

Independent think tanks and policy process in developing countries

By:

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Introduction

Major question: Should government, political parties or •
business-affiliated think tanks have the monopoly over policy •
advice in developing countries , or in any country for this •
matter? What are the risks involved in this situation?

The need for independent think tanks. •

Rationale of the argumentation: Lessons drawn from a practical •
experience.

Major points: •

1-Definition of an independent public interest think tanks, •

2-How IPITT's come into being and operate? •

3-Difficulties encountered by IPITT's, •

4- Impact on policy process, •

5-Stressing the need for IPITT's. •

Definition of Independent think tanks

-The need for independence in the work of think tanks. •

-Possible sources of constraints on independence of think tanks in general and in countries lacking well-established democratic traditions in particular: •

- 1-Governmental •
- 2-Political, •
- 3-Financial, •
- 4-Public opinion. •

A way out of constraints

How to enhance autonomy of think tanks: •

1-Pluralism of think tanks, •

2-Encouraging presence of private public interest think tanks •

What is a Private public interest think tank: •

Definition: An institution specializing in research •
and policy advice, motivated only by perception
by its members of public interest of their country,
and is not subordinate to the government,
political parties, business groups and is not
rigidly committed to a specific ideology.

How does an IPITT come into being

1-Motivation: Wish to engage voluntarily in •
the service of public interest?

2-Who are the founders? •

3-What is the operational structure: •

A board of trustees, •

Groups pf friends, •

Research groups •

Lean administrative structure. •

How do IPITT's operate, compared to less independent think tanks?

- 1-Flexibility in setting research and advice • agenda,
- 2-Enlarging the circle of policy advisers, •
- 3-Reaching out to a larger public opinion, •
- 4-Diversifying sources of funding, •
- 4-Transmitting advice and the need for • special communication skills and channels with policy makers the media

Difficulties encountered by IPITT's

- 1-Defining a legal status: an association, foundation, •
for profit company or a civil company?
- 2-Getting access to information, •
- 3-Administrative constraints on research, •
- 4- Getting funding while maintaining their autonomy, •
- 5-Attracting the attention of policy makers and •
public opinion? How?
- 6-The challenge of sustainability: •
 - a) of the academic and administrative staff,
 - b) handing the flag to a new generation •

Do IPITT's really matter?

The question of the impact of think tanks on the policy process? •

Difficult to measure.

Factors determining impact of think tanks on the policy process:

- 1-Willingness of policy makers to be guided by the advice of think tanks and of private think tanks, •
- 2-Professional background of leaders of IPITT's, •
- 3-Image of think tanks as politically neutral, •
- 4-Communication skills of think tanks with policy makers and the public, •
- 5-Involving policy makers in internal debates of think tanks. •

Any success story to tell?

One success story: •

Inviting a speaker in an event organized by the think tank for a meeting of experts with the prime minister of Egypt.

Lessons drawn from this story: •

Public interest think tanks are more likely to •
succeed when they provide advice related to administrative and technical matters, are not likely to succeed when they offer advice related to politically controversial issues. Give examples.

Concluding remark

Independent public interest think tanks, •
despite these difficulties, are
indispensable if policy makers and the
public wish to get an expert advice on
policy matters from institutions not tied to
special interest groups and not
constrained by rigid ideological visions.
They should therefore be encouraged •