

3rd Conference on Public Policy and Governance in South Asia ***“Expanding Public Choices and Market Opportunities”***

4-5 July 2019

Venue: Nepal Administrative Staff College
Jawalakhel, Lalitpur Nepal

Background and Rationale

Over the last couple of decades, South Asia has economically growing with the growth topping 6.9 percent in 2018 and set to accelerate to 7.1 percent next year and firming up its position as the fastest growing region in the world. However, the region is facing several developmental challenges including vulnerabilities stemming from climate change and environmental degradation, governance challenges and increasing inequalities within and among the countries that poses serious threats to the sustainable development in the region. Citizens in South Asia are now seeking the opportunities of wellbeing that can be achieved by expanding opportunities for inclusive growth.

The second series of conference on Public Policy and Governance in South Asia[1] drew attentions of scholars and wider policy stakeholders on ‘Justice and Prosperity’ in the region. It further highlighted the issues of ‘expanding opportunities’ as a strategy to achieve larger goal of ‘justice and prosperity’. Hence, the third series of this conference is going to be organized under the wider theme “Expanding Opportunities”.

Aim

This conference aims to bring together scholars, policy actors and political leaders of South Asia into a collective platform and deliberate and share experiences on public policy and governance in the region. This will further provide an opportunity for mutual sharing and learning from each other.

Objectives

- Provide forum to discuss and share practices as well as experiences of public policy and governance,
- Support to promote culture of evidence-based public policy making and identify issues and opportunities in public policy process in the region.
- Strengthen the synergy and networking of institutions working in public policy and governance.

Conference Theme

Expanding Public Choices and Market Opportunities

South Asia is characterized by mixed governance practice— liberal and social democracies to limited democracies and also absolute monarchical rules. However, as the result of increasing education, access to and interaction with global markets through liberal economic policies and practices, network with global societies, people in this region have opted for more democratic practice and opportunities. At the same time, the region is striving to acknowledge more democratic values, hence public democratic spaces have come up as the necessary boulevards for expanding

public choices. With introduction and enriched practice of democracies, people have been empowered as citizens with sovereignty vested constitutionally on themselves from mere subjects in the other rules. The sovereignty in practice is taken as political-economic value. Exercise of such constitutional authority and power as citizenry value by people opens up political and economic opportunities. Political decision making and policy management through periodically elected political representatives is the political dimension in practice of sovereignty by people while freedom of choice in employment, entrepreneurial scope and management of private assets have been the economic scope of sovereignty in practice by people.

Similarly, countries in South Asia have acknowledged decentralization on various forms, and tried to strengthen public access to governance and economic opportunities. India and Nepal have constitutionally acknowledged local governments as the closest to the people through which state authorities are exercised, opening a number of opportunities- civic, social and economic ones. Bangladesh is sincerely decentralizing its governance and delivering services through local one-stop service complexes. Sri Lanka has been duly practicing devolved governance since 1980 for enhanced access of local people mainly in agriculture and other livelihood practices in addition to political representation. Other countries also acknowledge to some form of decentralization that aims in enhances access to socio-politico-economic opportunities.

This theme is aimed to have papers which raise discourse on public governance at large as well as specific perspectives and dialogues on subnational governance, growth that is inclusive and sustainable (ref. sustainable development goals-SDGs), and investment environment.

Sub Theme

A. Public sector governance

During the recent two decades, south Asian countries have been gone through an unprecedented transition in governance mechanism by adopting a new market-friendly approach to public sector management. Along with this change, these countries have continued to undertake varieties of development-related initiatives such as long-term development plans, poverty reduction programs, rural development strategies, and inclusive development approaches. Certain institutions including national planning agencies, public service commissions, local government authorities, and series of other public institutions were established to implement those initiatives. However, several of these initiatives and institutions are facing challenges due to political, economic, social and environmental reasons.

