Protecting the Space for Policy Research:
Comparing Think Tanks and Universities in South Asia

Geof Wood[1], October 2014

[1] Emeritus Professor of International Development, University of Bath, UK; Visiting Fellow, Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), Islamabad, Pakistan.

1

Contents

Acronyms

DFID	Department for International Development
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IGS	Institute of Governance Studies
JNU	Jawaharlal Nehru University
LUMS	Lahore University of Management Sciences
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
PIDE	Pakistan Institute of Development Economics
SDPI	Sustainable Development Policy Institute
RAE	Research Assessment Exercise
REF	Research Excellence Framework
TTI	Think Tank Initiative
VfM	Value for Money

Acknowledgments

Introduction

The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) supports a funded Think Tank Initiative (TTI) programme in South Asia as well as other parts of the globe,[2] drawing upon a consortium of donor sources. Its aim is to promote independent research of relevance and use in the policy process across a number of development themes. However, think tanks do not represent the entire policy related research community, with universities and profit and not-for-profit agencies also being part of the landscape, in fact non-government organisations (NGOs) are prominent in South Asia, and many of them contain research wings partly focussed internally upon their own programmes with a motive to promote their best practice and learning into the wider society. Perhaps the most famous example of such an NGO is BRAC in Bangladesh, which has developed research institutes and now has a university too. (Indeed one of the institutions included in the TTI, the Institute of Governance Studies (IGS), is nested within the BRAC family of institutions in Bangladesh). IGS has now been merged with BRAC into the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD). This proliferation of other institutions in the landscape raises some definitional questions about what a think-tank is and how these different institutions work within the ambit of an often volatile social and political environment which (among other factors) threatens their independence and sometimes their existence. The many ramifications of the fragility of these institutions and the reasons behind the numerous threats to their existence are discussed in detail in this chapter.

There is a broad consensus with Abelson (2009) that think tanks are non-profit, non-partisan organisations engaged in the study of public policy, which organise and transform issues and ideas into policy debates. Perhaps the USA is where such think tanks emerged most clearly from the mid-1950s as non-governmental, not for profit research organisations with substantial organisational autonomy from the government and from societal interests such as firms, interest groups and political parties (McGann and Weaver 2011). Although 'non'-government with an eye to autonomy, government sources of funding can be compatible with such a definition,[3] depending on charter and especially if other sources of funding are also available.

However, although the function of think tanks can be understood as apolitical in the sense of not being aligned to political parties, while also being political by intervening in public policy and the principles of state-led resource allocation, there are contemporary threats to impartiality in Western countries with a more recent trend towards politically aligned think tanks

---

[2] That is: Africa and Latin America
[3] As is the case most clearly in India

— e.g. the Adam Smith Institute or the equally right wing Institute of Economic Affairs in London. So far, this obvious alignment is gradually appearing in South Asia (e.g. the oldest example is the Institute of Policy Studies in Islamabad, set up by a Jamaat-e-Islami Senator during General Zia's era in 1979; the Jinnah Institute in Islamabad, set up by a former Minister of Pakistan People's Party; and Institute of Policy Reforms, Lahore, set up by a PML-Q former Minister). It is a trend to watch for. Clearly political parties, whether in or out of government, have needs for research and analysis, which reflects their broad ideological stance. But obviously the outputs of such aligned think tanks have problems of credibility, objectivity and thus legitimacy in wider civil society.

Universities with policy research agendas whether through normal departmental research or though deliberately created institutes, centres and units essentially share some of the definitional characteristics of think tanks. And of course, public universities receive government funds but under strict charter conditions to protect their academic freedom and thus enable them to be also considered as part of civil society. They are GONGOs in effect. A small subset of high quality private universities have spawned think-tanks, not only through breakaway 'star' individuals, but also formally within their own institutions. But these are few and far between.

Both sets of institutions struggle continuously to protect their autonomy and space for independent thinking. This is a strong finding and theme for this study of relationships between these two sets of institutions. However, there is also a core difference between them in that think tanks are purposively created to engage with public policy, whereas universities have the option whether to do so or not, and many subject areas and staff do not and consider it inappropriate to do so. Universities globally also appear to be at some kind of crossroads. As publicly funded institutions (until the recent private sector initiatives in higher education across all the major countries in the region) there is an increasing 'relevance' and 'value for money' agenda. The UK seems to be leading, globally, on this (see below). The trend both brings universities more deliberately into the public policy domain while also having implications for their independence and autonomy.

This element of fluidity in the mission of universities opens up a new set of opportunities within them for independent, critical public policy oriented research in addition to separately instituted think tanks. And if we acknowledge that in the past many think tanks were created by public service oriented academics frustrated by the traditions and constraints of bureaucratically organised universities, then the prospect of universities themselves becoming more flexible and agile as organisations, opening themselves more to public engagement as part of their

6

identity and mission, starts to remove the incentives for setting up separate institutions outside the university. For IDRC with a commitment to support independent, critical, public policy oriented research in developing countries, this further entry of universities into such research and policy advocacy opens up a process in parallel to think tanks per se, and thus opens up at least three possibilities;

a) Modifying the TTI program to include strategic support for such universities (or more likely particular departments and specialist units within them);

b) Developing a separate parallel program of direct strategic support to universities beyond more ad hoc provision for scholarships and so on (there are some examples outside the South Asia region);
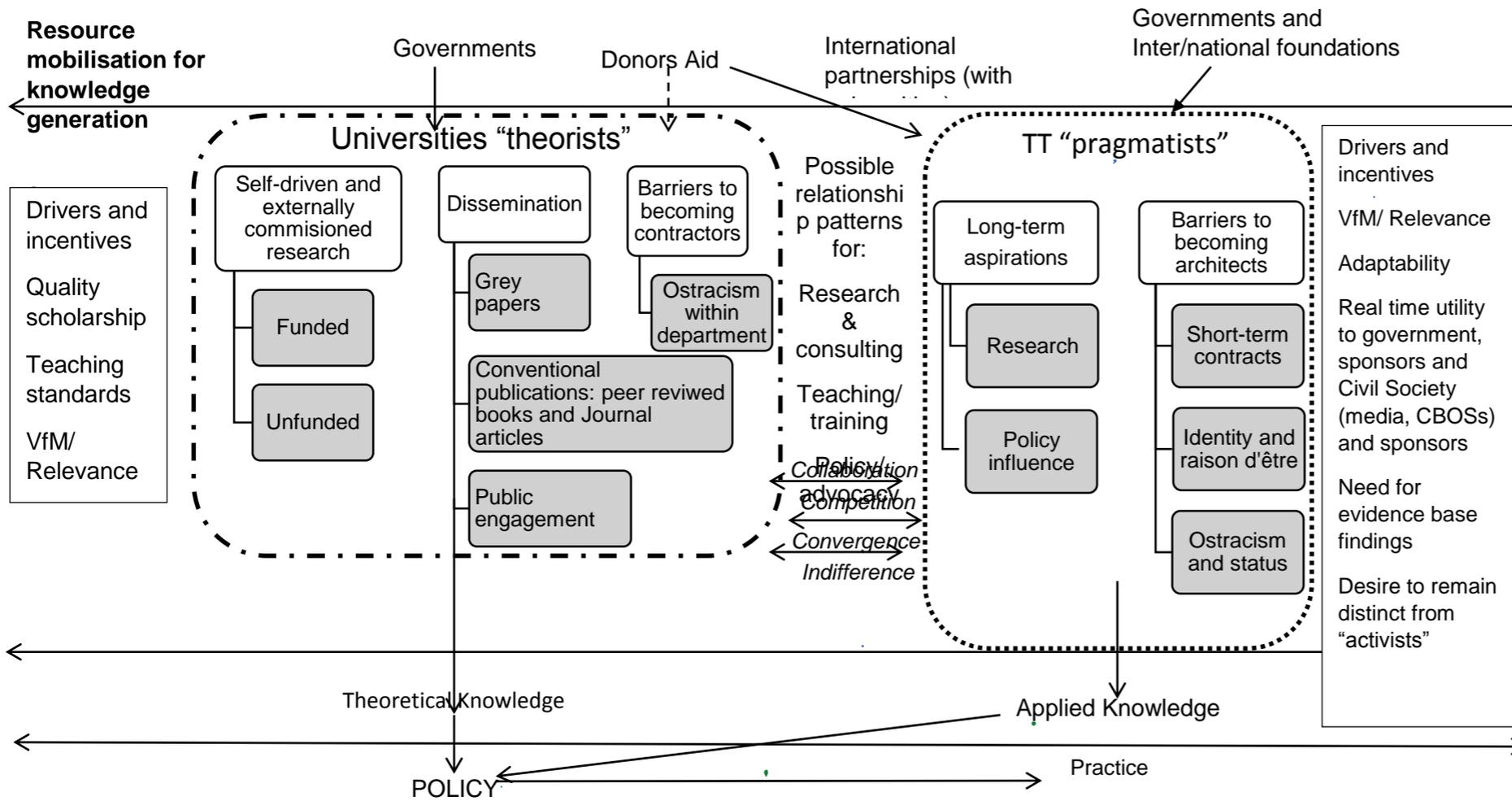
or

c) Promoting TT-Universities collaborations, especially through which both types of institutions may complement each other, within the existing TTI program.

This synthesis paper is prepared as part of the IDRC funded study on Relations between Universities and Think Tanks in South Asia: Exploring Effectiveness and Impact. It draws upon three country studies from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. In conducting this study, we see this evolving context as the rationale for exploring the relationships between universities and think tanks, in order to understand better the options for such strategic support either through an amended TTI window or in a separate newly developed program focussed upon universities. Clearly, there is also an issue of avoiding doing harm to present relationships in either of these strategic options, hence the need for this exercise. There is no presumption on our part that IDRC itself seeks to enlarge its commitments, but it certainly has a first stage interest in understanding the terrain on which it already stands through the TTI.

A. Initial Conceptual Framework

The diagram below tries to capture our point of departure for this overarching analysis and the country studies, the rationale of which follows thereafter. The diagram can be read in different ways, but the design is intended to place the two sets of institutional actors in the centre of the picture, with their resource mobilisation options located above them; their respective drivers and incentives alongside them; their outputs nested within a description of each set of actors with respect to whether research commissioned or self-determined; forms of dissemination; theoretical and applied or pragmatic orientation; adaptability to demand side timelines and the effect of all this on outcomes at the bottom of the picture in terms of forms of knowledge and direction of links to policy and practice.

Within the picture, major categories of potential relationship are indicated: collaboration, competition and convergence. We should also allow for a fourth possibility: namely indifference. This will be refined as the argument proceeds below. However, we note here that these categories have been adapted from Adil Najam's work (Najam 2002) on the relations between civil society and the state, and since our problematic falls within civil society/state problematic, it seemed appropriate to adapt the '3 Cs' approach to our framework. With the fourth category of indifference, we are thus modifying Adil Najam's approach. As an auto-critique, these categories permit only observable relationships, though we realise that other more hidden layers exist in a more ethnographical, political economy mode of enquiry—only partially enabled here.

Resource mobilisation for knowledge generation

Governments

Donors Aid

International partnerships (with

Governments and Inter/national foundations

Universities "theorists"

TT "pragmatists"

Drivers and incentives

Quality scholarship

Teaching standards

VfM/ Relevance

Self-driven and externally commisioned research

Funded

Unfunded

Dissemination

Grey papers

Conventional publications: peer reviwed books and Journal articles

Public engagement

Barriers to becoming contractors

Ostracism within department

Possible relationship patterns for:

Research & consulting

Teaching/ training

Policy/
Collaboration
advocacy
Competition

Convergence

Indifference

Long-term aspirations

Research

Policy influence

Barriers to becoming architects

Short-term contracts

Identity and raison d'être

Ostracism and status

Drivers and incentives

VfM/ Relevance

Adaptability

Real time utility to government, sponsors and Civil Society (media, CBOSs) and sponsors

Need for evidence base findings

Desire to remain distinct from "activists"

Theoretical Knowledge

Applied Knowledge

POLICY

Practice

Outputs

Outcomes

9

Rationale for Initial Framework: Theorists and Pragmatists

Based upon previous work in Pakistan, landscaping research policy outlets (Wood 2013), Naveed and Wood concluded with a core analysis of the autonomy issue between 'suppliers' of research and the sponsors of it. Having found that external donors were major funders of more immediate, applied research, with very specific agendas together with some interference in the 'academic freedom' of those commissioned to deliver research analysis and reports, we could identify the 'recipient of restricted funds' dilemma. Most of our informants in Pakistan agree that this core dilemma exists. To be set against that commissioned recipient role, we can deploy the antonym term 'core grant beneficiaries' to capture the more autonomous research processes—supplier rather than demand driven, with researchers more able to retain a mission of independent enquiry and analysis, in other words "flexible". In the previous work, we argued that even the higher reputation think tanks, heavily reliant upon external, short-term sponsorship, continuously struggled to achieve this academic flexibility, since they were continuously threatened by the funding environment, as well as the desire to connect to public policy in a recognisably relevant way.

