compare policy-making in other nations, especially considering that the country governs just under one-sixth of the world’s population. As such, policy research in India is of particular interest.

Think tanks can play a critical role in this process by serving as catalysts for ideas and influencing action on key policy issues. They bridge the gap between knowledge, policy, governments, and civil society. The Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program and its partners in the region have been working to create peer-peer exchanges between think tank scholars and executives throughout India. At the first ever Indian Think Tank Summit, held in New Delhi on April 25-29, 2015 organized by the University of Pennsylvania’s Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, Observer Research Foundation, Brookings India, Gateway House, the US Embassy in New Delhi, and the US State Department, participants identified the following key issues facing Indian think tanks that need to be properly addressed:

- The lack of effective communication and marketing strategies to reach target audiences and achieve greater impact;
- The over reliance on national governments and international donors to support think tanks and the absence of effective strategies to diversify their sources of funding;
- The need to create a national think tank community that reflects the diversity of India’s regional and local governments and the public they serve;
- The need to recruit and retain scholars and executives that have the proper training in the social sciences and have the requisite skills set to meet the current and future staffing needs of India’s think tanks;
- The absence of core funding for many think tanks is a major issue that forces many think tanks to rely on short term project funding;
- The lack of proper funding has resulted in a very fragmented think tank community that consists of a large number of small, highly specialized, poorly funded think tanks that are underdeveloped and lack the capacity to meet the major policy challenges facing India.

To meet these challenges the participants at the first all India Think Tank Summit suggested a number of possible areas where the think tank community in India might be strengthened. The “Call for Papers” is designed to stimulate thought and discussion on these challenges and to create a concrete plan of action in advance of the next Think Tank Summit. The Think and Civil Societies Program is issuing a call for papers (4000-6000 words) that effective analyze the challenges facing think tanks in India and identifies strategies, programs and plans that would best address them. These papers should explore innovative solutions to questions such as:
Human Resource Challenges

- In a dynamic economy how can think tanks attract the best and brightest to make working in a think tank a desirable/aspirational/competitive career choice?
- How to develop recruitment strategies and programs that will enable India’s think tanks to recruit and retain scholars with advanced degrees in the social sciences and who have experience in policy relevant research.
- What are the human resource models (best practices) developed by think tanks around the world and in India?
- What can the government and the private sector do to build the capacity of think tanks?
- What are the human resource challenges facing think tanks in India and what are some possible strategies and programs to meet these challenges?

Funding Challenges

- How can think tanks successfully mobilize financial resources to accomplish their mandate?
- What are the resource mobilization models (best practices) developed by think tanks around the world and in India?
- How can the changes in funding patterns and the lack of core funding be addressed?
- To what extent should the government and private sector be involved? How can corporations and individuals in India be encouraged to provide financial support for think tanks?

Communication Challenges

- How can think tanks effectively communicate their mission, value added and impact to policy-makers, donors and the public?
- What marketing and communications strategies can think tanks apply to help communicate and disseminate their research and analysis?
- What are the best practices for strategic communications and marketing developed by think tanks around the world and in India?
- How should think tanks incorporate social media into their communications plans?
- How can think tanks harness new technologies and networks to communicate ideas and extend their reach and impact? How can think tanks communicate their ideas in the digital age?
Role and Importance of Think Tanks in India

• What is the role and importance of think tanks in India? What is the narrative that effectively articulates why donors, policy-makers and the public should value and support think tanks? What is the value added by think tanks in the policy-making process and public debate of key policy issues?

• What specific steps can think tanks take to mobilize the public and private sectors to support them?

We hope to incorporate the input of a diverse set of institutions from across India in order to represent a variety of organizational types, political perspectives and expertise in the field of public policy and development.

Once the papers have been reviewed and edited for publication they will be circulated to the participants of the first US-India Think Tank Summit and the associated think tank meetings in Mumbai, Chennai and Bangalore.

