

MEC Perspectives: Quality of Knowledge Production/ Evidence Generation in Nepal for Policy Making Gaps and Way Forward

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Presentation Overview



1. Introduction & Context

EBPM definition, Nepal's federal shift



2. Institutional Ecosystem

Govt bodies, think tanks, donors



3. Methodological Rigor & Integrity

Quality, misconduct, ethics



4. Structural Gaps & Data Infrastructure

Data silos, R&D, technology



5. Policy-Research Disconnect

Communication, federal complexity



6. Sectoral Insights

Health, climate, education



7. Way Forward & Recommendations

Evidence synthesis, data access

Section 1

Introduction & Context

Defining EBPM and Nepal's federal transformation



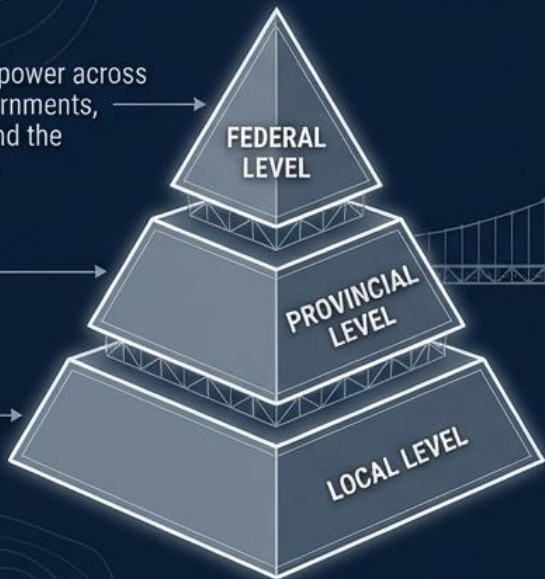
THE CONSTITUTIONAL VISION VS. THE IMPLEMENTATION REALITY

THE VISION

Decentralized power across 753 local governments, 7 provinces, and the federal center

Participative

Equitable Governance



THE REALITY

Overlapping jurisdictional mandates (Schedules 8 & 9)

Information silos

Misaligned resource allocation



Nepal has achieved political stability after 7 governance systems in 60 years. The focus must now shift from political transition to operational translation.

Evolution of the Evidence Ecosystem



**Phase 1 (1960s-1990):
The State-Led Era**

Entities: CEDA, CNAS
(Tribhuvan University).

Characteristic:
Highly centralized,
providing intellectual
legitimacy to the state.



**Phase 2 (1990-2015):
The NGO/Donor Proliferation**

Entities: Independent
NGOs.

Characteristic:
Expanded diversity of
voices, but fragmented,
project-driven, and reliant
on foreign funding.



Opportunity Zone

**Phase 3 (2015-Present):
The Rise of Policy Labs**

Entities: NPI (Diaspora),
KUSOM (University Policy
Labs), PRI (Apex Bodies).

Characteristic:
Agile, transdisciplinary,
and capable of human-
centered design thinking.

Section 2

The Institutional Ecosystem of Knowledge

Government bodies, think tanks, universities & international partners



Government Bodies & Sectoral Councils



Policy & Planning Bodies

- **National Planning Commission (NPC):** Apex advisory body for economic development and periodic planning. Bridges political mandates with technical analysis for evidence-informed governance
- **Medical Education Commission (MEC)** is the central authority responsible for regulating, planning, and overseeing medical education in Nepal. The role of MEC is to oversee health institutions and guide them to play role in strengthening health systems by bridging the gap between research and policy, ensuring that decisions are grounded in high-quality data
- **Policy Research Institute (PRI):** Established 2018 as national think tank for Cabinet-level research-based policymaking