In this landscape, we can identify university based research outlets which guarded their "flexible" status but usually at the price of remaining outside the intimacy of the policy process, and outside the framework for short-term, externally funded research,[4] especially from donors. This picture leads us, heuristically, to construct these two ideal types or metaphors: 'universities as theorists' and 'think tanks as pragmatists',[5] as the basis for the conceptual model above. This offers us the possibility of a contrasting hypothesis for understanding the respective positions of these two sets of institutions, though we understand and expected that actual reality would be far more complicated and murky. And while we saw a stronger fit between this model and the situations in Pakistan and Bangladesh, we expected the situation in India to deviate further from this model—partly due to the weaker profile of external donors in the knowledge society, and partly the longer traditions of government engagement with the higher education sector, the availability of foundation and private sector support for think tank functions, and a much stronger profile for the social sciences, which has frequently produced 'star' academics, with both national and international reputations, straddling the academic and

---

[4] At least at organisational level if not at the individual faculty level.
[5] Here we are not trying to coin pragmatists as an antonym to theorist but trying to describe the respective mandate of Universities and Think Tanks.

applied domains as public intellectuals. That has proved to be the case (see concluding model below).[6]

The model above nevertheless reflects a dynamic rather than static comparison of ideal types. In which direction are these two sets of institutions travelling? We have already noted a desire on the part of think tanks to curtail their applied/pragmatic identity and keep alive a more flexible academic dimension. This is partly a reflection of the ethics of founders and staff of think tanks, but also a pragmatic awareness that continuing credibility requires a clear manifestation that their findings and recommendations are based on rigorous academic theory and evidence, thus differentiating themselves from consultancy companies. It is also clear that within the university sector there are tensions and choices regarding the association with immediate problem-solving and policy development in the public sector, as well as towards innovation in the industrial and commercial spheres. How prominent should the immediate test of relevance be? Looking across to the UK, there can now be little doubt that the 'impact' agenda has swept across the university sector, driven by Value for Money (VfM) concerns for tax based public institutional performance. This now reinforced by the 20% weighting on impact in the public research assessment exercises. How far has that agenda emerged in South Asia? Perhaps not so far as in the UK, but the pressures in this direction can be detected—for example in some of the incentivisation offered by the Higher Education Commission in Pakistan. In addition, individual academic staff have choices whether to engage in public policy via their research and writing, and there are attractions for some and disincentives for others. Thus the issue for universities is whether they have institutional incentives, pressures and self-driven desires to move partially towards a role where they can try to bridge their research findings with policy.

This unstable, dynamic element in the identity and functions of these two sets of institutions (i.e. theorist to pragmatist; pragmatist to theorist) helps to inform the types of relationships which can evolve between them—the focus for this study. As indicated above, we have therefore drawn upon and adapted other work (Najam 2002) examining the relationship between civil society and the government to offer potential categories for those relationships: convergence, being the most obvious. But in the process of convergence, does that mean that they start to compete more intensively with each other for the same scarce resources in their common landscape? Alternatively, do they perceive their respective comparative advantage

---

[6] Our Indian colleagues have been wary of overdoing a distinction between theory and applied orientation as it might lead to 'political' misuse by those in India who seek to denigrate the significance of think tanks. But as a metaphor, it has precisely enabled us to distinguish between the picture in India and its more donor dependent neighbours, with shallower public intellectual traditions.

and find ways to collaborate or cooperate with each other, or they still their own niches and remain indifferent to each other's existence?[7]

Clearly these ideal types imply other differences between them in terms of the respective sets of drivers and incentives for function and performance, in terms of the types of knowledge produced, how it is disseminated and promulgated, and how quality is assured for continuing reputations and repeat business. These elements are thus also contained in the model above. The analysis across the three countries and in the synthesis below is not a slave to this framework, as other issues intrude in the exploration of effectiveness and impact. At the same time, the model does have the advantage of parsimony and has also been functional in leading us towards key sets of questions about relationships through which to engage with informant representatives from these institutions.

Effectiveness and Impact: Fit for Purpose

Both of these terms 'effectiveness' and 'impact', are a challenge in terms of definition and measurement. Neither precise definition nor measurement is attempted here. To some extent the issue is a 'fit for purpose' one in the connection between the value of research, the quality of evidence and implications for policy on the one hand and the potential 'consumers'[8] of that knowledge (evidence plus analysis) in the public policy sphere on the other. The 'public policy sphere' has to be understood as embracing the voices of atomised people as a core aspect of the democratic process in a rights-based society, alongside their 'articulators' in civil society and layers of public policy leadership across government (i.e. politicians, senior bureaucratic officials, advisors). It must now be clear that a 'fit for purpose' perspective relies intrinsically upon how 'purpose' is conceived, and that universities and think tanks both between them and within each institutional category contest that notion of purpose. With this statement, we are adding another layer of complexity.

Behind the ideal type construction of these two sets of institutions, there is internal and individualised contestation along the theorist-pragmatic continuum. In other words, individual staff members vary in their perspectives and personal missions. Sometimes these perspectives are a function of external objective conditions. We have already referred to UK

---

[7] In order to specify relationships in these terms, the parties to the relationships have to be conceptually and functionally differentiated, as the model outlines. Their respective institutional 'drivers' in the model is an element of this differentiation, alongside their differentiated forms of output as well as our ex hypothesis, metaphorical tag: theorists and pragmatists.

[8] Noting the issue of the capacity to consume.

Universities and the external pressures inducing internal change. Some academics welcome that change and embrace the public service agenda, others consider it a threat to their intrinsic mission. Some will thus be allowed to continue in that vein, while others 'manage' the impact of their purist colleagues' research as well as their own to the wider world. And some subjects, research topics and outputs lend themselves more easily to immediate public policy or commercial/industrial application, while others are several steps back from such impact upon immediate outcomes. New roles and positions have emerged to engage successfully with this public agenda.[9] Such heterogeneity and complexity of response to changing external pressures upon institutional 'purpose' is also obvious in South Asia, with academics hotly disputing 'purpose' and the criteria implied for appointments, promotions, and investments in specialist services to connect research more immediately to policy.

Likewise in think tanks. Some staff, often leaders and managers, perceive the challenges of sustainability and embrace the commissioned/consultancy end of the institutional maintenance options, while others are concerned about contamination and attempt to locate themselves in the 'unrestricted funds' corner of their institution, perhaps incurring the resentment of the more contract oriented (or trapped) colleagues. In other words, within the ideal type distinctions between universities and think tanks, there is an internal heterogeneity of personalised 'micro' missions across the staff profile. This is reflected in the concluding model.

Effectiveness and impact are a function of many other issues discussed below:

- Legitimacy and credibility of the research source.
- The independence of the source from vested interests.
- The perceived relevance of output to needs of the society or interests within it.
- The extent of integration between supplier and consumer in the formation of research agendas.
- The ability to communicate complex analysis to lay audiences.
- The willingness to innovate dissemination strategies.
- Capacity of researcher/policy analysts to engage with the policy community through extensive and continuous dialogue.

A key issue for policy research institutions (whether in universities or think tanks) is the systemic one of:

---

[9] Most obviously improved PR and Communications departments, and whole realm of social media – linked in; twitter etc.

- Identification of themes leading to precise topics for investigation.

- Devising appropriate tools which deliver credible and useful outputs.

- Tracking the efficacy of those outputs into outcomes.

- Being successfully evaluated on output to outcome performance, when control over outcomes is weak.

In both MIS and external evaluation terms, it is a challenge to research providers if the criteria of judgement goes beyond the 'measurable middle'[10] in that systemic chain—yet the effectiveness and impact judgement often requires that.

Governance: Accountability and Informed Policy

The agenda of effectiveness and impact, the production of quality research to inform or improve rational policymaking through independent analysis, has to be located in a broader set of governance challenges for South Asia. These are societies where the internal mechanisms for the assessment of policy choices in relation to the interests of vast sections of their populations are generally weak. There are two strata of society: the privileged few who have more chances to get heard in policy making and implementation; and a majority facing widespread poverty, illiteracy and denial of rights and justice which disconnect such people from the decision processes and planned outcomes which affect their lives. An implication of this disconnect is that power holders can behave with impunity with respect to policy choice, and engage in relatively risk-free rent seeking and corruption to the cost of those so excluded. Knowledge is monopolised and deployed for class and ethnic advantage through the institutional practices of the limited access state (North, Wallis and Weingast 'Violence and Social Orders' 2009), in which opportunities are confined to coalitions of elites, only slowly conceding space for the entry of new categories of recruit to elite privilege. Thus for this study, the governance context is twofold. It is about accountability. But intimately connected, rather than parallel to accountability, is the issue of policy competence which is a manifestation of governance, i.e. how are decisions made within societies and nations; who is involved in these decision-making processes; who has which powers to decide; on which evidence is planning based and how are conflicting views dealt with (Geiser and Suleri, 2010).

---

[10] In other words academic/policy studies may be evaluated on the quality of outputs but it is much more controversial to evaluate such studies in terms of their influence over applied outcomes since there are too many intervening variables beyond the control of the study authors.

People disconnected from the policy process have a right to well-conceived and well-made policy which addresses, inter alia, their own interests as citizens and voters. But where people are unable to realise their own citizenship, then the atomised, disorganised society requires the intermediation of the civil society and its range of actors to act on their behalf to ensure well-made policy and indeed its implementation. While recognising that limits to citizenship are not acceptable in the long run, such intermediation is the ultimate moral basis on which think tanks and universities participate in the policy process and contribute via their expertise to rights and justice. They may also contribute via their accountability roles in reviewing and evaluating implementation and practice. There is always the dilemma that such intermediation is disempowering of ordinary people and thus reproduces the necessity of the intermediating institutions as they become a semi-permanent entity situated between people and the state.

Of course the accountability function in civil society is not confined to universities and think tanks but involves a range of other actors in the media and 'NGO land'. So in addition to finding ways to 'report' to the disconnected, policy oriented research also has to reach out to the media and NGOs, not just to sitting governments, or governments in waiting (i.e. opposition parties). And we can remind ourselves that such intermediating institutions do become semi-permanent in societies with advanced literacy and educational indicators, but with continuing low levels of citizenship participation such as the UK and USA, inter alia. Some of this permanence also stems from a division of labour in which niches of expertise relieve others of the burden of being Prometheus or the lone genius.

Civil and Knowledge Society

Given the governance challenges referred to above, universities and think tanks thus operate at the interface between civil and the knowledge society.[11] They are institutions of the civil society. Although public universities have been significantly funded by the state across South Asia,[12] their charters give them an independence which locates them formally outside of the political domain and thus in the civil society domain. The reality can sometimes be different, with campuses deeply penetrated by competing political parties, as is the case for the public universities in Bangladesh, especially Dhaka University, Patna University in Bihar, India and to some extent Punjab University in Pakistan.

---

[11] Clearly this term is controversial where it under-privileges non-formal, 'indigenous', forms of knowledge derived from experience, practice and cultural mediation. It is deployed here in a restricted sense of science as knowledge.

[12] There has, of course, been a rapid rise of private universities over the last 2 decades which can be seen as more firmly in the civil society domain.