While an institution can submit more than one paper, each standalone paper must address one of three specific challenges outlined above. In addition, all papers must include specific strategies, programs and recommendations that address the challenge of how to create a sustainable future for think tanks in India.

Deadline: Papers should be submitted to Namratha Minupuri at nminupuri@brynmawr.edu no later than July 15, 2015.

We want to acknowledge the support of the US Embassy in Delhi and the US State Department for their support of this important initiative.
Appendix B

**Indian Think Tank Summit Participants:**

A N Sinha Institute of Social Studies (ANSISS)
Asian Development and Research Institute (ADRI)
Asian Development Bank
Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs
Brookings India
Center for Asia Studies (CAS)
Center for Study of Science Technology and Policy (CSTEP)
Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)
Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA)
Centre for Civil Society (CSS)
Centre for Development Alternatives (CFDA)
Centre for Good Governance (CGG)
Centre for Healthcare Management - Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI)
Centre for Internet and Society (CIS)
Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS)
Centre for Latin American and International Studies, Goa University
Centre for Objective Research and Development (CORD)
Centre for Policy Research (CPR)
Centre for Public Affairs and Critical Theory (C-PACT)-Shiv Nadar University
Centre for Policy Research (CPR)
Centre for Public Policy Research (CPPR)
Centre for Science and Environment (CSE)
Centre for Social Research (CSR)
Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS)
Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS)
Chennai Centre for China Studies (CCCS)
Come Clean India
Consumer Unity and Trust Society (CUTS) International -Centre for International Trade, Economics & Environment (CUTS CITEE) , CUTS Institute for Regulation & Competition (CIRC)
Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)
Delhi Policy Group (DPG)
Democracy Connect
Development Alternatives (DA)
Energy and Resources Institute (TERI)
Fields of View
Forum for Integrated National Security (FINS)
Forum for Strategic Initiatives (FSI)
Fundação Getulio Vargas (FGV)
Gateway House
Gujarat Institute of Development Research (GIDR)
Hindu Center for Politics and Public Policy
Imagindia Institute / Come, Clean India
India Foundation
Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER)
Indian Council of Social Science Research-North Eastern Regional Centre (ICSSR-NERC)
Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA)
Indian Institute of Dalit Studies (IIDS)
Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research
Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses (IDSA)
Institute for Human Development (IHD)
Institute of Economic Growth (IEG)
Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS)
Institute of Public Enterprise (IPE)
Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC)
Integrated Research and Action for Development (IRADe)
International Water Management Institute (IWMI)
M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF)
Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies (MAKAIAS)
National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER)
National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP)
National Maritime Foundation
National Thinkers Forum
Observer Research Foundation (ORF)
Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change & Development (OKDISCD)
PRS Legislative Research
Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS)
Strategic Specialist for Think Tanks (State Dept. Choice)/ Mantraya
Synergia Foundation
Takshashila Institution
United Service Institution of India (USI)
Vivekananda Institute of Professional Studies (VIPS)
Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF)
Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars
Appendix C

Think Tanks, Public Policy and Governance:
Ideas, Analysis, Innovation and Impact
US-INDIA THINK TANK SUMMIT

New Delhi, April 27-29, 2015
Nilgiri, The Oberoi

The Summit will be conducted in a Roundtable format and according to the Chatham House Rule. There will be no panels and each session will begin with 2-3 individuals who will make brief (5-7 minute) remarks that should be constructively provocative and will serve to frame and stimulate the roundtable discussion that will follow. Only the opening and closing keynote sessions will be open to the press.

