

Impact of COVID-19 on the Role of Think Tanks in the Global South

Think tanks play an effective role by conducting transdisciplinary research and fill the gap between research, policy, and practice. Robust evidence produced by think tanks leads to changes in perceptions, policies, and practices in public as well as private sector. In addition to their role in generating and disseminating research, think tanks also help to improve skills of practitioners. In the policy-making process, think tanks play critical roles in stages such as setting policy agenda, designing policy interventions, policy advocacy, monitoring policy implementation, and evaluation of programmes.

However, the current COVID-19 pandemic has seriously curtailed the capacity of think tanks to deliver and posed new challenges. South Asia is no exception. The pandemic has given rise to many crises in developing countries, including large and medium scale social, economic, health, education and livelihood disruptions. An extraordinary economic downward trend, slow-pace economic activities in all business sectors, and pressure on the health sector shattered economies of even developed countries. A similar situation is being faced by developing countries, including South Asian ones, which are already fighting to overcome poverty, disease burden and low literacy. The resources of the southern countries are under severe pressures and every challenge is more intense than the other. The situation has created problems such as resource crunch resulting in erosion of capacity. However, at the same time, it has created opportunities for think tanks to conduct research and provide advice on related policy issues.

For rapid recovery, effective strategies at the national and sub-national level are very important in post-pandemic period. New policies, practices and innovative implementation strategies are in demand now more than ever to bring economies back on track. Think tanks, as knowledge producers and connectors, are ideal platforms to mobilise and suggest relevant policies, from evidence-based research, risk analysis and mitigation, to handle post-crisis situations. Furthermore, the importance of reliable, timely, and helpful information, analysis, and immediate policy solutions to supplement and support government policies and actions cannot be overstressed, particularly in a crisis.

To discuss these issues and to derive effective policy recommendations and guidelines for Southern think tanks, this SDC session will address the following key questions:

1. What are the major challenges faced by think tanks in the Global South in pre- and post-pandemic times?
2. What are the opportunities to perform better or to improve the role of think tanks in a post-pandemic world?
3. How has legitimacy of think tanks suffered or evolved in post-pandemic situation? What are the best possible ways to attract government attention towards promoting evidence-informed policymaking and getting support for think tanks?
4. How and to what extent have think tanks from the South succeeded in collaborating with relevant government institutions to deal with the pandemic?
5. How can think tanks better help policymakers design policy responses for sustainable development in the post-pandemic era?
6. What are good examples and lessons learnt on the evolving role of think tanks for informed public policy responses during the COVID-19 pandemic in developing countries?

7. What strategies can the think tanks adopt to upgrade their capacity to develop and share cogent analysis and practical advice to decision-makers in a potential crisis with multi-dimensional challenges?

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