

Welcome and Introductory Remarks

I extend a warm Welcome to all of you for the 3rd Regional Meeting of the South Asian Think Tank Initiative cohort – all the heads of the 15 co-grantees of the TTI in South Asia and their respective colleagues, our special invitees, representatives of the donor agencies and the IDRC officials present... etc.

The 3rd Regional Meeting in Sri Lanka follows the inauguration of the TTI in South Asia in New Delhi in October 2010 followed by the first Regional Meeting at Neemrana, in the State of Rajasthan, India. The 2nd Regional Meeting was held in Mysore, India, in March 2012, leading up to the TTI Exchange in Cape Town, South Africa, in June 2012. These events have provided a unique opportunity for the Initiative's funded institutions in South Asia to share knowledge, practices and experiences related to being successful policy research organizations.

Much still remains to be learnt and shared amongst us. The TTI funded institutions in the South Asian region comprise a diverse set of organizations that vary in size, financing, structure and scope of activity. However, they share a common objective of trying to help governments and make civil society understand and make more informed choices about issues of domestic and international policy concerns. Over the last 2 ½ years of implementation, the Think Tank Initiative has become an important partner in meeting these aspirations. The multi-donor

programme offers us all a unique opportunity to benefit from medium-term unconditional core grant funding, aimed at strengthening policy research organizations across developing countries. The three pillars of support around which the TTI is designed – research quality, organizational development, and policy outreach – have offered each institution the flexibility to develop its own objectives and related activities, dependent on its own goals and aspirations. This level of ownership over the programme, is a much valued component of the overall TTI design.

For us as Think Tanks, the key objective is to promote the use of research evidence for policy making. In South Asia, this is not always an easy task. The role played by Think Tanks and the impact they can generate is strongly influenced by the economic, political and institutional context in which these organizations operate. In South Asia, many Think Tanks operate in volatile economic and political contexts, with few institutionalized channels to get research evidence in to the policy process. In such contexts, it is not uncommon to find that policy agendas are fairly undefined and are subject to frequent change, making it more difficult for Think Tanks to engage in public policy debates.

Besides such exogeneous factors, a host of endogenous factors also determine how successful or not Think Tanks are in generating policy influence. These include their organizational characteristics, their mission definitions, their governance structures, sources of funding, research management and the types of research they produce; their human

resources and ability to recruit and retain leading scholars and analysts; as well as the quality and reliability of the organization's networks. Think Tanks in South Asia, like many of our counterparts in the developing world face considerable challenges in many of these areas.

As we pass the mid-way mark of the four-year phase of TTI funding, this 3rd Regional Meeting is indeed a unique opportunity to take a step-back and reflect on the changes and challenges we have faced, what we can do better during the remainder of this phase of funding, and how we can sustain the positive changes that have been made so far. From our own institutional perspective, TTI funding has made a difference to the IPS, strengthening our independence and autonomy. We have invested in new financial management and human resource systems; ventured into new areas of research; strengthened existing mechanisms to monitor our research activities, output and policy impact; adopted new tools for our dissemination strategies; and provided networking and training opportunities, particularly through better links with our national universities engaged in economic research.

Similarly, I am sure that my co-directors have their own experiences of the TTI journey so far. We consider this Regional Meeting an opportune moment to share the best practices and experiences, the successes and failures, and undoubtedly, the challenges that lie ahead of us. The institutions that formed the Steering Committee to develop the Concept Note for this Regional Meeting clearly expressed a desire to continue the

conversations that we had already begun in Nimrana and Mysore. The TTI Regional Meeting was considered a unique forum for heads of the South Asian Think Tanks to explore institutional development issues, as opposed to the many occasions at which we meet, and take up purely research-related questions at various conferences and seminars. Issues of how to raise the quality of work we do, how to raise the policy impact of our work, how to improve the running of our organizations, and how best to use TTI funding to support these objectives are clearly recurring themes of interest amongst us.

As you will see from the Agenda for the meeting, all these elements are built in – a “Stock Taking of the TTI” so far; a discussion on “Is there Life after TTI?”; the “Challenges that Young Think Tanks Face” and lessons that older institutions hold for them; how we grapple with “Building Research Traditions” in our organizations; and going beyond, how we manage the “Interface between Research and Policymaking”, and how we make that “Last Mile Link through Policy Advocacy”. Indeed, we also ask the important question, “if there were no Think Tanks, will there be a Difference in Policymaking?”. The last session in the agenda, will tackle the next step – that is, if there is to be a second phase of TTI funding, what should be its contours? As you can see, the Agenda is comprehensive, and we hope that it will engage and provoke all of us to actively participate in the discussions over the next 2 ½ days.

I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of the IPS to express our sincere appreciation and thanks to a successful collaborative effort leading up to this meeting. Our co-grantees across the region have been involved from the outset, either as members of the Steering Committee or as Session Champions. We would like in particular to express our heartfelt thanks to Shekhar Shah from NCAER, Anshu Bharadwaj from CSTEP, Ajaya Dixit from ISET, Jeemol Unni from IRMA, Raghavan Suresh from PAC, Deb Bhattacharya from CPD, Nidhi Sabharwal from IIDS, and Rajeev Bhargava from CSDS for the leadership they took in championing sessions and pulling an interesting agenda together. Our sincere thanks also to Samar Verma and Kaveri Gill from IDRC for being on hand at all times to facilitate and help this process along. Indeed, leading up to this meeting, the networking and collaboration among the TTI funded institutions in South Asia has been a very good example of the objectives underpinning the Think Tank Initiative.

As you can see from the programme, this evening we will have a Senior Minister of Sri Lanka speaking on “How Economic Policies are Made in Sri Lanka” followed by a dinner. On the 15th afternoon, we have arranged a sight-seeing tour in Colombo with two other options for those who would like to do something else. We trust that the networking and collaboration will continue over the next 2 ½ days in these relaxed surroundings of Marawila. An IPS Secretariat staff is on hand to help you with any logistics and other arrangements, etc.

I welcome you once again and trust you will have a rewarding time at this meeting and a pleasant stay in Sri Lanka.

I thank you.