Several interconnected trends have underpinned the concept of 'knowledge society' in the last two to three decades:

- An increasing requirement under expanding democracies to present political and ideological choices as technico-rational ones (Foucault).
- More focus upon the principles and processes of public choice.
- A recognition that greater stakeholder participation in public choice will legitimate outcomes.
- Credibility and legitimation of choice requires grounded, evidence-based policy formulation (or at least the semblance of it).
- The introduction and spread of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has greatly enhanced the accessibility of knowledge and its enhancement through rapid sharing and exchange.
- Isolation of whole societies and classes/pockets within them from global sources of knowledge are reduced.
- The link between evidence, policy and outcomes is now presented as a 'theory of change'.[13]

Clearly conditions across South Asia where the bulk of the world's poor reside present severe challenges to the notion of knowledge society. Sometimes this has been presented as a problem of the digital divide, but the issues go much deeper. Leaving aside the obvious issues of the high incidence of illiteracy, high dropout rates in education, poor quality of education, the restriction of quality educational opportunities to a tiny elite, there is also a core problem of pedagogy in patriarchal, status-conscious societies in which teaching is highly didactic and learning is thus '*guru*' dependent rather than knowledge developing through contestation and dialogue. A true knowledge society is when people can think for themselves and express their arguments without fear across all domains of interaction. Such capacity reflects the distribution of opportunities to access quality education, defined as creative independent learning, which is confined to narrow elites.

Thus emerging knowledge societies in South Asia are a function of the political economies of those societies, reproducing class and caste inequalities, maintaining exclusion and thus enabling the policy process to be dominated by largely unaccountable elites. Some of those elites may be 'renegade' in being driven by pro-poor ethics, but their social position as

---

[13] In which causal linearity is not presumed, see next section.

knowledge leaders continues, de facto, to disempower others. The staff of universities, and think tanks alike share this problem of their inherited and structural position. There have been various attempts in the subcontinent to overcome this structural weakness and the knowledge biases arising from culturally derived didactic pedagogy and class.

Perhaps the most distinctive contribution has been through the principles of action-research, pursued quite deliberately in pre-break up Pakistan. It was a strong feature of rural development in South Asia, starting with the Comilla Academy in East Pakistan from 1959 under Akter Hameed Khan. After the break-up of Pakistan, these advances in action-research were repatriated to West Pakistan by AHK through the Orangi Program in Karachi, and then through AKRSP and thus the later, wider RSP movement, under the leadership of Shoaib Sultan Khan. In this way, there is actually a powerful indigenous tradition within Bangladesh and Pakistan of knowledge management for policy and practice. In India, there have been numerous examples of applied institutions such as the Institute of Rural Management in Ahmedabad or the A.N. Sinha Institute of Social Studies in Patna, Bihar whose work has been close to policy initiatives and the examination of practice through forms of action-research.

Another later attempt to overcome pedagogic and class bias has been through participatory forms of action research and learning associated with Khon Kaen University in Thailand and later, Chambers. The motivations for these approaches are several: certainly the overcoming of biases (Chambers 1983); the need for more rapid policy knowledge even if only satisficing (see below); avoiding the costs of time expensive ethnography; but also the breakdown of distinction and valuation between indigenous and expert knowledge. This was, therefore, a challenge to the more formally organised and pervasive forms of scientific policy knowledge in the universities and, later, think tanks. Biggs and Smith (1997) offered more subtle insight into this indigenous/expert issue, by modifying the usual vertical juxtaposition between them and deploying the notion of epistemic communities to identify alliances between indigenous/expert dyads in opposition to other indigenous/expert dyads. Their context was choices between agricultural technological choices—for example between *deshi* and high 'tech' practices.

Of course aid agencies like the Department for International Development (DFID) have been commissioning research and deploying it for policy purposes, ever since the formation of the Overseas Development Ministry in the UK, led by Castle, in the 1964 Labour Government. Soon after (1966) the Institute of Development Studies was created at Sussex University for this 'research to policy' purpose, alongside the formation of the Overseas Development Institute in London. The late 1990s, especially after the formation of 'DFID' in 1997, saw the increasing professionalization of evidence based policy and development management within

17

DFID. This reflected a growing wider 'value for money' perspective across Whitehall in the UK, especially driven by the Treasury. The VfM was and is primarily focused upon public spending, and could only be realized through extending and formalizing a knowledge management system involving not only primary research but evaluation and monitoring of public spending. The political sensitivity of aid spending, especially after the 2008/9 financial crisis and the introduction of austerity measures, placed DFID in the frontline of VfM.

The government wide VfM perspective in the UK has been increasingly applied to funded research itself. Thus the University wide Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) of 2008 began to introduce impact factors beyond the academic bibliometric ones. As noted above, this trend has continued more strongly into the current 2013 Research Excellence Framework (REF),[14] where a 20% weighting (for scoring) is now applied to impact. This has prompted a burgeoning literature upon the 'research to policy' problem (cf the newly created *Journal of Impact Studies*), which has become an academic field in itself.

Some of this work derives from another long established academic tradition in science studies, including its focus upon the public engagement with science. Initially much of this impact focus has been concentrated upon the supplier end of a 'results chain', through seeking and incentivizing more innovative approaches to dissemination—now an essential requirement of a research grant application, and a basis for scoring/ranking them. In this process, academics have continuously argued that while they can be responsible for outputs (i.e. findings and publications), it is much more difficult for them to be judged by outcomes. In a recent DSA Centres meeting in Oxford (March 2012), a senior official from the DFID Research and Results Division (with similar previous roles elsewhere in Whitehall) acknowledged this problem by referring to the 'measurable middle' in the results chain. (There are reminders of Einstein's famous quote in this position.)

The summary discussion above sets the civil and knowledge society framework within which these studies on South Asia have been located. This framework thus includes the demand side of the 'research to policy' equation: the external drivers upon our twin sets of institutions, as indicated in the opening conceptual framework. It embraces: an understanding of the limits in South Asia to a science based knowledge society; the innovations therefore pursued in the subcontinent to overcome those constraints; and the capacity for defining and identifying policy research agendas, for commissioning, absorbing and using (uptake) within the administrative and political parts of the major South Asian governments, inside and between their ministries.

---

[14] REF is the successor to RAE

18

There are several major and problematic features of this knowledge management landscape that have emerged so far:

- The central but ambiguous role of Planning Commissions.
- The significance of federal structures for breaking up the policy process and 'evidence to policy' links.
- The capacity to absorb and use policy related research within governments.
- The societal valuation bias towards science and technology disciplines in resource allocation to HEIs.
- The bias within the social sciences towards quantitative research (especially econometrics).
- The influential, almost overwhelming, role of donors in Bangladesh and Pakistan (in contrast to India) in commissioning research and thus orienting the scarce talent and resource to their agendas and priorities which may or may not be consistent with sovereign priorities.

Characteristics of the Policy Process: the long loop attribution problem

Knowledge management has become, over the last decade, a major element in policy analysis as part of the rationalist movement towards evidence based policy formulation, the assessment of outcomes through monitoring and evaluation, and the deployment of lessons learned through action-research for ongoing policy development. This is the long loop aspect of knowledge management and the primary focus for this study. The shorter loop refers to MIS, where knowledge management is designed for more immediate implementation purposes and tends to draw upon the in-house capacity of project managers. Long loop knowledge management entails relationships and transactions between relatively independent partners involving 'commissioning, undertaking and uptake'.

It is tempting for the analytic framework of this paper to be simply 'subtractionist', i.e. positing an ideal type relation between research, evidence, policy outcomes and implementation practice and then comparing to that ideal type, 'reality' across South Asia. However, the policy analysis literature has consistently debunked that linear ideal type in favour of a more nuanced, contextualised, circular, and multiple time period process. Thus Clay (1984) observed:

The whole life of policy is a chaos of purposes and accidents. It is not at all a matter of the rational implementation of the so-called decisions through selected strategies.' (Clay and Schaffer 1984).[15]

Elsewhere in Clay and Schaffer (1984), Schaffer and other essays all demonstrated a core proposition that policy and project cycles, together with their respective knowledge assumptions, were organised sequentially and sectorally (in other words compartmentalized), enabling participants to avoid responsibility and accountability for collective outcomes by attributing failure up and down the line, away from their own responsibility point in the process. At each compartmentalized stage, discrete sets of data and argument are deployed.

In an earlier path breaking study, Herbert Simon[16] introduced the notion of 'satisficing' organisational behaviour in which organisations avoided the costs of perfect information by opting for 'enough' information on which to base either rational decisions or establish legitimacy for them. He also recognized that information management played a role in the ongoing policy process through processes of goal recession and goal displacement. Braybrooke and Lindblom (1963)[17] also argued that the policy process occurred through 'disjointed incrementalism', again undermining any idea that the policy process was rational and linear. Wood (1985)[18] inter alia drew attention to the value and ideological biases lying behind the construction of social categories for analysis, thus reminding us that datasets are not sacrosanct but themselves reflective of a priori, and thus ideological, assumptions about significance of what is to be measured. Some recent literature reaffirms the earlier chaos observation without admitting that the process is completely anarchic and random (Room 2011.)[19] However, knowledge management has returned over the last decade in a quasi-rationalist guise (NPM: New Policy Management) with a strong focus upon long loop, evidence based policy cycle management. A central problem of the research to policy link, even assuming, heuristically, a simple, linear results chain, is that attribution and measurement of the impact of research cannot be rigorously assessed.

Initially much of this impact focus has been concentrated upon the supplier end of a 'results chain', through seeking and incentivizing more innovative approaches to dissemination and dialogue. The problem specification is now shifting further towards the additional, though not

---

[15] Clay and Schaffer (eds) Room for Manoeuvre 1984.
[16] H. Simon Administrative Behaviour 1947.
[17] D. Braybrooke and C. Lindblom Strategy of Decision 1963, New York, Free Press.
[18] G. Wood (Ed) Labelling in Development Policy 1985 Sage Publications.
[19] G.J. Room Complexity, Institutions and Public Policy: Agile Decision Making in a Turbulent World 2011, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar.

20

replacement, focus upon the demand side of the results chain. In other words, the uptake issue. Certainly from the 'supplier' and 'doing' side of the equation there is the continuous generic refrain:

- that those in government responsible for policy development and the VfM of actual budget allocations arising from policy initiatives do not meet the 'suppliers' half way for knowledge transfer;
- that sustained dialogue between the users of knowledge and its creators, and thus the knowledge that emerges from that potentially creative interaction, requires engagement on both sides, not just the supplier side;
- that they are constantly being urged to package their research into 'bite size' policy briefs, thus removing the subtleties of analysis;
- that they deliver their conclusions into a black hole;
- that no debate follows their submissions which might lead to more informed, policy led questions;
- that the significance of longer term, theoretically oriented, 'blue sky' research is ignored in favour of narrowly conceived applied, pragmatic research, with immediate, policy relevant outcomes;
- that (until recently at least) applied, pragmatic research is disparaged by more academic, theory-oriented ivory tower bound colleagues.

Referring to the demand issue, the ODI RAPID Briefing paper (2004) 'Bridging Research and Policy in International Development[20] quoted Martin Surr (2002) on policy uptake thus:

policy makers seem to regard "research" as the opposite of "action" rather than the opposite of "ignorance".

A more recent paper (Newman, Fisher and Shaxson 2012)[21] takes issues further into how this central 'demand for research' problematic might be resolved through capacity development initiatives.

