



ASTA-JA USA

Sustainable Natural Resources for Community Development

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Call for Policy Briefs

Asta-Ja USA plans to publish policy briefs on a quarterly basis beginning June quarter of this year. Policy briefs can be written on any relevant topics pertaining to Asta-Ja resources (*Jal, Jamin, Jungle, Jadibuti, Janashakti, Janawar, Jarajuri, and Jalabayu*) and socio-economic development of Nepal. Upon submission of such briefs, the Policy Advisory Council of Asta-Ja USA will review the briefs and make recommendations for publication of selected policy briefs. The council may also seek opinions of subject experts in arriving at such recommendations. Three to five policy briefs will be published each quarter.

Format

The format for the policy briefs include:

- summary of a particular issue in question
- policy options to deal with the issue
- recommendation on the best option
- four to seven references.

Each policy brief will be two pages long, or 700 to 800 words in length.

Since the briefs are targeted to general audience interested in the development of Nepal and policy makers in positions of authority and power, please make your briefs as jargon free as possible.

Suggested Themes

1. Environment

Current environmental issues related to Nepal could be addressed within the larger global framework for climate change actions as well as anthropogenic origin. Topics such as landslide, unplanned urbanization, ecological degradation, and environmental pollution stand out in the current context of Nepal. Due to ineffective management of *Jungla*, landslides during the monsoon season in various parts of the country has remained an on-going problem. Migration from rural areas to cities has begun to intensify environmental degradation processes especially in the urban areas. This process has already created undue burden on existing infrastructures. Unplanned urban development can play havoc in sustainability of cities. By any measure, Kathmandu has become one of the most polluted cities in the world. Cities like Pokhara, Nepalganj, Birgang, and Biratnagar don't have very good record on this count as well. Cities of the future, if not properly planned, may go the same pathways as the current big cities.

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ASTA-JA USA

Sustainable Natural Resources for Community Development

2. Fourth Industrial Revolution

The fourth industrial revolution driven by big data, artificial intelligence, machine learning and cloud computing is upon us. As the scope of both products and labour markets becomes truly global, Nepal has a chance to leapfrog and move to the rank of middle income country faster than ever before imagined. However, policies need to be geared towards human capital development such that the workforce can globally participate and products can compete in the world-wide market. In this new global environment, important matters such as economic planning, international trade, and workforce management will go through a paradigm shift. Policy makers need to be mindful of such changes and transformations.

3. Paradigm Shift

Science and technology is at the forefront of the new transformation that the world economy is going through. How science and technology can be harnessed to make the Asta-Ja resources of Nepal amenable to the new evolving world economy into the fourth industrial revolution should now be a major question for policy makers. Do we need to stay with a sectoral approach as it is practiced today? Or, do we need to move to a more holistic approach? Our over-dependency on India for aid, trade and transit is killing us in many ways. We are so little integrated to the world economy due to this overdependence and landlocked geographic reality. To redress this situation, new avenues for multilateralism in trade and investment need to be sought. New way of doing things and new way of thinking about the economy are the necessities of the day. Put differently, we need a paradigm shift.

4. Innovation and Entrepreneurship

In addition to capital and labour, economic development requires innovation and entrepreneurship. Innovation is closely related to the system of higher education, and a national innovation system is the result of networks of public and private institutions dedicated to initiating, importing, modifying and adapting new technologies. How can Nepal develop a national innovation system? Is the national entrepreneurial echo-system supportive of entrepreneurial activities? What are the constraints for universities and other institutions to become more innovative? Are there issues in promoting public-private partnership for innovation and entrepreneurship? If there are, how can they be resolved?

5. Governance

One of the key foundations for socio-economic development of a country is political stability. With the establishment of the Republic and the election a year or so ago, some level of political stability has come in Nepal. However, the stability has been overshadowed by wide-spread culture of favoritism, bribery, kickbacks and corruption. For example, the widebody case, 33 kg gold smuggling fiasco, the illegal land deal of Baaluwataar cooked up by successive governments over time, immunities enjoyed by criminals and inability of the government to bring the culprits to justice, and so on. Political parties, including the governing ones, have witnessed a rapid erosion of



ASTA-JA USA

Sustainable Natural Resources for Community Development

trust capital. Absent the trust capital, the ability of the governing parties to govern the country has recently been questioned. Governance failure is thus a major issue in Nepal at present.

6. Social Justice

While a small elite group has disproportionately benefited from the recent political changes, a large percentage of the Nepalese population is unable to meet even the very basic needs at the lowest level. More than a quarter of the population still lives below poverty. The incomes distribution system has not improved very much despite huge inflows of foreign aid and remittances. An alarmingly large percentage of the youth population is working as migrants in over 110 countries around the world. Remittance sent by this group has become the life-blood of the Nepalese economy as almost a third of the Nepalese economy is accounted for by remittances. While this resource has helped economically as a stop gap measure, social issues arising out of the remittance economy (family breakdown, increase in imports of luxury goods, worsening trade balance resulting from this, etc.) often outweigh its economic benefit. How to use this remittance resource to promote social justice and economic growth is an important policy issue.

We would like our potential policy brief writers to focus on topics related to these themes and others related to socio-economic development of Nepal. We would also like to see that the policy briefs related in some ways to one of the eight resources (*Jal, Jamin, Jungle, Jadibuti, Janashakti, Janawar, Jarajuri, and Jalabayu*) of the Asta-Ja Framework.

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