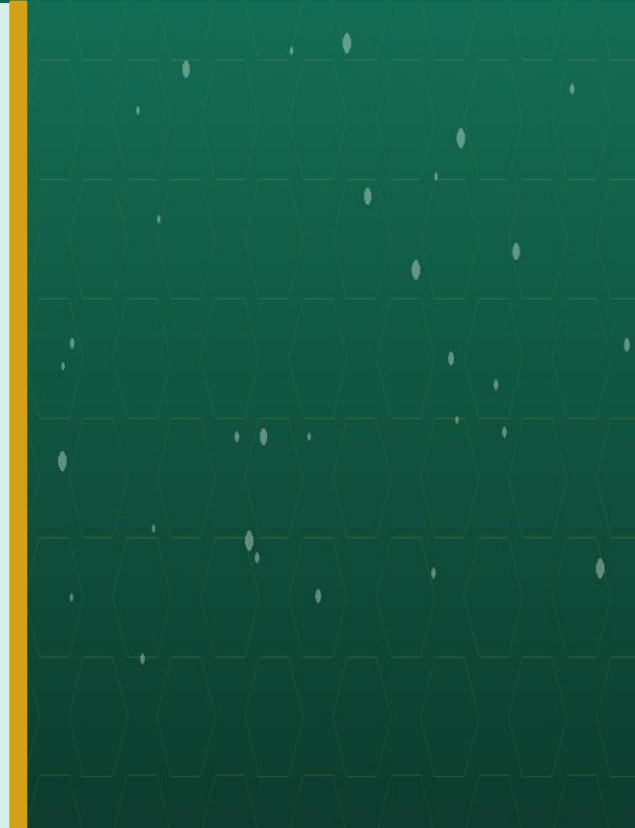
Sectoral Research Councils

- **Nepal Health Research Council (NHRC):**
Coordinates health research, regulation, and ethical oversight.
- **Nepal Agricultural Research Council (NARC):**
Drives agricultural innovation.
- **University Grants Commission (UGC):** Sets standards and funds university research.

Universities & Independent Think Tanks



- **KU Policy Lab:** Uses design thinking to enhance governance through evidence-based policy incubation.
- **Tribhuvan University (CNAS, CEDA):** Continues academic research but faces challenges in stability and global recognition.
- **Nepal Policy Institute (NPI):** Engages diaspora scholars to provide focused policy advice and leverage international networks.
- **Martin Chautari & CSAS:** Foster public dialogue, niche policy analysis, and critical social research.



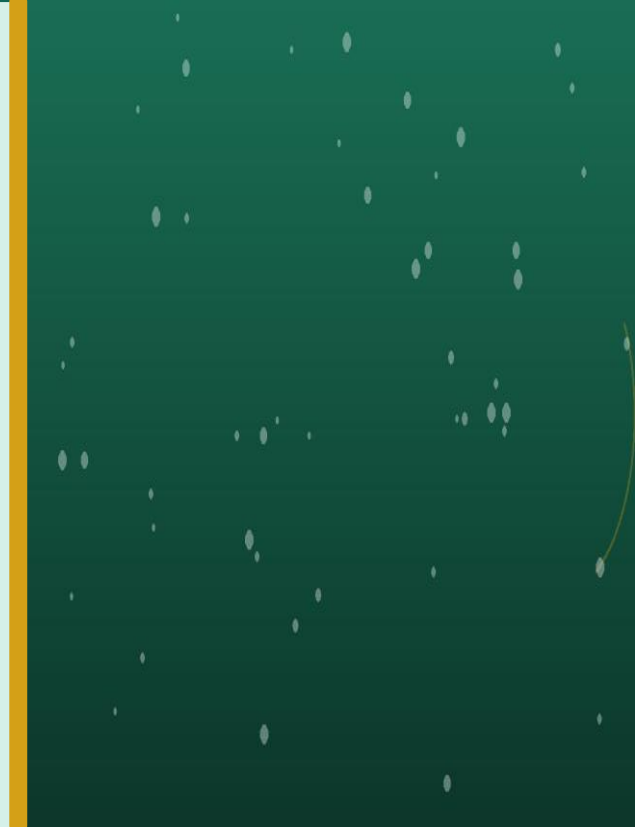
International Development Partners



Key entities: **World Bank, ADB, UN agencies (WHO, UNDP, UNICEF), and bilateral donors** shape Nepal's research landscape.

- Provide technical assistance, systems funding, capacity building, and global benchmarking for research quality.
- Significantly shape research agendas through 'co-created' learning agendas often reflecting donor rather than national priorities.

Risk: Research emphasis drifts away from locally determined development priorities toward externally set agendas.



