

## NPI Policy Audit and Research Announcement

Nepal Policy Institute (NPI) is seeking research proposals from interested researchers in Nepal and elsewhere for a policy audit study on

### ***“Scoping the policy domain of reforms in local governance in Nepal”***

#### **Introduction**

The general consensus on how best to formulate public policies is that a thorough scoping of the policy issue at hand is carried out stemming from a clear articulation of the policy problem. The scoping exercise will have, as one of its core constituent elements, analysis of any prior actions that may have been taken in addressing the policy problem, for it is not uncommon to find vestiges of the efforts to address similar problems impinging on the policy problem at hand. Such an analysis of prior actions also includes efforts made by other jurisdictions on the same, or similar, policy issues. Indeed, from jurisdictions that may have effectively addressed such problems come what is known as global good practices.<sup>1</sup> Effective policy formulation, then, results from a rigorous analysis of the different dimensions of a policy, coupled with lessons learned from international good practice.

#### **Mal-governance at local level**

There are, at present in Nepal, many public policy issues and problems that have continued to vex policymakers. These range from, for example, the oft-referenced public health policy or climate change or federalization to the not-so-well articulated inclusive service delivery at local level. One public policy issue, in particular, that has substantial bearing on successful federalization in the country is that of mal-governance in financial resources use evident in local governments. Successive annual reports of the Office of the Auditor General have documented the evidence that details the scale of misuse of resources or lack of processes mandated to be followed. For example:<sup>2</sup>

- (i) purchase of vehicles by 343 local governments from grant funds (which are not allowed) of Rs. 1.33 billion;
- (ii) procurement of consultancy services without any competitive bidding or assessment of requirements of Rs. 1.39 billion;
- (iii) over-payment of social security funds amounting to Rs. 225.6 million;
- (iv) foreign trips undertaken by officials of 47 local governments without Cabinet approval, daily allowances of which amounted to Rs. 15.1 million;
- (v) total level of irregularities still to be reconciled by local governments amounting to Rs. 40.2 billion; and
- (vi) gaps in proper implementation of local government functions ranging from a lack of medium-term expenditure framework, to proper planning and budgeting processes, to systemic capacity constraints.

The selective evidence above is telling; clearly, there are issues of public policy that need to be adequately sifted through, and policy recommendations made that will ensure that local

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<sup>1</sup> This note deliberately employs the term ‘good practice’ instead of the rather ubiquitous ‘best practice’ since, in reality, there is no best practice in the domain of public policy; there are only good ones since all policy work is necessarily contextual, and contexts differ across jurisdictions.

<sup>2</sup> See the 58<sup>th</sup> Annual Report of the OAG, 2078 (2020-2021).

governments not only save much-needed funds, but that they demonstrate their accountability to citizens, and also enhance governance, thus ultimately enabling the federalization exercise to be successful.

As an initiative to demonstrate how public policy reforms in the particularly very critical area of local governance are to be approached, Nepal Policy Institute is keen to financially support a research exercise wherein the public policy domain of local governance takes center stage.

### **Details of Policy Audit Research Proposal**

1. **Objective:** To carry out rigorous policy research in the area of mal-governance at the local government level so as to be able to make actionable policy recommendations on how local governance can be enhanced across Nepal.
2. **Provisions:**
  - a. Funding: Rs 500,000 total for entire research exercise
  - b. Team composition:
    - i. Lead researcher, with more than 10 years of research experience in the particular subject matter (the individual does not necessarily have to be based in Nepal)
    - ii. Two research assistants based in Nepal to carry out field-based assignments; data collection; data triangulation; focus groups discussions, as needed; and other such related activities.
    - iii. Overall guidance for the research exercise will be provided by the Executive Director of NPI on behalf of the Institute.
  - c. General qualifications of Lead Researcher (1):
    - i. Academic threshold: Graduate degree (preferably doctoral level) in a related field from an accredited academic institution
    - ii. Work experience threshold: minimum of ten years
    - iii. Prior experience carrying out substantive policy research is preferred
    - iv. Prior experience in, or exposure to, public policy analysis in Nepal's context is required, with preference given to familiarity at local government level
    - v. Demonstrated evidence of effective policy communication in the English language
    - vi. Familiarity with the vernacular language since much of the research, and knowledge products and services in Nepal are expected not to be in English
    - vii. Priority will be accorded to research proposals from marginalized groups and from those that are in, or represent, backward regions (as measured by the Human Development Index for Nepal)
  - d. General qualifications of Research Assistants (2):
    - i. Academic threshold: Graduate degree in a related field from an accredited academic institution
    - ii. Work experience threshold: minimum of 5 years
    - iii. Prior experience in either carrying out, or being a team member of, substantive policy research work is preferred
    - iv. Prior experience in, or exposure to, public policy analysis in Nepal's context is required

