



Role of Think Tanks and Policy Analysis Institutes in Policy Making Process

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Over the years, enormous role of policymakers in addressing health and human development outcomes have been identified. So, existence of organizations and think tanks as well as the results achieved from studies and analyses of public policies have been diagnosed vital for long-term growth of a country (1). Achievements that can be expected from such studies include: identification of underlying supportive factors and creation of a barrier against policy change, identification of strengths and weaknesses in policy strategies, identification of different interest groups and analysis of their role, position, and power to consider these stakeholders in formulation of future policy and manage them appropriately, identification of setting agenda process in order to understand emergence of a policy on the agenda, identification of political opportunities and bottlenecks in setting policy, further examination of the extent to which policy-makers have been able to achieve their policy goals, that is in fact awareness about past successes and failures to plan for setting successful future policies and directing the applied reforms or development of reform policies to address the adverse effects (2).

Think tanks are organizations of civil society which are mainly experts in production and dissemination of general knowledge (3). They consist of academics, administrators, government officials, and other elites who search and analyze national and international issues full time and has



the ability and talent to explore various options related to a problem and necessary resources to explore deeply about a problem (4). So, it can be said that they play a significant role in shaping the policy making landscape and are observed as independent voices and idea producers in this complex policy setting landscape.

The concept of think tank has emerged due to the need for increasing entrepreneurship and political participation, as well as the need for a focused strategy to increase engagement with policy-makers and politicians (1). For this purpose, they have increasing active partnership in the process of health policy setting beside people, interest groups, and business; meanwhile they are different from historical, organizational, budget, and activities views (3). Think tanks influence the policy process in various ways. In this regard, from the methods used by them the following points can be mentioned: writing articles in various journals and newspapers, presentation in TV, participating and providing evidences in conferences, determining issues' priority and importance, making close relationships with politicians, building coalitions for issues related to policy, and shaping public debates (5).

Despite the mentioned cases, international growth of think tanks is associated with growing concerns about their role in guiding the political debates on health care as well as shaping policy and planning their job characteristics including scientific, professional, and media regular reporting (3). Additionally, in spite of the critical role that think tanks can play, this role and its importance has not been understood as it deserves. Thus, politics has been negotiated largely among different stakeholders that consequently often turned to be weak. Furthermore, policy codification is focused to a large extent and is dictated by the political agenda concerns; it is often used as a means of gaining popularity or legitimacy by governments. Finally, policy

formulation and its implementation are fundamentally different so that policy is modified and re-interpreted by bureaucrats and local stakeholders.

The main constraints that think tanks are faced with include: lack of financing and independent leadership, inadequate institutional capacity, and lack of adequate skills especially in the areas of rallying and communications (1). On the one hand, little attention has been paid to the role of think tanks in health policy making and planning; on the other hand, present activities in political sciences and public management tend to define and classify think tanks as an expert impartial source of policy making (6). Another point is that the distinction between think tanks and lobbyists has been much debated. In the meantime, Andrew Willis (5) reports that most think tanks are reluctant to lobby and avoid it.

Despite all the points raised, politicians believe that think tanks will hopefully receive more influence and effect in the future (7). For example, in recent years growth in the number of independent health policy analysis institutions has been observed in low-income and middle-income countries. This emerged in response to government's analytical capacity constraints and pressures associated with democracy (8).

Currently, there is a growing need to reduce the gap between research on policy making and policy codification. The isolation is resulted from limitations in resources and in the fields to exchange thoughts. As mentioned above, emergence of think tanks is due to the high needs to entrepreneurship in politics. For this purpose, an overarching framework should be created to facilitate exchange of ideas between different actors. Creation of think tanks for informed participation of policy-makers in alternative policy ideas should also be considered to formulate effective policy and expand the role of think tanks in shaping policy perspective.

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