SUMMIT AGENDA

17.00 WELCOME REMARKS : Sunjoy Joshi (Director, Observer Research Foundation), Subir Gokarn (Director of Research, Brookings Institution India Center), James McGann (Director, Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program)

17:10 KEYNOTE ADDRESS Suresh Prabhu (Railway Minister of India)

17.05 SESSION 1: The Future of Think Tanks and Policy Advice in India
A panel comprised of think tanks, policymakers, journalists and donors will explore how think tanks can help India meet the challenges and opportunities it faces. (Welcome speakers remain seated on dais, Mehta and Dahiya invited to join on stage after keynote address

Chair: Sunjoy Joshi
Indian: Pratap Bhanu Mehta (President, Centre for Policy Research) / Rumel Dahiya (Deputy Director General, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses) / Subir Gokarn / James McGann

19.00 DINNER

Tuesday, April 28, 2015

10.00 WELCOME ADDRESS Sunjoy Joshi

10.05 KEYNOTE ADDRESS Richard Verma (United States Ambassador to India)

10.20 SESSION 2: Mobilizing Human and Financial Resources for India’s Think Tanks
Think Tanks need adequate human and financial resources to cultivate and retain a pool of researchers and generate a body of empirical evidence that fosters and supports evidence-based policymaking. In dynamic economy how can think tanks attract the best and brightest to make working in a think tank a career choice? What can the government and the private sector do to build the capacity of knowledge based policy research institutions? Should think tanks be more proactive, what can they do to mobilize the public and private sector to support them? What are the funding and human resource models (best practices?) developed by think tanks around the world and in India? What can think tanks do to mobilize funding? To what extent should the government and private sector be involved? Key discussion point: How can India’s Think Tank successfully mobilize human and financial resources to accomplish their mandate?

**Chair**  
Subir Gokarn  
Indian  
Samir Saran (Senior Fellow and Vice President, Observer Research Foundation) & Rathin Roy (Director, National Institute of Public Finance and Policy)  
Foreign  
Lisa Grande (Resident Representative in India, United Nations Development Programme)

**SIMULATION EXERCISE:** A group of young scholars and future think tank executives from the think tanks in India will be assigned to all the tables at lunch where they will frame and lead discussions based on the following exercise. Each group (table) will be asked to create a new, cutting edge think tank for India that will help it meet the challenges and opportunities it faces now and in the future--what does it look like?

**LUNCH**

**SESSION 3: Engaging Policymakers, Journalists, and the Public**

To be effective in their work, think tanks need to engage policymakers, journalists and the public on global and national policy issues. What strategies do think tanks employ to reach these key audiences (best practices). How do can think tanks harness new technologies and networks to communicate ideas and extend their reach and impact. How do think tanks communicate their ideas in the digital age? Are books and Journals a thing of the past? How are think tanks in India and around the world assessing their performance and the impact of their work? Key discussion point: What are the key mechanisms do think tanks use to effectively engage with policymakers, civil society and media?

**Chair**  
Siddhartha Dubey (Director of Operations and Communications, Brookings India)  
Indian  
Ashok Malik (Australia India Institute-ORF Chair for Indo-Pacific Studies, Observer Research Foundation) / Nitin Pai (Co-Founder and Director, Takshashila Institution) / Arunabha Ghosh (Chief
SESSION 4: Bridging the Gap: The Role of Think Tanks

How to can think tanks help bridge the gap between the world of ideas and politics and governments and their citizens? Are think tanks effectively bridging these divides, what more can they do to better serve their governments and the public? Why do think tanks around the globe still chant the mantra: if policymaker would only take our advice? How do think tanks contribute to policy in other countries? What are they doing to bridge the divide? How do they work with legislative and executive branches of government? What should the Indian government do to take advantage of the intellectual resources and policy advice of think tanks? What can be done to build better channels of communication and cooperation between government officials and agencies in India? Key discussion point: What changes must think tanks make to their strategy, structure and business models to effectively bridge these gaps and the demand for greater relevance and impact?