- v. Demonstrated evidence of effective policy communication in the English language
  - vi. Familiarity with the vernacular language since much of the research, and knowledge products and services in Nepal are expected not to be in English
  - vii. Priority will be accorded to those candidates that are willing, and able, to travel around Nepal in the process of data collection, information gathering, data triangulation, and field-based analysis.
- e. NPI will adhere to all provisions with respect to diversity and inclusiveness in the selection of the Research Team members.
  - f. EOIs are sought from specific teams of a Lead Researcher and two Research Assistants (all three will have to be in one proposal as part of the research team).

### 3. Research tasks:

- a. Ascertain the full scope of the research task, ensuring adequate explanation of the research boundaries
- b. Carry out a desk review of all relevant policies, legal provisions, and administrative and regulatory provisions of the policy issue selected
- c. Analysis of the binding constraints faced by the country/local governments on the selected policy issue
- d. Data collection, triangulation, and analysis based on ground-level practice of the policy
- e. Ascertain the status of policy implementation from a whole-of-government and whole-of-society perspective
- f. Search for relevant global good practices on local governance, ensuring relevance of the context<sup>3</sup>
- g. Preparation of a status report that (i) documents completely the policy issues; (ii) gaps in policy design and/or implementation; (iii) binding constraints and how policymakers dealt with them; (iv) what good practices are evident from the implementation of the policy in other jurisdictions; (v) what lessons, if any, Nepal can take from them; and (vi) succinct policy recommendations that are evidence-based and actionable.

### 4. Deliverables:

- a. Report prepared to the quality expected of high-quality research, with rigorous research methodology well documented
- b. Webinar on the subject matter (focusing on a specific policy theme of the research work)
- c. NPI Policy Brief
- d. Journal article (either to *Policy Design & Practice* (Routledge), or some other globally recognized policy studies journal).

### 5. Parameters of the Research Exercise: Interested teams should note the following parameters within which the research work will be carried out –

- a. It should be non-political
- b. All data and information has to be topical and current
- c. The research exercise will have finite boundaries
- d. All the policy recommendations to be made have to be evidence-based
- e. The research should have a whole-of-government and whole-of-society perspective

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<sup>3</sup> The best known example of caution to policymakers around the world in terms of not taking on policy reforms blindly for adaptation is contained in Schick, A. 1998. "Why most developing countries should not try New Zealand's reforms." *World Bank Economic Observer*, 13(1): 123-131. <https://doi.org/10.1093/wbro/13.1.123>

- f. It also should be able to take pluri-disciplinary perspectives on the policy problem
- g. It has to contain global good practices in the relevant sector or theme
- h. It should focus on actionable policy recommendations
- i. It has to be grounded on the practice of the policy (ie, implementation) and not be theoretic.

- 6. Submission of proposals:** A single-stage proposal process is envisaged – submission of the policy research concept and research plan, which will include a brief context description on the different dimensions of the policy problem, and research methodology. The proposal will also have to respond, in brief, to the question “how will the research benefit the country?” It will also contain a cost breakdown, as well as a full CV of all team members. All proposals will be reviewed by a committee set up by the NPI Board of Directors. **Please send the proposal to [info@nepalpolicyinstitute.org](mailto:info@nepalpolicyinstitute.org) by January 25, 2022.** Any EOIs received after that will not be considered by NPI.
7. The Research Team is expected to be familiar with research ethics, and of all relevant government policies and administrative provisions in carrying out the research.
8. Time frame:

	Action	Time frame
1	Deadline for EOI submission	January 25, 2022
2	Selection of Lead Researcher, and determination of research team	By mid- February 2022
3	Research commencement	By end-February 2022
4	Draft report due to NPI for peer review	By March-end 2022
5	Final report due to NPI	By May 15, 2022
6	Peer review of the research report	Completed by first week of June 2022
7	All deliverables submitted	By July-end 2022

#### Exclusions

*NPI Board members and staff members of NPI, as well as their close relatives, are not eligible to apply for this research grant.*

For further information, please contact: [director@nepalpolicyinstitute.org](mailto:director@nepalpolicyinstitute.org)

Please note the deadline for submission of the proposal: January 25, 2022 (email: [info@nepalpolicyinstitute.org](mailto:info@nepalpolicyinstitute.org))