Similarly, public sector, in the recent times, is redefined and working collaboratively with market mechanism, has been the major vehicle to drive development and growth in the South Asian region. With growth of market facilitated by liberal economic policies in the region, it has demonstrated considerable capacity of serving in the public affairs. Governments in the region acknowledge the market as one of the inescapable stakeholders of serving the public and be an integral partner of governance. It is so duly acknowledged due to its capacity of managing and mobilizing resources, bring in and adopt innovation in management and leadership and harness value for money. For South Asian countries, these have become the common scopes and paramount competencies that public sector should develop capacity, so the results shall be better attainment of the public commitments through public service delivery. As the region itself is a dynamic environment, skilled and experienced public sector managers are the need of the hour, the general public want the quality of service delivered by the public service to improve, therefore, it is imperative to develop on

required competencies encompassing skills, knowledge and attitude of the public sector. India and Sri Lanka have formally defined the competencies and have adopted capacity building initiatives based on the competency frameworks while Nepal has recently defined the competency areas and proposed the competency framework for capacity development of the civil service. Although the other South Asian countries are silent on such framework with defined competency areas, they have adopted needful strategies for building the capacity of the public sector.

Hence, this theme brings the experience of public sectors institution development that depict resulting management practices in South Asia and provides opportunity for countries to learn from each other. Similarly, bringing in the learnings and experiences of countries across the region on their initiatives on reforming the public sector and capacity building will be an advantage of the conclave.

B. Subnational governance

Most of the countries of South Asia have practices of decentralized governance in some forms. There could be difference in forms and scope of sub - national government or the multi-level governments but basic principles of management could be the same. Nepal, for example, is the youngest country to adopt federalism with an aim to devolve power to the sub-national governments for strengthening democratic governance whereas India is practicing federalism for the last 6 decades. Bangladesh, on the other hand, is practicing decentralization to empower sub-national units. As federal countries, Pakistan, India and Nepal have multi-level governments while the others have decentralized units to undertake governance functions closest to the people. Though its own unique kind of multi - level governance the countries in the region have adopted, all of these have unequivocally underlined the importance of devolution of opportunities along with the devolution of power at all the levels of government. The arrangement existing in any form, are designated as the sub-national governments which in common work for the goal of coordinated and pro-people governance. The inherent philosophy, therefore, of the subnational governance is to bring citizen close to the government by expanding opportunities for improved service delivery. However, it is evident, in the region that the capacity to effectively deliver the governance function by these sub-national governments is limited and the capacity of these governments is always on question. With this critical state, it is imperative to look into the capacity building of sub-national governments. Hence, The conference takes this thematic scope to bring in the initiatives taken by different countries, experiences—both what worked well and what not, best practices and some way forward and opinion proposed, into discourse in the dialogue sessions, paper presentation and even in the key note address. It is aimed at providing an opportunity to the delegates to engage in dialogue and share their research insights and experiences from the practice of dealing with different forms of sub - national governance practice in South Asia.

C. Creating Investment Environment

South Asian region remains one of the most promising investment prospects for the world. There has been a phenomenal growth in the output, trade and employment which highlights the importance of investing in this region. It is at its historic moment of transforming the economic conditions in the global economy. Consequently, it could help in addressing the challenges of poverty, peace and environmental degradation that confronts the world. If present trends of GDP are to be analyzed, then China will be the largest economy in the world followed by USA and India respectively. Under these kinds of development going around, if South Asian countries develop an integrated economy, then perhaps South Asia could become the second largest economy in the world after China. Also, if analyzed from the geographical proximity, South Asian region have the obvious potentiality of being

an economic powerhouse. Since the growing importance of trade in services in most of the South Asian countries, the salient question that arises is regarding the growth of investing opportunities and its contribution to the development of the economy. Analyzing the competitiveness and openness primarily helps to understand the potentialities and complementarities among the South Asian countries. Furthermore, along with technological advancements, provision of services occurs at lower costs, which opens up the possibility of specialization in different sectors. Next, economic liberalization could integrate markets, which in turn leads to a restructuring of production. This change or transition of production structure is true for industrial products but there is a need to look at the same in the context of services; especially in the context of South Asia's business and to create opportunities.