Chair: James McGann
Indian: Radha Kumar (Director General, Delhi Policy Group) / Rajiv Bhatia (Director General, National Maritime Foundation)
Foreign: Barkha Dutt (Consulting Editor, NDTV)

CLOSING KEYNOTE: Arvind Subramanian (TBC) (Chief Economic Advisor, Government of India)
India’s ambitious growth agenda requires the support of home-grown, independent institutions which can incubate ideas to give the country a competitive edge – a concept the West has understood and used to full potential for over a century, with think tanks and policy research institutions providing critical input and topical expertise.

India is among the top five countries in the world with the largest number of think tanks and policy research institutions. This is reflective of the intellectual power of the country, and presents an opportunity for the government as well as the private sector to benefit from the expertise of such institutions, and to support them robustly.

Mumbai is India’s most international city, home to leaders from the financial, technological, and academic fields. Intellectual institutions should be thriving in the city, and contributing effectively to the policy-making process in New Delhi. However, such institutions are far too few in the city; they are under-funded and under-utilised. There is a need to nurture an intellectual and institutional ecosystem in Mumbai, one which is functional and creative.

Gateway House and the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP) at the University of Pennsylvania (UPenn) will host a roundtable for policy research institutions in Mumbai to discuss opportunities and find solutions to common challenges.

**Agenda**

| Opening Session | The opening session will include a presentation and discussion of national, |
regional and global **research and policy trends**, and how they impact think tanks in Mumbai.

Key discussion points:
- Where are research organisations in Mumbai placed vis-à-vis national, regional and global research and policy trends?
- What is the role of think tanks in Mumbai in the national policy landscape?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Mobilising resources and engaging policy-makers</th>
<th>The discussion will focus on how think tanks in Mumbai can meet the <strong>challenges of operating</strong> in an information-rich, highly competitive and resource-constrained environment.</th>
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<td>Key discussion points:</td>
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<td>- How can policy research organisations in Mumbai, which are largely non-profit, attract and retain the best scholars and managers?</td>
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<td>- How can intellectual institutions in the city successfully mobilise funds from the private sector?</td>
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<td>- What strategies are different institutions employing to reach and influence government, academia and the private sector?</td>
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<td>- How do intellectual institutions assess their performance and the impact of their work?</td>
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| Conclusion and recommendations* | The discussion will focus on consolidating ideas and recommendations from the roundtable. |

* If time permits, the roundtable will also explore Mumbai’s potential to become a national, regional and global knowledge and policy hub.
Appendix D

SPEAKER PROFILES

Shereen BHAN
Delhi Bureau Chief and Executive Editor of CNBC-TV18, India.

Shereen Bhan joined UTV news and current affairs division and produced shows like We the People for Star TV and Line of Fire for Sab TV. Her stint with CNBC-TV18 began in December 2000. Bhan anchors and produces several flagship shows like Young Turks, India Business Hour, The Nation's Business and Power Turks. She has done some of the biggest interviews on CNBC-TV18, including Bill Gates, Richard Branson, Benazir Bhutto and Deepak Chopra. She also anchors and puts together CNBC-TV18's ground events like the Managing India brainstorm and the CNBC Industry Vectors. She graduated from St. Stephen's College, Delhi with a degree in Philosophy and a master's in Communication Studies from the University of Pune, with film and television as her area of specialization. The Year 2005 was remarkable for her on all fronts. In April 2005 she was selected as FICCI women of the year award, then in Sept-2005 Femina/Indiatimes had included her among 20 beautiful face of the year. Her effortless deliverance of news and features alike as well as her cheerful disposition has made her a favorite in thousands of Indian homes.
Ambassador Rajiv Kumar Bhatia is the Director General of the Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi. As a career diplomat, he served India with distinction for over 37 years. He was India’s ambassador/high commissioner to Kenya, Myanmar, Mexico and South Africa. Mr. Bhatia enjoys writing and speaking on a wide range of foreign policy-related issues. Since his retirement, he has published over 100 articles on international affairs and diplomacy in India’s national dailies, journals and periodicals. He has also delivered lectures at the National Defense College, Foreign Service Institute, universities and other institutions in India.