Institutional Identity & Funding Challenges



>50%

of 'think tanks'
registered as NGOs

11/14

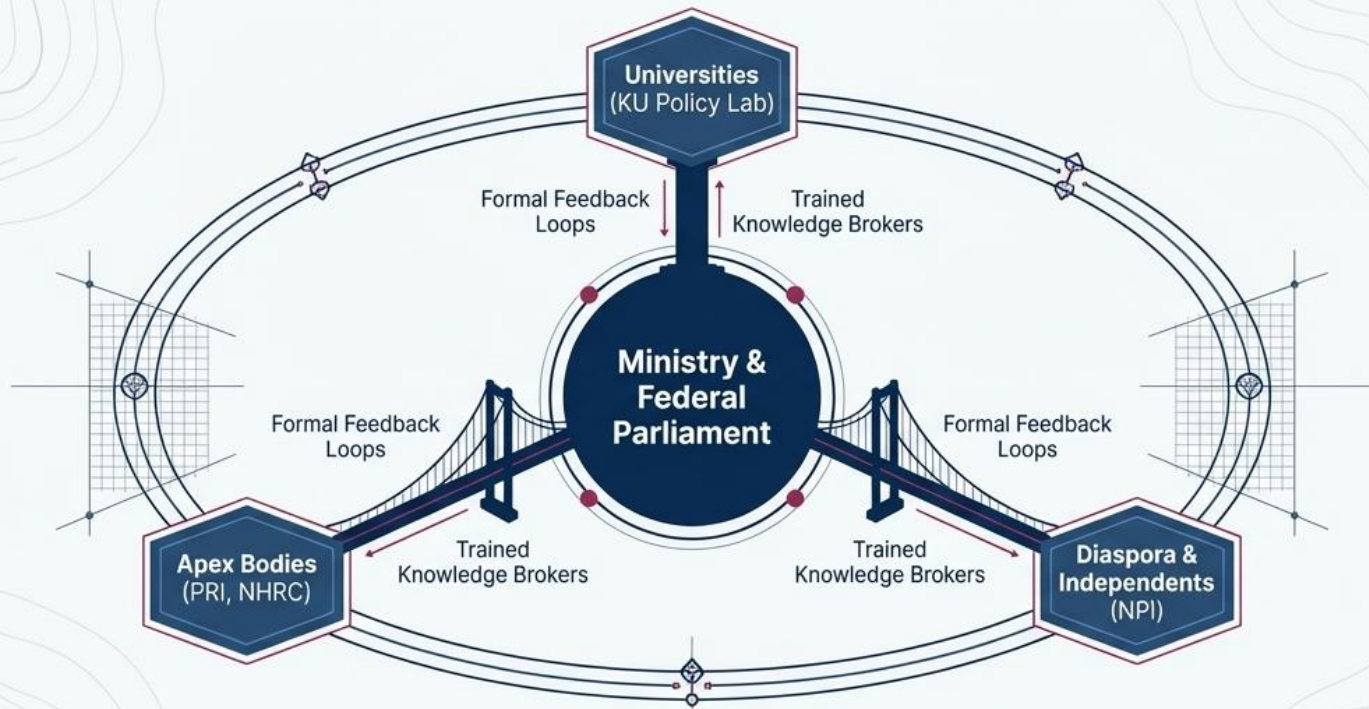
major think tanks
on project funding

<6mo

typical funding
cycle duration

- Absence of a legal framework forces most think tanks to register as NGOs, undermining institutional credibility.
- Project-based funding discourages long-term investment in institutional capacity and knowledge management.
- Reliance on external donors risks skewing research toward donor priorities rather than nationally determined agendas.

Paradigm Shift: Building the Architecture of Evidence



The Ministry does not need to generate all the evidence; it must act as the architect that efficiently docks external expertise into the legislative core.

Section 3

Methodological Rigor & Research Integrity

Quality challenges, misconduct, ethics deficiencies & neocolonial influences



Challenges in Methodological Quality



- Nepal lacks validated research tools tailored to its unique socio-cultural and linguistic context.
- Ad-hoc translation of international instruments misses psychometric analysis and cross-cultural validation.
- Measurement tools from high-income countries often fail to capture constructs accurately in Nepal's diverse communities.

Result: Inaccurate data that misinforms policy interventions, misallocates resources, and undermines program effectiveness.