D. Inclusive Growth

Growth has always been an all accepted political and social development issue in the countries of south Asia. In the meantime, acknowledging the socio-economic needs of people with varying socio-economic bases is one of the major challenges, and, *if-well-taken* an opportunity impactful results. Governance paradigm and policy practice have acknowledged many other stakeholders in addition to conventional actors, with an aim to create an enabling environment for harnessing all opportunities of economic development and growth. Long term perspective plans to periodic development plans have been adopted and country wise poverty reduction strategy papers introduced with an aim to foster inclusive growth in the economies. Having this context, this theme aims to bring in papers from government agencies, academia and practitioners to share among the conference attendees for initiating discourses by providing them an opportunity for assessment on historicity of inclusive growth and share newer perspectives for common benefit of South Asian people.

E. Sustainable Development Goals

Despite having a rich resource base, South Asian Region accounts for 36% of the world's poor with a number of development and infrastructure gaps. A disproportionate concentration of the deprived populations in the sub-region that accounts for a quarter of the world's population means that the global achievement of the SDGs will not be possible without South Asia achieving them. Cross cutting issues such as poverty reduction, economic growth, job creation, industrialization, inequality (SDGs 1, 5, 8, 9, 10) are related to expanding opportunities which reiterates its significance in the region. SDG 8 involves job creation, all South Asian countries are far behind the target of ensuring decent jobs for all. This is reflected in the fact that among the top five countries in the world with very high proportion of informal employment in the total employment sector, four are from South Asia. As for SDG 9, a recent study (UNESCAP, 2017, "Asia-Pacific Countries with Special Needs Development Report 2017", Bangkok) shows that the calculated infrastructural indices of all South Asian countries, except the Maldives, are much lower than the average of developing countries of the Asia-Pacific and a much wider gap is observed when compared with the average of the developed countries of the Asia-Pacific. This indicates the need for a lot of infrastructural investments in the South Asian countries. If we look at the status in terms of other SDGs, the scorecards are not very encouraging. Also, if we consider SDG 5 (gender inequality) and SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), there are concerns with respect to the very low level of female labour force participation in most of the South Asian countries, with Nepal being the only exception. From empirical studies, we see that South Asian countries are yet to be on the right track to attain most of the goals under the SDGs. In this context, discussion on the aspects of expanding opportunities to ensure sustainable development seems to be need of an hour. Renewed efforts and a strong political commitment to address the challenges in implementing these SDGs. Effective SDG implementation will further require: outcome-based approaches to multidimensional sustainable

development challenges; decentralization to empower local administrations; and institutional reforms to incentivize changes in regulations, institutional culture, markets and mindsets.

Conference Programme

Day I

Keynote Address: Expanding Public Choices and Market Opportunities

Technical Session I: Public sector governance

Technical Session II: Sub-national governance

Technical Session III: Inclusive Growth

Policy Dialogue I: Creating investment environment

Policy Dialogue II: Devolving opportunities – reaching to people

Day II

Technical Session IV: Technology in Public Sector Governance

Technical Session V: Entrepreneurial eco-system

Technical Session VI: Contemporary policy issues in South Asia

Policy Dialogue III: Sustainable development goal- Where is South Asia

Policy Dialogue IV: Governance reform

Plenary: Expanding opportunities: Integrating South Asia

Key dates

Submission of abstract: 15 April 2019

Selection of abstract: 30 April 2019

Submission of full paper: 30 May 2019

Conference date: 4-5 July 2019

Information for submission of abstracts and papers

All Abstracts and full paper submission, inquiries should be directed to conference@nasc.org.np with subject line

For abstracts – ‘Abstracts_full name_country_theme’

For full papers – ‘Paper_full name_country_theme’

For general inquiries - ‘Inquiry_full name_country’

The conference secretariat will make responses within three days.

