

# Using Networks for Leveraging Influence – Successful Collaborations with New Partners

Friday, 19 February 2016

- Chair: Siegfried Herzog, Friedrich Naumann Foundation, Southeast Asia
- Robin Sitoula, Samriddhi – The Prosperity Foundation, Nepal
- Parth J Shah, National Independent Schools Alliance, CCS, India
- Lorenzo Montanari, International Property Rights Index, USA

Robin Sitoula from Samriddhi began by reminiscing about his early interactions with delegates from the Asia Liberty Forum, and how it inspired him to start his own think tank.

Mr Robin pointed out that in Nepal, a strong network of individuals inspired by classical liberal thought (within the local community) had succeeded in demanding accountability from the government. As an example, Mr Robin noted that Samriddhi managed to persuade the Nepalese government to amend the constitution, to include stronger property rights and freedom for enterprise. It did this by obtaining the support of 300,000 locals.

Moreover, the government adopted four out of five economic policies that were proposed by Samriddhi. Leveraging on its vast network, Samriddhi has become one of the most influential think tanks in the region and actively advises the Nepali government on market solutions to economic problems.

In India, Parth J Shah from the Centre for Civil Society utilised an expansive network of think tanks and NGOs - with the support of a successful media campaign - to build and maintain 300,000 budget private schools (BPS). These BPSs are often of equal standard, if not better, than government schools with respect to learning outcomes, especially since it places strong emphasis on mastery of the English language. Through the BPS initiative, many Indian children from impoverished families are able to gain valuable new skills and seize fresh opportunities to climb up the lowest rungs of the economic ladder.

“You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people, than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you.”

- Lorenzo Montanari

Lorenzo Montanari, of the Property Rights Alliance (PRA), recounted his experience of mobilising various groups to lobby Congress, to pass bills that promote tax reform in America. Many politicians were persuaded by these groups, who in turn mobilised constituents to sign pledges - for their congress representative - to promise not to raise taxes. Mr Lorenzo also provided ten practical steps to organising coalition meetings, for

example ensuring that the meetings are multi-issue and that speakers only share what they are doing, without complaining about other issues.

The experiences of Robin Sitoula, Parth J Shah and Lorenzo Montanari highlight the need to form lasting networks between like-minded organisations and individuals, in order to affect real change. Such coalitions and groups can often spark and catalyse change in ways that individuals acting independently cannot.