Brig. Dahiya is an Indian Army veteran with extensive command and staff experience spanning 32 years, including in counter-insurgency operations. He previously served as a Defence Attaché to Turkey, Syria and Lebanon, and with the Indian Military Training Team in Bhutan. He also served with Military Operations Directorate of the Indian Army and Net Assessment Directorate at Integrated Defence Staff. Brig. Dahiya is a graduate of the National Defence College and Defence Services Staff College. He was
awarded the Sword of Honour and Gold Medal at the Indian Military Academy at his commissioning.

Siddhartha DUBEY
Director of Operations and Communications at Brookings India

Siddhartha is responsible for coordinating in administrative matters between Brookings India, New Delhi and Brookings Institution, Washington DC. Siddhartha works with Brookings’ foreign policy team, general counsel, the CFO’s office, the executive office as well as Brookings centers in Doha and Beijing to make sure there is constant contact and information between New Delhi and the wider Brookings world. Siddhartha is also responsible for IT systems and human resources. In his communications role, Siddhartha is in charge of outreach and maintaining relationships between Brookings India and its various partners in government, NGOs and the private sector. Siddhartha also looks after Brookings India’s various social media platforms and manages the organization’s relationship with journalists. Siddhartha did his masters degree from the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University and his BA from St. Stephens’ College.
Dr. Gokarn earned his Ph.D from Case Western Reserve University (U.S.) in 1989. He received his B.A. (Hons) in economics from St. Xavier’s College in Mumbai in 1979 and his M.A. in economics from the Delhi School of Economics in 1981. He was awarded a Fulbright Research Fellowship in 1997, on which he spent an academic year at the Economic Growth Centre at Yale University (U.S.). He is currently a member of the National Security Advisory Board of India and a columnist with the Business Standard. Dr. Gokarn, who will serve as a Brookings senior fellow, was previously chief economist of Standard & Poor’s Asia-Pacific from 2007-09 and executive director and chief economist of CRISIL from 2004-07. He served as chief economist at the think tank National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) in New Delhi from 1999-2002 and taught at the Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research (IGIDR) in Mumbai from 1990-2000.
With experience in 35 countries and having worked at Princeton, Oxford, UNDP and WTO, Arunabha advises governments, industry and civil society around the world on: energy and resources security; renewable energy; water governance; climate governance; energy-trade-climate linkages; and international regime design. He is a World Economic Forum Young Global Leader, Asia Society Asia 21 Young Leader, and fellow of the Aspen Global Leadership Network. He is also a founding board member of the Clean Energy Access Network (CLEAN). He writes a monthly column, Inflexion Points, in the Business Standard. Dr Ghosh has presented to heads of state, India’s Parliament, the European Parliament, Brazil’s Senate, and other legislatures; trained ministers in Central Asia; and hosted a documentary on water set out of Africa. His op-eds have appeared in the Times of India, The Hindu, India Today, Indian Express, Financial Express, Mint, Seminar, and Tehelka. He has delivered public lectures in several countries, and commented on All India Radio, ABC (Australia), BBC, CNN-IBN, NDTV (India) and Voice of America, among other broadcasters.

Dipankar GUPTA
Distinguished Professor and the Director of Centre of Political Affairs and Critical Theory, Shiv Nadar University.

Professor Gupta was formerly Professor in the Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi that he joined as a faculty. For a brief period from 1993-1994, he was also associated with the Delhi School of Economics as Professor in the Department of Sociology. Prof. Gupta is also involved in an advisory capacity in several educational and research institutions. He was the President’s nominee in the Academic/Executive Committees of Visvabharati and Pondicherry University, which are both Central Universities. Currently Prof Gupta is a member of several boards like RBI, NABARD, National Standards Broadcasting Authority, Punjab Governance Reforms Commission, National Centre for Good Governance and the Doon School. From 2008-2010, he was a member of National Security Advisory Board. He has regular columns in two national dailies including Times of India. He has written or edited 18
books including, “The Caged Phoenix: Can India Fly?” which was re-published by Stanford University Press in 2009. His latest book is titled “Revolution From Above: India’s Future and the Citizen Elite”.