These generic concerns about the supplier-demand interface are reflected strongly across the South Asian experience, where there is a near universal refrain that research is not valued by

[20] Derived from J.Court, I.Hovland and J.Young Bridging Research and Policy in International Development: Evidence and the Change Process 2004, ITG Publications.
[21] Newman, Fisher and Shaxson (2012) 'Stimulating Demand for Research Evidence: What Role for Capacity Building' IDS Bulletin Vol.43, No.5 Sept 2012.

government and thus little or no demand for it. This is a strongly shared perception between the majority of our research provider informants as well as among more creative thinkers in government. Universities and think tanks are, however, crucially differentiated with respect to this problem. The weakness of demand represents a severe problem for think tanks as 'research to policy' is their core business, while universities are less dependent upon observable demand as a condition of their institutional sustainability. At the same time, there is country variation. This fracture problem seems to be most acute in Bangladesh and Pakistan, though in both countries the appetite for research based evidence from think tanks is increasing among their Planning Commissions and Ministries of Finance.[22]

B. Barriers to Policy Research: Varied Experience

In understanding the relations between universities and think tanks in the context of effectiveness and impact, we need to compare how they respectively experience barriers both in conducting policy relevant research and advancing that research into the policy domain. Overall this review of barriers reveals common challenges but at the same time indicates broadly that universities enjoy more financial autonomy compared to think tanks, while genuine think tanks are able to retain more political autonomy contrasted to those organisations exclusively reliant upon restricted funds, towards the consultancy and for-profit end of the knowledge supply continuum.

Access to Funds

The lack of access to funds appears to be the largest barrier to the conduct of research faced by think tanks and research active university departments. Apart from internal cross subsidies from teaching to support staff salaries, both sets of institutions lack any core financial support to meet their fixed and recurring costs, including the research personnel costs. While public sector think-tanks[23] and universities receive all their budgets from the government, 'civil society' think tanks are significantly dependent upon the international aid agencies. Being aid dependent (as is the case especially for Bangladesh and Pakistan) entails the high risk of the research agenda driven by the donors. Accessing funds, as highlighted by different

---

[22] For example In Pakistan, Ministry of finance has included many knowledge suppliers in National Economic Advisory Council, likewise, Planning Commission has substantially increased its interaction with the think tanks and universities. In Bangladesh, the Planning Commission has requested a background paper on poverty for the first time as an input into preparation of the 7th FYP.
[23] In India, think-tanks receiving significant government funding may not consider themselves 'public sector' but they are in effect GONGOs.

organisations, often involves a strong culture of informality and networking and at times arbitrariness compromising the competitiveness of the commissioning process. Newly established organisations also faced serious challenges in accessing funds despite having the required human resources and competitively designed projects as they lacked the institutional credentials and history. Moreover, some organisations have also reported that the application timeframes set by donors are sometimes unrealistic and inappropriate with very small time given for preparing the bids. This is especially a challenge for universities, with less agile and responsive procedures in meeting grant conditions.

Unreliable financial inflows results in think tanks especially hiring short term consultants instead of developing their own core research faculties. This affects their ability to enter into competitive bidding as there are huge sunk costs (on human resources) involved in conceptualizing projects and preparing bids, combined with uncertain outcomes of the bidding. Think tanks can be trapped into this cycle of self-perpetuating financial instability due to lack of human resources resulting in weak quality of research proposals, unfavourable funding outcomes and consequently their inability to hire better quality human resources which may affect their research outputs. This challenge is often overcome by recruiting short-term inputs from universities to shore up theory and methodology at the proposal stage, and then during the project itself. There are many such examples of this from the Indian country study. The public sector universities themselves considered the issue of accessing funds to be a lesser problem as the large part of their human resource costs is already covered by government allocations. But this also means that they have less incentive to bid for grants and commissioned opportunities in the first place, thus keeping them further distant from policy relevance and impact.

Human Resource Constraints

Given the overall weakness of social sciences compared to other sciences, the lack of appropriately qualified human resources appears to be a major barrier to doing policy related research, whether theory oriented or pragmatic. Furthermore, policy research is essentially inter-disciplinary and does not fit into academic structures across all countries. This is especially a problem for universities, which are mainly organised into disciplines. The lack of human resources for policy relevant research thus exists at all levels of skills and experience. Fresh graduates continue to lack research capability as they are not receiving that training during their programs. There is an overall shortage of mid-career researchers with the appropriate set of skills. Moreover, the historic process of brain drain has particularly affected

23

the availability of highly qualified personnel, who prefer to stay abroad. There is thus a general lack of senior researchers to mentor the young researchers who are often left on their own. The lack of human resources particularly affects think tanks struggling for financial resources as their trained researchers often move on to the organisations that offer better financial rewards and job security. This high turn-over is particularly evident at the level of junior and mid-career professionals. As a large amount of resources, both time and money is spent on training researchers, the high turnover adds to the recruitment and training costs and often delays in projects alongside affecting the quality of research.

In contrast to the think tanks, the universities, both in public and private sector, seem to be more 'satisfied' with their human resources. The leading private sector universities particularly take pride in the quality resource they employ or the junior researchers they themselves train. Nonetheless, as the universities are only gradually moving from their 'teaching only' role towards appreciating the need for research and policy research,[24] these academically qualified human resources continue to be overly burdened with teaching with less time for research.

Since think tanks, struggling with financial resources, rely upon short-term consultants, their institutional human resource base thus remains weak. The engagement of short-term consultants, at times, results in the conflict of interests as consultants simultaneously work for several organisations. There is also a sense of 'thinning' of human resources as good quality researchers/consultants are approached by multiple organisations, procure multiple assignments simultaneously beyond their capacity in terms of time available, thus compromising the overall quality of their work. Most of the organisations also highlight the insufficiently trained human resources collecting data for the government agencies. As the government's statistical agencies are the only actors collecting, maintaining and disseminating the large-scale data, the weak quality of their human resources greatly affect the quality of data and hence the research.

---

[24] And private universities are clearly behind in this process. For many Indian universities, teaching still remains the major function.

Restricted Access to Data

The lack of needed and reliable secondary data is the third major challenge faced by every research institution. For certain institutions, the secondary data collected by the government agencies does not fulfil their needs. This is particularly a serious concern for those working on the issues of health, nutrition, poverty, and conflict/peace studies. Most institutions, whether universities or think tanks, report that the government data is of poor quality. They also report inconsistencies in the data collected from various sources. Importantly, the panel data, which is of immense value for policy research, is particularly missing in government statistics.

Both universities and think tanks report the difficulties in acquiring the data from the public sector organisations that are mainly responsible for collecting and disseminating the statistics. There is also a strong layer of informality that surrounds an institution's access to data, requiring a strong networking with public officials. Some institutions, such as Lahore University of Management Sciences

(LUMS) in Pakistan, have handled this problem by developing their own database by purchasing all national statistics since 1982. But some institutions often end up collecting primary data to meet their needs.

Security Issues

Poor law and order conditions in many parts of South Asia appear to be one of the major factors constraining research institutions. The security issue interacts with the statistics one. We need to ask the question whether the poor quality of government statistics (as a distinct issue from providing access to what exists) is itself a function of the security problem, thus making primary data collection the only choice for most of the projects given the lack of secondary data on certain issues. Some areas are famously worse than others, especially in Pakistan where the most obviously affected organisations are the ones working on the issues of peace and security itself! In India, there are increasing sensitivities around work with religious and ethnic minorities as well as in collaboration with some of the more critical NGOs especially in relation to energy and infrastructural policy. In Bangladesh, the increasing political polarization between the two major political parties inhibits even-handed research. These are also constraints to long-term qualitative work in addition to short and sharp surveys. Qualitative research with ethnographic or via various PRA and PAL approaches is seriously impeded with 'strangers' as outsiders not safe to spend repeated and extended periods of times in research

locations. And yet for poverty, livelihoods, educational access, gender rights and civil society research, it is precisely the marginalized locations, which require the greatest attention.

Non-evidenced Based Policy Making

Civil society, in its de Tocquevillian sense, is still in its infancy in many parts of South Asia with independent NGOs and think tanks struggling to maintain independence as well as to gain recognition for the value of their arguments in relation to public policy, budget making and accountability. Other aspects of the political society continue to be very strong whether in the religious and sectarian domains or in the agricultural, labour union and professional association domains, including significantly lawyers. Between the main political parties and the military there are also sets of vested interests in different sectors of the economy. Within this highly politicized and sectional context, the place for evidence based policy making is weak. 'Rationality' lies elsewhere within culture, ideology, prejudice (sometimes religious or racial), ethnicities, and patron-client systems. Thus the 'environment' for evidence based policy formulation is weak. It is this context which helps to explain the repeated remarks in our data about the lack of interest by the political and bureaucratic class in using research or sponsoring it for different policy arenas. However, research investments in agriculture, partly driven by export interests but also for domestic subsistence, or in health (medicines, pathology and intervention techniques) appear to be stronger drivers of policy in these sectors than in others. And these sectors in Pakistan and Bangladesh have enjoyed a recent increase in capacity through PhD training, and PhDs returning to their institutions.

Political Neglect

This is a slightly different category of 'barrier' from above, but can be understood as causally connected. Both universities and think tanks appear to share the same problem. It is always important in the societies of South Asia to acknowledge that while there are different sets of institutions across the broad categories of state, market, and civil society, they are socially intertwined with large families, kin and clans stretching across them while recognizing these kinship loyalties. Thus what appears to be separated with intellectual or professional classes in one place and public officials in another, in order for one domain to have influence upon another, is not in fact disconnected at the level of social networking. However, there remains a question whether the leaders and cadres of the main national and regional political parties, along with some religious and populist leaders, populate a parallel universe, significantly divorced from the intellectual and professional ones. Are they socially divorced from the world

of research? Their domain is more conventionally 'feudal'—a function of control over property and people, where constituencies are manipulated and mafia type political management prevails as the norm. These are the systems of rewards and obligations, informal, personal and non-transparent, which have been raised artificially to the apparent status of 'policy'.

This is a further embedded or deep structured context for the neglect of scientific underpinning in policy choice. There is little political respect for an informed basis for policy options, let alone opportunity cost considerations of any initiative. There is mainly no formal or rational 'testing' of policy propositions, which is why the terrain is littered with partially formulated and partially implemented initiatives which are rarely monitored and evaluated, or if they are (perhaps as a function of donor insistence) then results are ignored. Our data constructs policy as much more haphazard and incoherent. Many of our interlocutors with much experience of close encounters with the world of policy making and formal planning report this to us, though some sectors appear to be worse than others especially in the domains of welfare and social protection. There is a degree of arrogance, which does not even require scientific backing to legitimize personalized and ideologically driven policy initiatives. The hurdle even for 'satisficing' information is low. In other words, there are repeated references to a wilful lack of respect for the value of research (evidence and analysis) in the policy process. Higher education policy itself and building scientific capacity is a case in point. Political leaders surrounded by a narrow coterie of acolytes - dream up policy, mainly driven by the need to stay in office and maintain access to rent seeking opportunities through positions on the boards of parastatals and public corporations.

Bureaucratic Resistance to Criticism

Again, as a variant on the above analysis, Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) research (i.e. knowledge deployment rather than knowledge building) is not well received by public sector officials where explicitly or implicitly their performance is being judged. This resistance to criticism (actual or potential) prompts a series of disconnects in the 'project' cycle (or policy cycle) between policy ideas, formulation and design, inception, pilots (if any), full implementation, monitoring, evaluation and project/policy adjustment. These formally discrete steps in a linear and rationalist vision of the policy cycle enable responsibility to be avoided by allocating it elsewhere in the chain, viz: bad concepts, poor design, inadequate information, inaccurate baselines, incompetent implementation and so on. Thus M&E type research is easily co-opted and thereby distorted in this process, with blame deflected and praise absorbed. Unpalatable results are discarded for poor methodology, inadequate sample sizes

and insensitivity to externalities. Either M&E is commissioned and controlled from the outset, or if independent and thus critical, is easily suppressed and marginalized. Think tanks are more exposed than universities to this problem due to their greater proximity to a policy oriented mission and desire to keep their "perceived" political autonomy intact.

