



Summary of the Mysore TTI Meet

The second meeting of the IDRC South Asian Think Tank Initiative grantees hosted by the Center for Study of Science, Technology and Policy (CSTEP) was held from March 4-6, 2012 in Mysore, India. This meeting brought together the 16 leading think tanks institutes (TTI) from the region and select stakeholders (advisors and donors) to discuss, debate and deliberate on a comprehensive, empirical understanding of the role, impact and sustainability of think tanks and ways to strengthen them.

About 35 representatives from the 16 TTIs participated in a series of panel discussions, debates and games on the above-mentioned topics. The discussion by the panel comprising of three members and a moderator was followed by a session of debate.

The meetings built on the discussions in the previous meeting to ensure continuity of agenda and learning.

The participants discussed and debated on a given set of themes such as Impact, Measuring research quality, Assessing the success of Think Tanks, Human resource management-training, retention and compensation, Sustainability and Accreditation.

Impact

It was suggested that the basic yardstick to measure impact of a TTI should be assessing their function of creating and harvesting knowledge and apply that in the relevant fields benefitting several stakeholders for implementation and policy-making.

Research Quality

Baseline criterion to measure research quality is to add to knowledge, maintain analytical rigour and be relevant. It was suggested that internal and external processes be put in place to maintain the quality of research. It was felt that the governance structure, flexible work-hours and freedom to think, and no fire and hire contribute in maintaining high research quality.

Measuring success

Assessing qualitative work is a challenge faced by the TTIs. During the debate session, one of the groups articulated a set of solutions on how to assess the work of think tanks. It was suggested that the indicators of success could be developed based on the access to policy-making, attracting funding, presence in the public spheres and media visibility. Citations,

sponsored research, risk taking, responding to the contemporary or emerging issues are the other important indicators. Lastly, ranking of think tanks and relative performance forms another indicator of success.

Human Resource and IT

Attracting good talent, promoting TTIs, recruitment process, attachment/dialogue with Universities, competitive compensation formed part of good HR policies to train, retain talent.

Sustainability

To attain financial sustainability it was recommended to plan for long-term, medium and short-term partnership with agencies. Several models and sources of funding were suggested such as one-time grant from the government, alumni donation, private and philanthropic and international funding.

Accreditation

Credibility is an important factor in gaining acceptance in the policy-making community. Accreditation was observed to be one mechanism by which think tanks could self-assess quality and gain credibility. It was suggested to take lessons from the established think tank institutions, or adapt from western TTIs, and/or partner with Universities help build/add credibility.

It was recommended to make a collective case for why this ecosystem is necessary so that we can engage broader society to convey that what is being done is evidence-based, is necessary and desirable.

Take away

Following series of sessions, the members recognised a need to come together and conduct research on common issues, brand building and work towards a Journal for South Asian Studies.

The meeting brought the TTIs together and enabled them to share the experiences around the themes that were set out for the discussion. The presentation in the panel and parallel sessions and the discussions brought clarity and insight on the themes. It also laid down the issues for discussion for Cape Town meeting happening in June, 2012.