James, MCGANN
Director
Think Tanks and Civil Society Program at the University of Pennsylvania

James G. McGann, Ph.D., is a senior lecturer at the Lauder Institute of the Wharton School and the School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania. He is also the director of the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP) at the University of Pennsylvania. He conducts research on the trends and challenges facing think tanks and policymakers around the world and provides advice and technical assistance to think tanks, governments and public and private donors on how to improve the quality and impact of policy research. He is also a senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, a think tank based in Philadelphia. Prior to coming to the University of Pennsylvania Dr. McGann was an assistant professor of Political Science at Villanova University where he taught international relations, international organizations and international law. His current research interest include: assessing global trends in security and international affairs research; the role of think tanks in shaping US domestic and foreign policy; think tanks and policy advice in the BRICS and G20 countries and transnational threats and global public policy. He is the creator and author of the annual Global Go To Think Tank Index which 6,603 think tanks in every region of the world.
Sunjoy Joshi has a Master’s Degree in English Literature from Allahabad University, India, as well as in Development Studies from University of East Anglia, Norwich. He also studied Upstream Economics and Risk Analysis at the Petroleum Economist, Woking, UK. He joined the Madhya Pradesh Cadre of the prestigious Indian Administrative Services in 1983, but has taken premature retirement from the service in 2009 in order to pursue his primary interests in energy and environment. During his career spanning over 25 years in the Indian Administrative Service, Sunjoy has gained experience across the conventional as well as non-conventional energy sectors. He has handled oil and gas exploration as Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas and was the Government nominated Director on the Boards of ONGC, OVL, OIL and MRPL. Sunjoy headed the Madhya Pradesh Energy Development Agency as its Managing Director and served as Chairman of M.P. Windfarms. He has been Visiting Associate at the International Institute of Strategic Studies, London as well as Distinguished Visitor to the Programme on Energy and Sustainable Development, University of Stanford, USA. Presently he is responsible for all outreach, development and research activities of the Foundation and co-ordinates programmes across centers and study areas. He continues to write and research on India’s energy needs and its interplay with the development challenges and climate narratives within and outside the country. He is presently working on a program on "India and China: Energy Imperatives for a Changing World" and is engaged on issues pertaining to Climate Change, as also comparative development studies.

Radha Kumar
Director General
Delhi Policy Group
Dr. Radha Kumar is a specialist in ethnic conflicts, peacemaking and peace-building. Formerly Director of the Mandela Centre for Peace at Jamia Millia Islamia University (2005-10), Dr. Kumar has also been Senior Fellow in Peace and Conflict Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York (1999-2003), Executive Director of the Helsinki Citizen's Assembly in Prague (1992-4), Associate Fellow at the Institute for War and Peace Studies at Columbia University (1996-8) and was a member of the Council on Security and Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP India). She is currently on the Board of the UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), the Foundation for Communal Harmony (India, Ministry of Home Affairs) and an Associate Fellow of the Asia Society in New York. From October 2010 to October 2011, Dr. Kumar served as one of the three-member Group of Interlocutors appointed by the Government of India for Jammu and Kashmir. Dr. Kumar holds a PhD from Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi and an MA and BA from Cambridge University, UK. She is the author of 5 books and over 100 journal articles & book chapters, as well as several dozen op-ed and about 30 reports. Dr. Kumar also appears frequently on T.V. and radio.