Capital Centric Research/Policy Networks

The 'access to funding' category above has already referred to the 'Capital centric' problem, but the issue extends beyond this. Given what we have also reported about the informality of commissioning practices, there are both issues of exclusion from research opportunities as well as the dissemination of findings and analysis into the policy process. Institutions away from Capital centres feel that they are outside relatively closed Capital based networks or interfaces between government and the research community. In the absence of transparent processes of commissioning, their perception is that they are not hearing about possibilities and are not present in receptions and seminars where these things get discussed. This is a mixed blessing in that they protect a degree of independence for the work that they do, while missing out at the same time. This problem extends into the dissemination part of the 'results chain'. Given that knowledge to policy does not simply occur through publications, even if they are 'grey' ones (and this observation applies equally, say, to the UK as it does to South Asia) but is more function of continuous opportunities for dialogue in seminars, workshops, joint exercises and casual assignments, then not physically being part of these networked opportunities in the Capital reduces the potential impact of research completed outside the Capital. Furthermore, the significance of the Capital is reinforced by the presence of donors, which remain significant in the overall flow and volume of funding for development research, and which participate in the forums through which research is both commissioned and listened to.

Institutions in Karachi report that they lose some of their research talent as it drifts towards Islamabad, and the same applies in Bangladesh between Rajshahi or Chittagong in relation to Dhaka. Of course, the 'Capital Centric' issue is complicated in India, and to a lesser extent Pakistan, by having federal constitutions and states or provinces. Thus State and Provincial Capitals represent a 'sub-Capital centric' issue. But it would seem that even though there is some State/Provincial level direct research-policy interface, university and think tank policy research nevertheless remains oriented towards the national capital. In other words, despite forms of decentralisation, the 'metropolitan' bias prevails. In Bangladesh, with its unitary state structure, the Dhaka centric bias is paramount. There is some divergence of experience here,

with think tanks being able to set themselves up in Capitals, closer to the policy action. Universities on the other hand are located and distributed across countries for many other purposes, not least sub-regional identities and student access.

Cultural Sensitivities: Women's Issues

To some extent this heading is a euphemism for gender issues, but also for religious sensibilities as well particularly around issues of secularism, religious minorities and blasphemy. There are barriers to generating research on these issues in the first place, but also on how such research gets done and how it might be disseminated and even acted upon without incurring political upheavals and even direct danger for research personnel. However there is strong diversity between the major countries in South Asia on this issue.

Thus in India, the room for manoeuvre to research and advocate on women's rights issues has long been established, and has brought very impressive intellectual women and educated activists into research on a whole range of gender related issues (e.g. domestic violence, women's inheritance rights, other aspects of family law including rights over children in the event of divorce, mobility, access to public spaces and opportunities). They remain highly relevant topics in India in the context of some recent significant incidents of violence towards women, but there is no fear in confronting them. There are complications in India, requiring some overall conceptual distinction between attributing women's problems to overall patriarchy or to customs and practices associated with different religions.

Bangladesh is not far behind in tackling women's issues head-on in the public arena, despite being mainly a Muslim society.[25] Within the NGOs, the MFIs, as well as donor/government operational programs, there is a strong focus upon directly targeting women so that there are no constraints upon research and policy dialogues about women's issues. This extends significantly into maternal and new born child health. The problems in women's lives remain a core issue in Bangladesh society, but the indicators of improvement are in the right direction (even to the achievement of the related Millennium Development Goals and that reflects a current openness across government and civil society to this agenda.

---

[25] There continues to be acute contestation on this issue in Bangladesh, with the present Awami League government determined to maintain a secular approach to gender, while its opposition including violent terrorism seems intent on applying more conservative attitudes to women.

By contrast, the challenges for a functional research-policy interface on women's issues in Pakistan are extensive. It is known that some geographical areas of Pakistan are very conservative, especially with respect to gender issues and secularism. Despite the presence in Pakistan of impressive female intellectuals and activists research into gender issues is difficult to promote and certainly difficult to gain sponsorship from within Pakistan's own institutions and sources. Thus such work is often disproportionately sponsored by donors and NGOs (themselves donor funded), and hence not owned from the outset by relevant government departments and political leaders. But layered into this problem are the barriers to women actually doing research in these controversial topics and, correlatively, in the more conservative, female repressive parts of the country like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Baluchistan, Southern Punjab. These constraints upon female researchers are relaxed in less controversial topics with universal application, like medicine (outside of reproductive rights and sexual health), agriculture, macro-economics and so on.

Cultural Sensitivities: Ethnicity and Religion

Again the variation across the subcontinent is significant. In developmental terms, practices associated with some groups and religions are seen as more conducive to progress in livelihoods (including for women) than others. Also, given the significance of identity politics in the context of extreme inequalities (i.e. horizontal as well as vertical), there are major issues of conflict and thus peace/law and order and conflict/dispute resolution. These issues are therefore, in principle, high on the policy agenda of all the countries in the South Asia region. At the same time, these 'histories' are highly politicised narratives and thus 'relative' rather than 'absolute', with different institutions identified and aligned with different positions. There is also a geo-political aspect to these narratives, with national projections disguising internal contestation. These issues are of central importance to the framing of public policy in the South Asia region.

Without going into more detail on the issues per se, many of these issues require lengthy, qualitative approaches to research to get beyond the rhetoric into some real understanding of the drivers of these fissiparous tendencies. But such research is rarely publicly commissioned, and donors are wary of moving into this fraught domain. These issues, and the problems of researching them, are more acute in Pakistan and India, than in Bangladesh where internal ethnic variation is less (though there are, nevertheless, issues regarding the rights and wellbeing of Hindu and Adhivasi minorities). In many ways, these policy issues ought to lend themselves more to long term university based treatment rather than the more instant

expectations from commissioning think tanks. But universities are keen to avoid controversy, while sometimes the really independent think tanks are prepared to open up debates, while others, more dependent upon restricted funding, prefer to avoid these crucial areas of concern.

Donor Volatility

Given the significance of donor sources of funding for policy research, especially in Bangladesh and Pakistan, think tanks report difficulties in their interactions with donors. This is less of a problem for universities across the region, as their links with donors are weaker or non-significant, and less of an issue in India with its low dependence upon donors anyway. This is more likely concentrated more at the M&E, Baseline Studies, project/program related part of the research landscape rather than more fundamental research. There are several concerns: instability in agendas; short deadlines for proposals with little prior warning; changing agreed research targets while work is in progress, often adding dimensions (whether sample sizes or topics); in co-funded commissioned work, different reporting expectations between donors. These issues all amount to a certain volatility which undermines the ability of research institutions to plan their timetables and plan for capacity to undertake commissions. Some institutions are turning away from research/M&E invitations because of the disruption this volatility causes.

Certainly, the hand-to-mouth aspects of this nexus have implications for human resource capacity as noted above. With this uncertainty of work flow, institutions have difficulty in retaining good long-term staff. While they chase other more lucrative opportunities, institutions have to rely upon less proven short-term consultant staff with variability in quality outcomes as a result. Thus reputations are not stable, affecting the ability to attract repeat work, which would give them more stability and reliable capacity. Another feature of this problem, noted above, is that the context of uncertainty leads individual consultants to over-commit and moonlight, again undermining deadlines and quality. These issues do not have the same intensity in India, where the role of donor funding for research is less significant. The question there is whether the government sponsored policy and program related research and M&E replicates the same problematic relations of volatility and interference as donors in the neighbouring countries. Think tanks are especially exposed to this volatility, needing to display *loyalty*, whereas universities have the option to *exit*, or at least be far more selective in their engagement with such grant sources. They also have far less flexibility to respond to the speed of the commissioning process.

C. Respective Missions: Universities and TTs

While recognising that much of the interaction between these two sets of institutions occurs in a relatively unplanned ad hoc, personalised way via individuals which results in an actual blurring of functions and outputs, in their ideal type form, these institutions have different if not entirely contrasting missions. Employed individuals in either institutional type therefore have to reference their respective missions even if their own behaviour deviates from it. This prospect of deviation is more a problem for university than think tank staff. The intention below is not to produce some composite list or consensus of respective archetypical missions. Reader and writer alike are sufficiently familiar with the broad characteristics of each ideal type, which are represented in the opening model. Rather we discuss some of the finer aspects of these missions as they impinge upon real institutional performance and relationships.

In referring to universities first, we are acknowledging a chronology of breakaway think tanks, with academics or academically oriented individuals removing themselves from the core mission of a university. Thus often, think tanks begin from a **particular** set of drivers operating on individual motives and incentives and then take on a more **universal**, institutional form resembling peer institutions, and they soon start experiencing similar constraints and opportunities as their peers. In addition to this trend, some think tanks have not been created by their staff, but as deliberate government policy like Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies and Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) and then staffed with academics or academically trained professionals. (PIDE has now turned itself into a university). The early core mission for universities in the subcontinent was teaching in higher education, entailing a staff of scholars probably with research backgrounds (e.g. as evidenced through PhDs) and engaged in continuing scholarship and the writing of learned papers. In short, there is a commitment to knowledge building. Note that, at least in the more public policy related disciplines like economics, political science, public administration, sociology, anthropology, management, the core mission did not emphasise ongoing primary research requiring scales of funding beyond the salaries and incidental expenses in an academic's contract. In other words, the emphasis was upon teaching and scholarship rather than funded research projects.[26] In the public policy social sciences, 'research' comprised theory development based upon secondary sources and the primary research of postgraduate students, plus nationally

---

[26] Of course, other disciplines less immediately connected to public policy in the sciences and engineering do require larger scale funding from the respective research councils to support laboratories, equipment and materials for experimental work plus research assistance.

32

available datasets.[27] Clearly in the subcontinent published output in peer reviewed quality journals or books with prestigious publishers is increasingly displacing 'seniority through length of service' in promotions. So research in the public policy disciplines is not missing from the core mission of universities, but it remains more in the domain of 'scholarship with theory' rather than empirical analysis focussed upon policy choice-hence our theorist-pragmatist distinction. The rationale for 'scholarship with theory' has been a combination of reputation enhancement for individual and institutional purposes, and for enhancing the value of teaching in the classroom.

Restless, public service oriented academics, seeking more direct and immediate engagement with contemporary challenges of development amid widespread poverty, need to persuade both immediate colleagues and the managers of their institutions that their 'contract' should in effect be altered to permit more time away from continuous availability to students or colleagues in favour of protected, primary research as well as to permit the import of external funds to pursue that research without being frustrated by internal bureaucratic, over-elaborate audit procedures. In attempting to renegotiate their 'contracts' away from a theorist to pragmatic role whether formally or informally, such staff have often encountered the hostility and sometimes jealousy of their colleagues for such deviant and potentially internally threatening behaviour by changing the rules and the expectations of performance.

Some universities have institutionally adjusted to their public policy oriented academics, or strong external demands for the services of such academics, by re-working their missions and purpose and creating a conducive atmosphere for such outreach research and promulgation/advocacy. Probably the strongest example of this in the subcontinent is Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in Delhi, with a strong public profile for its economists, political economists, political scientists and even anthropologists, and an increasing formation of thematic centres on its own campus. These high profile public academics have nevertheless managed to retain their theoretical academic credibility. Dhaka University had this reputation in the past, but with the invasion of political party factional interests across the student body and now staff, that reputation is fading.[28] In Pakistan, the candidates for that adjustment would be Quaid-i-Azam University in Islamabad, which has offered sabbaticals and teaching relief,[29]

---

[27] This scenario incidentally still describes the profile of most academic economists in the top UK University departments.

[28] However, Dhaka University appears to be adjusting its mission through the formation of policy relevant institutes on its own campus. See the case study in the Bangladesh country paper of this series.

[29] Though teaching pressures are growing with the development of undergraduate programmes on top of its original postgraduate focus, and some staff report the jealousies or hostilities of colleagues to their outreach work with government or other agencies.

and LUMS in Lahore. This process of institutional adjustment can continue beyond just 'accommodating individuals' into the creation of institutes, centre and units that begin to resemble 'think tanks on the campus' as in Dhaka University in Bangladesh, or LUMS and Beaconhouse universities in Pakistan. Historically where universities have failed to adjust their missions and procedures, staff are faced with the option of moonlighting outside or setting up their own think tanks and 'going independent'. This is how many think tanks have been created in the subcontinent, especially in India.