Guidelines for writing abstracts and full papers will be made available in www.nasc.org.np/conference

Conference Venue

Nepal Administrative Staff College, Jawalakhel, Lalitpur, Nepal

Conference Secretariat

Nepal Administrative Staff College
Centre for Research and Development

Organizers



BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), Bangladesh

<http://bigd.bracu.ac.bd>

BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), BRAC University is a center of excellence in post-graduate education and policy research, as well as advocacy based on rigorous research. BIGD conducts multidisciplinary research under the four clusters namely, economic growth and development; policy, democracy and governance; gender studies and social justice; and urbanization, environment, and climate change. On the academic side, BIGD offers four Master's degree programs in Development Studies, Governance and Development, Procurement and Supply Management (MPSM).



Institute for Social and Environmental Transition (ISET) Nepal

<http://isetnepal.org.np/>

ISET-Nepal was established in 2001 as a non-governmental and not-for-profit organization to study and analyze developmental issues of rapidly changing social and environmental context that demand new insights into the emerging challenges to manage resources for sustainable development. ISET-Nepal envisions a society capable of addressing the emerging social and environmental challenges through the improved local institutional capacity to respond flexibly using innovative approaches and sustainable solutions as new issues arise.



Institute of Public Enterprises (IPE), India

<http://ipeindia.org>

Established in 1964, the Institute of Public Enterprise (IPE) was established as an autonomous non-profit society with the objective of furthering studies, research and consultancy in Management Sciences. IPE is devoted to systematic and sustained study of issues relevant to the formulation, implementation, review, monitoring, and assessment of policies and programs concerning public enterprises.



Nepal Administrative Staff College (NASC)

<http://nasc.org.np>

Nepal Administrative Staff College (NASC) is a national institution for the capacity development of government officials. For more than three decades, NASC has been involved in capacity building of administrators, development managers, and public service providers through various training programmes, management development programmes, research works and consulting services. NASC is also preparing to run academic programmes in public policy, development management, and governance.



Niti Foundation

<http://nitifoundation.org>

Niti Foundation is a Nepali non-profit organization engaged in strengthening Nepal's policy process through research, innovations, and alternatives. Niti Foundation's goal is to promote the engagement of Nepalis in the policy-making process and the reformation of Nepal's policymaking process into one that is democratic, responsive, informed and evidence-based.



North South University (NSU), Bangladesh

<http://www.northsouth.edu>

North South University (NSU), the first private university in Bangladesh, was established in 1992. It visions to be and remain a center of excellence in higher education with aim to gain recognition, nationally and globally and attract students, faculty, and staff from all parts of the world. NSU has a regional research and academic center with the partnership of four South Asian universities called Public Policy and Governance (PPG) program. Since the inception, it has drawn the interest of public sector professionals and researchers from Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Bhutan. This program could modestly be claimed as one of the pioneering center in the South Asian region for higher learning and research on policy and governance.



Southasia Institute of Advanced Studies (SIAS)

<http://www.sias-southasia.org/>

Southasia Institute of Advanced Studies (SIAS) was established in 2011 as an indigenous platform for advanced research and scholarly exchange in the South Asia region. It emerges from the pressing need to nurture and promote critical research, scholarship, and teaching in Southasia. It takes an interdisciplinary approach and specializes in advanced studies – research, scholarly publications and seminar series. As an endogenous initiative of the region, it will fill the critical gap in knowledge generation and capacity strengthening by cultivating and promoting more engaged practice of social science in addressing social and environmental challenges.



Think Tank Initiative/IDRC, India

<http://thinktankinitiative.org>

The Think Tank Initiative (TTI) is dedicated to strengthening the capacity of independent policy research institutions in the developing world. Launched in 2008 and managed by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC). TTI currently provides 43 think tanks in 20 countries with core, non-earmarked funding. This support allows the institutions to attract, retain and build local talent, develop an independent research program, and invest in public outreach to ensure that research results inform and influence national and regional policy debates.

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[1] Public Policy and Governance in South Asia is an annual conference series organized by Nepal Administrative Staff College in partnership with research and development organizations in Nepal and South Asia. This conference provides the unique platform to communicate new studies, exchange issues, ideas, and experiences, and explore collaboration opportunities in the field of public policies and governance in the region.