Ashok MALIK
Australia India Institute-ORF Chair for Indo-Pacific Studies
Observer Research Foundation

Ashok Malik has been a journalist for 20 years and is a columnist for leading Indian and international publications including the Times of India, Hindustan Times, Asian Age, Pioneer and YaleGlobal Online. He focuses on Indian domestic politics and foreign/trade policy, and their increasing interplay, as well as on the broader process of globalisation and how it is influencing policy choices in not just the economy but in social sector spheres such as health, education and urbanisation. In 2011, Ashok co-authored a paper, India’s New World: Civil Society in the Making of Foreign Policy, published by the Lowy Institute for International Policy, Sydney. It looked at the influence of Indian business, news media and overseas communities on the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi. In 2012, Ashok’s book, India: Spirit of Enterprise (Roli Books) was published. It encapsulates the story of the growth of India’s leading private sector industries since 1991, and their role in the Indian economy. In the same year, he was a member on the bilateral Taskforce on Perceptions commissioned by the Australia India Institute, University of Melbourne, to assess and make recommendations on the relationship between Australia and India. In June 2013, Ashok was named to the Australia India Institute-ORF Chair for Indo-Pacific Studies. His work will focus on the bilateral relationship between India and Australia as well as emergent challenges related to maritime and energy security, and new institutional architecture, in the Indo-Pacific.
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Nitin Pai is a co-founder of Takshashila and a graduate of Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy (National University of Singapore), Nanyang Technological University and National College, Bangalore. Nitin spent over a decade working in the Singapore government in various capacities, including deregulation, broadband infrastructure development and strategic technology foresight. Nitin Pai blogs at The Acorn and has a monthly column in Business Standard.

Shri Suresh Prabhakar Prabhu is a fourth time Member of the Lok Sabha from Rajapur Constituency of Maharastra - one of the biggest states of India. He was Industry Minister, Government of India in his first spell. Then, he was Minister of Environment and Forests, Government of India and formerly, Minister of Fertilizers & Chemicals. He was the Union Minister for Power, Government of India until August 2002. Currently he is the Railway Minister of India. He is well known for his easy accessibility to the public, which not only acts as a deterrent to the bureaucratic delays and corruption in the functioning of the Ministry, but also encourages new ideas and viewpoints. Shri Prabhu
believes in listening to criticism of the Government's policies, which he says, helps in reorienting the policies towards the greater common good. He is also a believer in people's participation in the working of the Ministries under him, especially through the involvement of NGOs and people's groups.

Rathin ROY
Director
National Institute of Public Finance and Policy

Rathin Roy took charge as Director NIPFP in May 2013. Prior to joining NIPFP, he has been the Director of Asia Pacific Regional Centre, UNDP, Bangkok, and the Director, International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG), UNDP, Brazil. He has also served as the Public Resource Management Advisor, and the Acting Cluster Leader, Inclusive Development, in the Poverty Practice, Bureau for Development Policy (BDP), UNDP. On invitation from the Government of India, he also served as the Economic Advisor to the Thirteenth Finance Commission, a Constitutional body of the Government of India. Recently, he has also been appointed as part-member of the Seventh Central Pay Commission, constituted by the Government of India. He has worked in over 80 countries during and prior to his tenure with UNDP, and is a well known figure in the world of applied macroeconomic and fiscal policy. He holds a PhD in Economics and an MPhil from the University of Cambridge, UK. Post-PhD, he was tenured in the Economics Faculty at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, and an Economist with the Institute for Development Policy and Management, University of Manchester.