Thus the missions of think tanks, where they have not been created by governments, have evolved as part of a critique of the limitations of universities to engage in public policy which requires a deployment of knowledge rather than knowledge building per se. Clearly a core concern is independence and thus a retention of the principle of academic freedom. Within a more linear positivist scientific framework, they are committed to follow the evidence and let the data make the argument, irrespective of prejudice and ideological signals from sitting governments. Actually the issue is more complicated where the evidence arises from more constructivist epistemology as is the case for the stronger qualitative research. This requires a defence of perspectives and guiding value positions and thus requires a return to theory as a defence of autonomy. In other words, think tanks, in contrast to consulting companies, cannot really divorce themselves from academic preoccupations. But the difference with universities is that theory; theory development and the advancement of the discipline is not the primary objective; rather the deployment of theory is a tool for another purpose—to make credible forms and selections of data.

Implicit in much of the work of respectable think tanks is a theory of change. For some think tanks, this may be an institution wide perspective—the brand or unique selling point. Thus the Centre for Policy Dialogue in Dhaka has always taken a neo-Marxist, political economy perspective as the basis for number crunching and interpreting large datasets about the economy, with an enduring focus upon poverty and inequality rather than economic growth. Furthermore, much of its output, similar to JNU, occurs within a heterodox economics perspective as an implicit critique of neo-classical orthodoxy. This means that its outputs comprise discursive narratives, eclectic sources of data, thick descriptions and interpretation of qualitative material. Other think tanks are more prepared to accept the premises of orthodox economics and focus more upon incentives and signals rather than the institutional aspects of transactions and market imperfections. Clearly some think tanks adopt a more neo-liberal perspective, while others see the case for a strong interplay between state and the economy. Thus some are for de-regulation, while others are for regulation.

In addition to these core academic roots and epistemological variations, the think tank mission requires compatible behaviour from its staff. Of course there can be a behavioural division of labour between the quiet, shy backroom researcher and the ebullient, even extrovert public performer. But while universities can survive only with the former, think tanks cannot survive without the latter. Having the capacity/ability to package and project research findings and complex arguments in the public arena with effect is a <u>sine qua non</u> for a successful think tank. They cannot really rely upon passive dissemination as in the university. Knowledge to policy demands continuous dialogue and political skills in choosing favourable conjunctures to advance significant arguments, or more opportunistic seizure of passing moments and chances.

This analysis points to elements of differentiation and convergence between the two sets of institutions. A core formal difference is between the intellectual *advancement* of a discipline (pure theory) and the pragmatic *deployment* of theory and scholarship in order to engage with contemporary real life problems (applied). The convergence is that, assuming a level of high or at least competent intellectual quality, both sets of staff need to display appropriately professional levels of scholarship and theoretical awareness albeit for different purposes. Additionally, more think tank staff are likely to be more methodologically up to date, since this is a demand from commissioning sponsors if evidence and argument are to inform policy choice, resource allocation and have a determining influence on outcomes in a more immediate results chain than for pure research. However, key academic staff in universities may have been the pioneers of that methodological advance as part of their disciplinary focus and theory development.

Hard and Soft Structures

Above we have referred to the problem of over-elaborate bureaucratic procedures within universities acting as a depressor upon institutional innovation towards a more applied, public policy stance for staff so inclined. More generally between universities and think tanks there is a contrast in organisational structure and attitude to deliver output under pressure of time and resource. Universities are large organisations, in India especially, sometimes with thousands of students, hundreds of staff and large campuses with significant infrastructure to manage. Managing such scale requires systems, and especially so when rights and entitlements are high on staff agendas. Equity has to be managed. Though 'bureaucratic procedures' are an easy target for criticism and ridicule, they can be essential for efficiency and dispute avoidance. Of course, if such procedures become cumbersome and obstructive (even rent seeking) then

they will certainly act as a depressor upon innovation and creativity. Procedural rationality then displaces substantive rationality. And of course, bureaucratic structures can be like amoebas, rapidly expanding into the spaces of other activity. We have all encountered the university managers whose first instinct is to say 'no, not possible' instead of 'let's see what I can do'. These become *hard* structures—rigid and inflexible. It is difficult for sub-groups of staff whether in campus institutes, centres or units to avoid and isolate themselves from the prevailing sets of rules about conduct of business, especially in finance and human resource management, but also increasingly over the wide brief of quality assurance. This definitely acts as a structural constraint upon universities setting up quasi think tanks within their own institutions. If exceptions are made on procedure, then precedents are set and the whole edifice of management is threatened.

Think tanks are usually tiny institutions by comparison. And like many small firms, they tend especially not to have elaborated HR procedures. Consultancy companies especially have appalling equal opportunities records. But think tanks too are under pressure to get jobs done quickly, requiring a cutting of corners on process. Staff or consultants are hired on short term contracts, sometimes even without formal contracts, just verbal agreements. Across South Asia such informal hires occur frequently, reflecting an element of patronage as well as personalised knowledge of individuals and their capacities. In other words, there is rarely open advertisement and formal competitive recruitment. Such practices enable agility and quick responses. Indeed sponsors commissioning such work often export these assignments to overcome their own internal bureaucratic procedures of doing it in-house. Financial arrangements hopefully have probity, but again short-cuts and special arrangements occur to fit particular circumstances of hiring enable agility and speed of response and delivery. In other words, substantive rationality trumps procedural effort and is geared towards delivery to the customer. Of course there are downsides to such *soft* structures and informality in terms of staff protection and equity. Indeed a lack of transparency may be essential to manage such diversity and variability in contractual arrangements. Certainly this is how many think tanks start up, and how they enter the market. As they become more established and larger, and perhaps more secure in their sustainability then their procedures become more codified. But, the struggle to retain flexibility is always present.

These contrasts of institutional form affect the differentiation/convergence variable. The contrast certainly inhibits the prospects of institutional level collaboration with an incompatibility between financial, HR and quality assurance rules of business and conduct. Consortium arrangements are difficult to set up and manage. And any convergence in practices and style means that each institutional type loses its comparative advantage for its own core mission.

This institutional incompatibility between hard and soft management regimes helps to explain why the interaction between universities and think tanks tends to be individual rather than institutional and usually uni-directional for public policy research activity—i.e. individuals from universities coming into the more relaxed less codified institutional environment of the think tank for particular assignments. But we have plenty of evidence of the reverse direction, where think tank staff enter universities for particular teaching assignments, often precisely because they bring an applied, real life experience to students offering forms of knowledge not easily available in the textbooks and journal papers. Thus universities, especially of course the private ones, have become adept at making contractual arrangements for these purposes. So, there is room for manoeuvre to facilitate staff mobility on a casual, short term basis for specific research or teaching assignments. This is mutually advantageous and all three country studies have strong evidence to this effect, and is strongly described in the India country study.

Quality Maintenance: Mutual Agenda?

We referred above to 'quality assurance'. This can refer to a range of institutional issues from the status of the policy sciences in the society and thus receptivity to their forms of analysis and argument and hence the impact they have on policy outcomes and practice; as well as the quality of research referenced to the accepted standards in the respective disciplines and the judgements of commissioning sponsors. These issues embrace the interests of both sets of institutions and to some extent stimulate relations between them.

The public policy sciences share a problem in the subcontinent. In comparison with other academic disciplines in the sciences, medicine and engineering, the social sciences remain the poor cousin. To some extent, quantitative economics escapes a general criticism that the methodologies of the other social sciences, especially when qualitative, are not robust so that their findings and analysis often cannot be generalised and at worst are just a matter of opinion. However, quantitative economics can be vulnerable to the Einstein quip that not everything measurable is worth measuring, and it also suffers from the criticism that ex-ante classification within datasets remains arbitrary and theory or prejudice driven. So there is a collective problem of convincing the potential users of policy analysis that they are reading or engaging with quality and verified data, findings and analysis. Evidence, in other words can easily be dismissed if there is a predisposition to do so due to other pressures on any decision making process.[30] Demonstrating quality and replicability is a core challenge for the policy sciences

---

[30] The Research and Evidence Division within UK DFID has increasingly turned towards the sponsorship of positivist, numerical research with a reliance upon RCTs.

beyond the confines of academic peer judgements from within disciplines, where there is naturally a greater self-interested consensus. The problem is persuading sceptical others.

In this challenge, think tanks with their shorter time horizons and deadlines for conducting, completing and delivering applied research, are particularly exposed. This is certainly an incentive to associate their outputs with respected academics and academic institutions in the relevant field. This occurs in a variety of ways: actual short-term contracts to design and oversee a project; participation on an advisory committee to guide the work; peer review of early drafts before submission to sponsors. For think tanks, this is a strategy of co-operation, another key relationship category[31]. It supports the credibility of findings and research outputs and legitimates the think tank as an institution which can recruit the best available expertise to its portfolio of activity. Such co-option includes the preparation of jointly authored publications, preferably in peer reviewed journals (international if possible), which further establishes the academic kudos of the institution, and further extends the significance of its outputs beyond the immediate purposes of the sponsor.

The think tank gains further credibility through the association of its staff with quality universities by offering courses, more likely to postgraduates. This reinforces the academic credentials of think tank staff, while connecting university teaching to real world problems and acting as role models to students who may be seeking careers in the public policy arena, including those think tanks. Indeed such connections often lead to internships for sitting students and university graduates, where they can contribute research assistance in various forms—fieldwork, data management, number crunching and so on. This enhances the employability of graduates which becomes a reputational indicator for the university department, enabling it to attract good students in the future.[32]

The above paragraphs may be criticised for offering an over-cynical tone about the motivations for co-option being a PR exercise. But there is a more positive, collaborative dimension to these linkages. Since most think tanks are small by comparison to universities while nevertheless needing to have a profile of staff thinly spread upon different sectors and disciplines to maintain a position in the market, they need to be able to recruit expertise from outside in order to populate a particular project for a finite period. So a think tank needs fluidity in its staff profile and is helped by its interaction with universities, though usually through individuals rather than formal institutional Memorandum of Understandings. Those individuals are in effect moonlighting, but across the region it is so normal for the well qualified individuals

---

[31] Famously analysed by Philip Selznick in 'TVA and the Grassroots'.
[32] The University of Bath in the UK is high in the UK league tables because it scores on employment indicators which derive from its placement programmes.

to be in demand elsewhere than their own 'primary' institution, that such movement or multi-institutional tasking is condoned and accepted. It is also a way of preserving salary structures by allowing individuals to supplement their earnings from outside.[33] So perhaps 'rotation' is a better description than 'moonlighting'.

How does this structural point about needs for fluidity in staffing a changing profile of projects through a combination of permanent in-house staff and rotating short-term external university based staff connected to the issue of quality? The external expertise can contribute contextual scholarship, theoretical constructs, conceptual frameworks, methodological design and guidance over fieldwork or other forms of data collection, and then engage with the analysis and interpretation of findings, and even take responsibility for report completion. In return, apart from fees, such involvement adds to the research profile of the academic by having access to funded opportunities not so easily available in the university through formal, peer reviewed grant applications, which often fail. Gaining such an enhanced research profile, especially when the work can be converted into peer reviewed publications, assists promotion.

Thus, at least for individual staff in universities, there is a mutual agenda between themselves and think tanks in these rotating, short term 'consultancy' opportunities. Can and should these collaborative and co-optive relationships be taken up from the individual to the institutional level? The danger for think tanks is that they would lose this essential flexibility by dealing with known individuals and have to thread their way through university bureaucracy. The issue for universities is whether under evolving pressures of relevance, impact and VfM, they can afford this 'leakage' of staff, or whether they should create in-house think tanks, with more 'business oriented' sets of management rules in order to improve their own institutional reputations and capacity to participate in the public policy market and thus diversify and enhance their external income flows? If public universities remain cushioned through government core grants for teaching and scholarship, then incentives to add to or diversify income are weak. But if those conditions change, as they have done in other parts of the world, then they would have to adapt. For private universities, such a business approach comes more easily, though has to be traded off against their high fee teaching missions.

Universities in any pursuit to find access to policy corridors try to have the members of leading think tanks on their advisory boards, syndicates, and in their adjunct faculty. This is a strong finding from the India country study.

---

[33] That happens in many universities globally through consultancy, though some disciplines are more in demand than others.

Under the pressure of offering degrees and courses in emerging themes such as "sustainable development", "climate change", "public policy and governance" , "peace and conflict studies, etc., many universities the South Asia have relied on the transdisciplinary skills present among the researchers of TTs. Thus the latter are approached not only for module developments but also in delivering lectures.

We also see universities partnering with TTs for policy outreach and advocacy on certain research findings, especially for media coverage of their research findings. This is an area where TTs have their niche.

This range of institutional and individual transactions between universities and think tanks driven strongly by quality, independence and relevance objectives have been reported in the country studies in terms of a typology of think tank needs: governance; programs of work in specialist themes or across a more flexible range; and specific research and consultancy projects. These main types are expressed through:

- **Cooption**: board trustee memberships.
- **Cooption and collaboration**: participating in program advisory committees.
- **Collaboration**: hands-on involvement (usually with honorariums and fees) in proposal design, intellectual project leadership, methodology construction, oversight of data gathering, analysis of data and writing of reports for client submission and perhaps scholarly publications.

Conditions for 'Thinking' in Public Policy

Some of our key informants, as leaders of the more significant think tanks in South Asia, have raised the issue about an over broad application of the term 'think-tank' to research organisations interlinked to the policy process. They are concerned to distinguish their profile, mission and niche from a plethora of institutions trading under the 'think-tank' title. Basically they are saying that our analysis should not just be looking at the relationships between think tanks and universities, but also the distinction between genuine think tanks and the large number of essentially consultancy organisations which act as contractors for commissioned work, with offering fundamental, critical thinking. Certainly in earlier work on the 'research to policy' landscape in Pakistan (Wood 2013), this contrast was very clear. It refers, of course, to the issue of unrestricted funds for policy relevant research. But the contrast often reflects mission drift in the hard world of resource mobilisation for research, where initial hopes for

producing independent, critical work are undermined by the need to accept and search for commissioned contracts which increasingly circumscribe the research both theoretically and methodologically. Thus, what are the conditions for thinking in public policy, and can 'think tanks' maintain that stance, or will we only find that critical autonomy in the universities?

In this complex landscape of the relation between knowledge, information and public policy generated through research and advocacy, there is a core problem with the connotations offered by the term 'think tank'. If we understand the term 'tank' to refer to a bounded organisation designed for a specific purpose of engagement with public policy, often with a more specific disciplinary, sectoral or thematic identity to indicate a niche or unique selling point (usp), then we can be misled. Most entities describing themselves as think tanks may have started with specific, differentiated missions as in India, but then develop highly porous boundaries, through a turnover of staff as well as rotating staff between themselves and other institutions, and unstable missions which continuously metamorphose. Such fluidity is an indicator of weak control over their own missions and originally conceived purpose as their sustainability depends upon remaining attractive to demands for their services from governments, donors and civil society, demands which are constantly changing in response to volatile policy ideas and political environments. The required agility to some extent confronts the above metaphor of 'tank'.

However, if we think more in terms of a tank being a place of storage of expertise and talent, with a standing availability and pragmatic capacity to 'think, analyse and recommend' in relation to contemporary policy issues, then its mission is defined less in terms of thematic specialism. Thus fluidity of staff can be compatible with control over a mission defined in terms of 'agile capacity to engage'. So there is some tension between the two interacting concepts about mission.

In our exploration of effectiveness and impact, we have often been told that the term 'think' when applied to institutions with that tag is a misnomer; that a firmer distinction should be made between think tanks and consultancy companies; and that institutions calling themselves think tanks, if ever they truly were, experience goal displacement or goal recession as their survival requires dependence upon specific commissions for their expertise and thus 'consultancy services' to serve the policy choice and operational program needs either of government or donors. Thus any original 'supplier' mission to be reflective, strategic and at one remove from immediate tactical demands quickly becomes undermined and by default drifts, especially in resource constrained environments. As indicated before, most 'think tanks' struggle with this

problem of goal displacement.[34]/[35] At the same time, others would emphasise the contrast between the sustained maintenance of 'in-house' knowledge on a sub-set of policy themes (i.e. a think tank) and temporary 'freelance' expertise brought together by a consultant company for a specific and finite assignment. And the former would have a longer term commitment to advocacy in relation to that expertise.

The significance of this overall analysis is to point out that the structural imperatives surrounding think tanks set the conditions for an independent capacity to 'think'- in other words to set agendas, initiate potentially transformative discourses, search for new types of evidence and thus build rather than deploy knowledge.

Having made this general observation, it seems clear that, again, there is nuanced variance between Bangladesh and Pakistan on the one hand and India on the other. The threats to thinking are stronger in Bangladesh and Pakistan, probably due to the much higher resource dependency upon donors and program/project driven lines of enquiry alongside non-functional democracy. The military interruptions, repeated martial laws, and political instability have eroded (and are still eroding) not only tolerance in the society but also the culture to agree on having a disagreement in an amicable manner. The extreme behaviours shown in many parts of South Asia are "if you are not my friend you are my enemy" and this further limits the space of independent thinking. This trend may be appearing now in India too.

So where does any insulation occur? Clearly the core grant strategy of IDRC contributes to this insulation, offering space to stay on mission. Another source of insulation can be attributed to the process of initial formation of a think tank, and this is where the variation between Bangladesh/Pakistan and India occurs. When a think tank is created by very well-known persons with high individual reputations, then to a significant extent those individual reputations (as long as they last) function to protect the institution from undue external influence over their missions and priorities. The challenge to independence then occurs when the organisation has to transit from founders to a more institutionalised existence and staff without the same name-recognition and ability to offer mission protection. This transit problem can be observed in several of the key think tanks supported by the IDRC-TTI in South Asia: Centre for Policy

---

[34] Even one of the original development think tanks, the Institute of Development Studies at Sussex University, founded in 1966, has struggled with this problem, especially after its funding was projectised during the Thatcher era. Its internal room for manoeuvre to be reflexive through longer term thinking is constantly challenged by a pressure to engage with new, externally conceived, agendas and modes of knowledge (e.g.RCTs). INTRAC in Oxford has a similar challenge. The constant refrain and pursuit is for 'unrestricted funds' to retain core mission.
[35] The IDRC TTI is designed to provide sufficient resource to offset the fragmenting pressures on TTs, and for them to retain thinking independence.

Dialogue and IGS (now BIGD in Bangladesh); Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) and Social Policy and Development Centre in Pakistan, alongside the Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre (outside the TTI). Some of these institutions recover well after founder departure and maintain their reputations for critical independent thinking akin to universities. Others do not and drift towards contractor status, entirely reliant upon demand driven commissions with accompanying constraints.

However, again India offers a divergent narrative. While there are numerous consultant companies in India providing technical, applied services in the public policy domain, genuine think tanks have retained their critical, reflective independent missions usually by staying closer to their university origins and roots. The country study confirms this. Famous names in politics and economics established think tanks in the last 4 decades (sometimes with their own names on the title) such as Rajani Kothari, K.N.Raj and V.K.R.V. Rao. These and others had high personal name recognition for their academic prowess and autonomy which they were able to offer to their institutions, even if they were heavily dependent upon government resources directly or via the Universities in which they were located, such as V.K.R.V. Rao's Institute for Economic Growth. This 'tradition' has been maintained through examples such as IIDS and significantly in JNU, as well as other key institutions outside Delhi such as in West Bengal (Kolkata), Kerala (Trivandrum) and Karnataka (Bengaluru-Bangalore). The India study elaborates more examples.

This longer history of think tank formation in India, through these personalised origins, alongside a much smaller external donor presence, has established a contrasting tradition and culture of independent thinking to the more recent processes in Bangladesh and Pakistan, which are anyway much more donor dependent and with government policy itself much more sensitive to donor pressures and conditionalities.

This freedom or space to 'think' and the threats to that space in the real world opens up a number of issues about the knowledge society and the university/think tank nexus. The heuristic contrast, in our opening conceptual model, between theorist and pragmatist institutions was intended to indicate a continuum between supply driven knowledge and demand driven information, with a starting assumption that universities were more the former and think tanks more the latter. But our exploration indicates a more complicated picture and the need to conclude with an amended model. What are the elements of this amendment?

D. Conclusion: Knowledge Building and Knowledge Deployment

From the three country studies, we are concluding with the following core propositions:

- Think tanks in their *ideal type* status are to be distinguished from the more obvious contractor consultancy services.

- The *ideal types* of university and think tanks are both towards a theorist or 'architect' [36] end of the continuum with independence and high autonomy.

- Ground realities can push many *purported* think tanks (i.e. those without unrestricted funding) towards the 'contractor' end of the continuum, i.e. a loss of independence, autonomy and the space or time to think. They become incorporated into the agendas of their commissioning sponsors. This applies far more to think tanks in Bangladesh and Pakistan than in India, though the potential 'threats' to autonomy will always be present.

- The core distinction then becomes between knowledge building (university and genuine think tank mission) and knowledge deployment (goal displaced TT mission).

- Individuals in universities join that shift towards contractor status as they participate in institutions experiencing goal displacement and goal recession lending both quality and legitimation in the process.

- Staff from goal displaced think tanks seek relationships with universities to indicate an ongoing commitment to knowledge building, with some reputational wash-back to their think tanks to reinforce the original 'thinking' mission.

- With think tanks so potentially undermined in striving for a reflective, knowledge building thinking role, and with universities increasingly either being judged or seeking to be judged by their societal value and impact, will knowledge building for public policy become re-located within universities?[37]

- Under such arrangements, independence is supported by internal cross subsidies from other income earning streams. In that sense, could this development signal the demise

---

[36] The term 'architect' is introduced here to contrast with the notion of 'contractor', more associated with consultancy functions, reliant more exclusively upon restricted funds for commissioned work. Some think tanks, especially in the more donor dominated contexts of Bangladesh and Pakistan, where the bulk of policy research is funded by donors, are continuously vulnerable to losing their architect status under these financial and thus sustainability pressures. (See Wood 2013)

[37] For a UK example of this trend, the University of Bath is responding to the impact/VfM agenda by setting up on campus interdisciplinary institutes. The recent formation of the Institute for Policy Research (see website) is a case in point. Many UK universities are doing the same, for example the Brooks World Poverty Institute at Manchester University, if it can be sustained beyond its original endowment.

of the free standing think tank, with universities retaining a comparative advantage in knowledge building, but more calibrated to public policy agendas? Dhaka University and JNU in Delhi have been moving this direction, despite in the Dhaka case the continuing problem of partisan politics on the campus.

- Would such a development reconcile autonomy with relevance, instead of a presumption that there is a trade-off between them? In other words, there has been the assumption that with universities keeping close to their knowledge building, developing the discipline, function, they have enjoyed academic freedom and thus independence but at the expense of public policy relevance. But if they are uniquely placed through internal cross subsidies to retain independence while directly addressing public policy issues with theoretically driven evidence and recommendation, then they have squared the circle.[38]

- Where would such a development leave present think tanks? What options would they face? It seems to be a 180' choice. The present daily pressures of sustainability push them towards the commissioned, consultancy profile with a consequent loss of politico-academic autonomy, fragmented mission and credibility for objective, reflective and critical discourse. In order to recover those losses, and without the guarantees of IDRC type unrestricted funding designed to shore up independence, it could be attractive to move towards inclusion within universities, while seeking more flexible business management models as a quid pro quo. Thus instead of collaboration or convergence, we might see mergers (such as MHDC and LUMS in Pakistan).

- There is another categorical option: for think tanks eager to retain their core mission of 'thinking' to diversify their sources of funding, especially appealing to the corporate social responsibility windows of large private sector corporations such as banks and industry sponsored foundations. Think tanks can be likened to newspapers in this respect. Essentially independent think tanks need endowments. This phenomenon seems to be happening in India, but yet to do so in Bangladesh and Pakistan.