Rajiv Pratap RUDY
Minister of State (Independent Charge for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship
Government of India
A Lok Sabha MP from the Saran constituency in Bihar, Rajiv Pratap Rudy is a member of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). He is a man with multiple skills – a lecturer, a lawyer and a Jumbo Jet pilot rolled into one. Recently, Rudy has been inducted in the Union Cabinet as a minister of state by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and has been given charge of Minister of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (Independent Charge), and Parliamentary Affairs. He is also the national general secretary of the BJP. Rudy started his political career in 1990 when he was elected as an MLA from Taraiya Assembly constituency in Bihar. He fought this election on a ticket from the Janata Dal. Later, he joined the BJP and was appointed as its National Vice President. He was elected to the 11th Lok Sabha in 1996 on BJP’s ticket. Once again he was elected to Lok Sabha in 1999. During the NDA Government led by Atal Behari Vajpayee, Rudy was Commerce and Industry Minister from 2001 to 2003 and then later he served as Civil Aviation Minister from 2003 to 2004 in the same government. In 2010, he was elected to the Rajya Sabha from Bihar and in the year 2014 he contested Lok Sabha elections from Saran in Bihar and won. He has been member to various parliamentary committees. Just to name a few, he has served as member of Joint Parliamentary Committee on Wakf, Committee on Food Management in Parliament complex, Committee on Home Affairs and Parliamentary Forum on Global Warming and Climate change, among others.

Samir SARAN
Senior Fellow and Vice President
Observer Research Foundation

Samir Saran is Senior Research Fellow and also Vice President responsible for Development and Outreach at the Observer Research Foundation. An Electrical Engineer by training, he has a Masters in Media Studies from the London School of Economics and Political Science and has been a Fellow at the University of Cambridge Program for Sustainability Leadership. He is visiting Fellow at the Australia India Institute and faculty at a number of other schools and programs. He has had a rich and diverse experience in the Indian private sector and was actively engaged with regulators and policy makers during the 1990s as India undertook economic reforms. He was part of the business development team of Reliance Industries, India’s largest business conglomerate, and helped to develop its investment plans in the Power Sector. From 2000 onwards - he served the company in its regulatory and corporate affairs team for the Telecommunications business at New Delhi and was a member of the Government - Industry panel on Intellectual Property and Broadcasting regulation. As Vice President at Reliance Industries, he was entrusted with the task of external communications and government relations across the group’s businesses including Retail, SEZs, Oil & Gas,
Petrochemicals and Textiles. Since 2008, in his capacity as Vice President at the Observer Research Foundation, he has been involved in fund raising, nurturing global partnerships and developing programmes for the various centers of the organization. Samir is also a prolific writer and authors frequent columns in India’s most widely circulated newspapers such as the Times of India, The Hindu, Mail Today and the Indian Express. He has also published his research in some of the most reputed journals in India and abroad on issues such as, Climate Change, Non-Traditional Security, Radicalism, BRICS, Development Policy and Cyber Governance. He has recently published a book "Re-imagining the Indus: Mapping Media Reportage in India and Pakistan" and co-authored the report "A Long Term Vision for BRICS" commissioned by the Indian government. His latest work in the 'Seminar' magazine delves into "Privacy, Property and Sovereignty in the Cyber Age."

Richard VERMA
United States Ambassador to India

Ambassador Verma is a former Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs. From 2009-2011, he served as a principal advisor to Secretary Clinton. He led the State Department’s budget and policy efforts on Capitol Hill, handled more than 200 Senate confirmations, and managed several major congressional investigations. He was also the Administration’s lead negotiator with Congress on Iran sanctions and the ratification of the new START Treaty. He most recently served as a senior counselor at both Steptoe & Johnson and the Albright Stonebridge Group, where his practice focused on international law and global regulatory compliance. Earlier in his career, Mr. Verma served in the Senate as the senior national security advisor to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid. He also worked in the House of Representatives for Defense Appropriations Committee Chairman Jack Murtha. Formerly a country director for the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs in Eastern Europe, Mr. Verma was a senior National Security Fellow at the Center for American Progress, a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, and served on the boards of the Clinton Foundation, Human Rights First, and the National Democratic Institute. Mr. Verma served on active duty in the U.S. Air Force from 1994 to 1998. He received his LL.M. with distinction from Georgetown University Law Center, and his J.D. cum laude from American University’s Washington College of Law. He holds a B.S. from Lehigh University.
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