It is difficult to represent all of these core propositions in a comprehensible model because of the variation in interaction between institutions and the individuals within them. Essentially the model below tries to capture the respective primary missions of universities and genuine think tanks, associating them with knowledge building (theorist and pragmatist) and with the higher end of a politico-academic autonomy axis. Thus the vertical autonomy axis offers a contrast between high autonomy, supply driven research (our 'architect' metaphor) and low autonomy

---

[38] The projectisation of funding to IDS at Sussex in the UK brought into play a range of UK universities with academic interests in development studies, and has thus brought them more strongly into the public policy agenda.

demand driven or 'contractor' status. The horizontal axis refers to core mission or purpose, offering a contrast between academic and policy purpose. There is a further dimension of complexity in making the distinction between knowledge building (above the purpose line implying greater autonomy) and knowledge deployment (below the purpose line indicating less autonomy). This enables us to distinguish between a more holistic and reflective academic role for the major public universities with strong academic reputations for originality and 'blue sky' enquiry contrasted to many (but not all, and this may change) private universities which presently remain primarily focussed upon high quality teaching in selective subjects, attractive to high fee paying students/parents and thus meeting more commercial objectives.
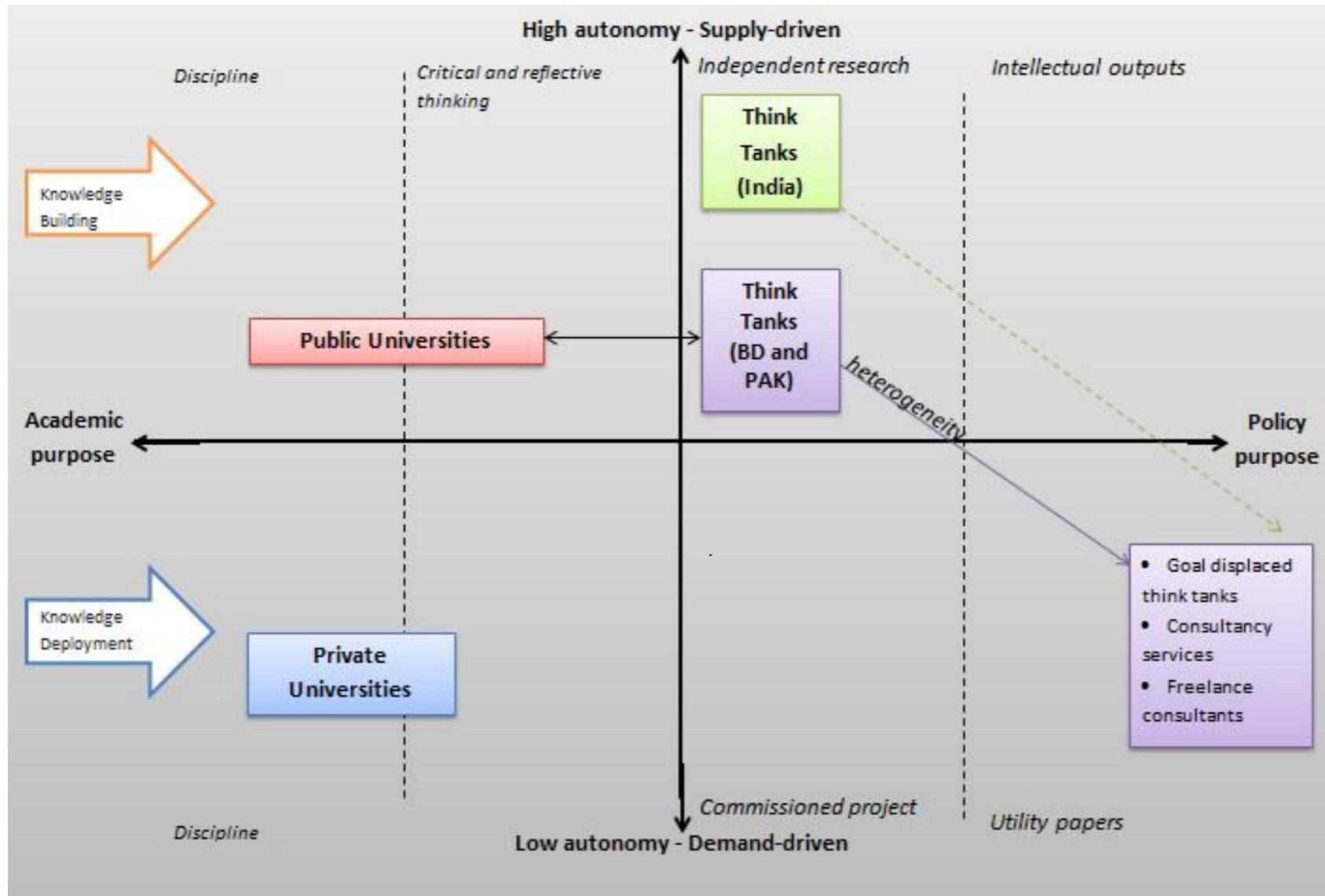
Placing public universities as a category above the line may not be fully accurate, but it places them in the high autonomy/academic purpose space devoted to knowledge building with actual or potential capacity to shift into the high autonomy, policy purpose space and thus **compete** with genuine, rather than goal displaced think tanks. In other words, public universities with long established reputations are starting to create their own on-campus think tanks. In effect they begin to straddle the top two quadrants, adding policy to their academic purpose.

Meanwhile, 'genuine thinking' tanks, with a policy purpose, struggle to retain an independent research status in the high autonomy quadrant due to the sustainability pressures upon them and are vulnerable to moving from knowledge building towards knowledge deployment as they engage with policy through more commissioned research, and towards the production of utility papers rather than intellectual output. This potential, goal displacing shift, is thus diagonal, bringing them near to another competition with consultancy companies and freelance consultants who have no aspirations but to accept commissioned research to produce utility papers.

The institutional options outlined above are not quite so stark, because the brittleness of institutional positions is relaxed by the choices and movements of individuals between these institutions as outlined above in the paper. This movement is primarily from public universities towards think tanks to strengthen their credibility and legitimacy by adding theory, methods and quality analysis. Such movement helps the think tank to remain independent and 'genuine', inhibiting a diagonal shift into knowledge deployment and only utility papers quadrant. (A secondary movement for university staff is directly into the diagonally opposite, bottom right hand quadrant to consultancy companies for specific short term assignments, or themselves acting as freelance consultants.) Any 'autonomy maintenance function' for think tanks from inward movement from universities is reinforced by individuals from think tanks offering teaching services (usually postgraduate) to the universities—both public and private. So there

is export and import movement. There are other movements of less interest to the theme of the paper, between public and private universities for example for teaching purposes.

A further complication is that heterogeneity is not restricted to public universities adding policy to their academic purpose. Think tanks have opened up in two directions while trying to retain a core identity within the autonomy/independent research/policy purpose quadrant (i.e. top right). First, and more significantly, they attempt to ride both the architect and contractor horses by having a portfolio mix of independent research and pure commissioned consultancy. SDPI in Pakistan is an example. Secondly, some think tanks like IGS/BIGD in Bangladesh have for some time developed Masters programs in governance thus opening up a teaching window. This, of course, requires university affiliations to validate degree awarding.

High autonomy - Supply-driven

Independent research   *Intellectual outputs*

Discipline   *Critical and reflective thinking*

Knowledge Building

Think Tanks (India)

Public Universities   Think Tanks (BD and PAK)

heterogeneity

Academic purpose   **Policy purpose**

Knowledge Deployment

Private Universities

- Goal displaced think tanks
- Consultancy services
- Freelance consultants

Commissioned project   *Utility papers*

Discipline

Low autonomy - Demand-driven

48

This dynamic model enables us to highlight the key concluding argument, while differentiating on the one hand between the Bangladesh and Pakistan contexts which have strong similarities, and on the other India, where the story is subtly different, partly due to a greater depth of academic infrastructure in the country, the reduced significance of donor commissioning, and the higher significance of unconditional core government funding from various sources. The following points summarise the main conclusions.

- Are think tanks in danger of losing their genuine thinking or 'architect' status and becoming 'contractors'—commercialisation of knowledge? The starkness of that choice is weakened by the observation that institutions are heterogeneous.
- Owing to specific missions, funding profile, name recognition of founders and access to quality inputs from universities, TTs in India appear to be less exposed to such threats, and able to maintain more autonomous, independent knowledge building for public policy.
- In Bangladesh and Pakistan, the threats are higher due to wider missions, quality, funding profiles and thus goals can be displaced, moving towards knowledge deployment and less autonomy.
- When TTs have strong internal human resource capacity, they interact less with universities.
- Universities are increasingly interested in occupying the classic, knowledge building for public policy, think tank space through on-campus TT initiatives.
- Universities can offer sustainability for independent policy research through more secure, long range funding, offering internal cross subsidies to their Centres and TTs—driven by a shift in public expectations of the relevance, value for money and policy impact of publicly funded institutions and their research orientation.
- Private universities, qua institutions, are too recent to enter this arena, remaining preoccupied with teaching, although individuals move into other roles.

The three accompanying country studies of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh intend to provide an overview of the institutional environment within which universities and think tanks can pursue a public policy agenda and raise questions about how global ideas about the place of research in the policy process has altered public and governmental expectations of output and performance.

As is reflected through the studies, in the region, the role of donors in this process is more direct and influential in Bangladesh and Pakistan than in India for reasons of scale and degree

of institutional development and domestically generated capacity in policy research. Thus donors, where they are significant, bring additional expectations and performance demands usually derived from 'drivers' in their own domestic policy setting. The institutional environment for the pursuit of independent policy research also comprises a set of barriers both to the doing of research as well as the promulgation of it, but these barriers are not experienced in the same way. The responsibility for a successful transition from output to outcome not only lies with the provider or supplier of policy research but also the demand side. This invites the question whether the demand side is thereby equipped to interact with evidence and analysis and have it inform and shape policy given the other, separate, drivers on the policy process such as ideological, calculations of political survival, short-term crisis management crowding out long-term planning, and so on.

We hope that a common platform of issues has been created on which to identify the key relationship concerns and their implications for each sector in the evolving knowledge society in the three countries. It is envisaged that the studies will shed light on their individual set of challenges and limitations as well as the opportunities that can be found within the context of their unique social and political environments.

References

Abelson D.E. (ed.) (2009) Do think tanks matter? Assessing the impact of public policy institutes   Montreal. McGill: Queen's University Press.

Biggs S.D. and G.Smith (1997) 'Contending Coalitions in agricultural research and development: Challenges for Planning and Management' Knowledge and Policy: The International Journal of Knowledge Transfer and Utilisation Vol 10, No.4, Pages 80-92.

Braybrooke D. and C. Lindblom (1963) Strategy of Decision New York: Free Press.

Chambers R. (1983) Rural Development: Putting the Last First. Longman:UK.

Clay E. and B.Schaffer (Eds) (1984) Room for Manoeuvre.

Court J., I.Hoyland and J.Young (2004) Bridging Research and Policy in International Development Evidence and the Change Process ITG Publications.

Geiser U., and Suleri A.Q., (2010) Floods in Pakistan: Socio-political and ' techno-nature' challenges – a first glance. NCCR, Switzerland (http://www.north-south.ch/publications/Infosystem/On-line%20Dokumente/Upload/Pakistan_flood-challenges.pdf).

McGann and Weaver (eds.) (2011) Think Tanks and Civil Societies: Catalysts for Ideas and Action.

Najam, A. (2002) 4 Cs of NGO-Government Relations: Complementarity, Confrontation, Cooperation and Co-option, LEAD Occasional Papers: Pakistan.

Newman, Fisher and Shaxson (2012) 'Stimulating Demand for Research Evidence: What Role for Capacity Building' IDS Bulletin Vol.43, No.5 September 2012.

North D. Wallis and Weingast (2009) Violence and Social Orders. Connecticut: Yale University Press.

Room G.J. (2011) Complexity, Institutions and Public Policy: Agile Decision Making in a Turbulent World. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Simon H. (1947) Administrative Behaviour. New York: The Free Press.

Wood G. (1985) 'The Politics of Development Policy Labelling' in Wood G. Ed Labelling In Development Policy. London:Sage Publications.

Wood G. (2013) Architects and Contractors- Political Economy Analysis of Policy Research in Pakistan. Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) Islamabad, Paper 1. (Also DFID R4D website).