Research Misconduct - Scope & Drivers

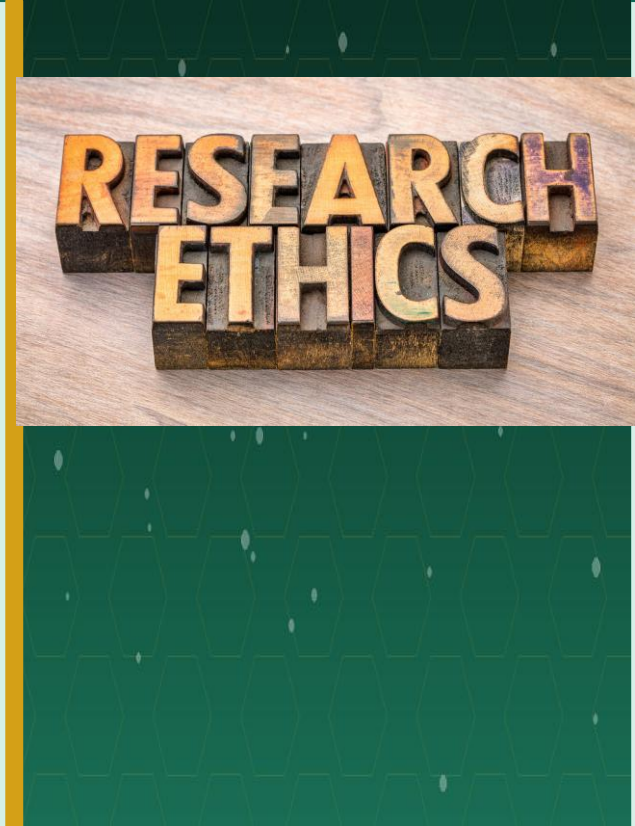


- Retractions in the Global South are rising; misconduct includes data fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, and unethical practices.
- A significant proportion of Nepal's research is published in low-quality or predatory journals lacking rigorous peer review.
- Lack of Awareness: Many researchers do not fully understand research ethics or informed consent requirements.
- Publish or Perish: Promotion criteria prioritize publication count over quality, incentivizing shortcuts.
- Supervision Gaps

Ethical Review Deficiencies



- Ethics reviews focus on administrative paperwork and compliance checklists rather than substantive ethical principles.
- Review committees apply a narrow biomedical lens that excludes qualitative, participatory, and implementation science methods.
- Shortage of skilled ethics oversight staff limits rigorous and timely monitoring of research projects.
- The gap between formal ethics requirements and actual practice remains wide in applied and community-based research.



Impact of the Education System



- Rote-learning culture and examination score emphasis fail to develop critical thinking and analytical skills essential for research.
- Systematic skill deficiency persists among younger researchers, especially for evidence synthesis and systematic review.
- Underfunded science and social science curricula produce graduates lacking basic quantitative and qualitative competencies.
- The mismatch between university training and skills demanded by research and policy institutions is a structural barrier.

Section 4

Structural Gaps & Data Infrastructure

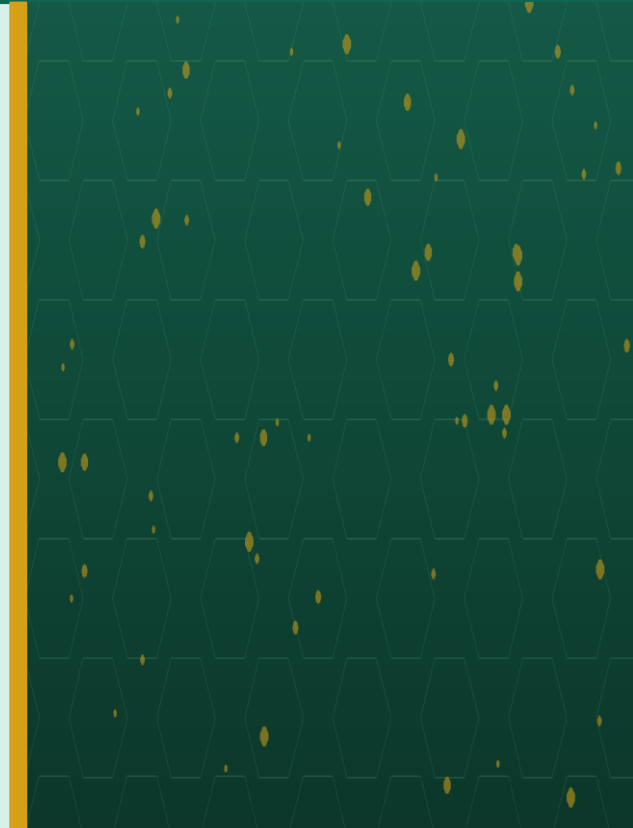
Data silos, R&D investment, digital divides & fragmented development aid



Information Silos & Local Data Gaps



- **Data collected** by ministries and the National Statistics Office (NSO) remain **locked** in departmental databases.
- **Limited public access** to microdata prevents think tanks and researchers from performing in-depth secondary analysis.
- **Local governments lack unified platforms** for systematic data management and inter-governmental sharing.
- **Planning is often driven by political interests** rather than empirical need due to absence of reliable municipal data repositories.



Digital Divide & R&D Underinvestment



0.3%

Nepal's GDP
spent on R&D

2.2%

Global average
R&D expenditure

7×

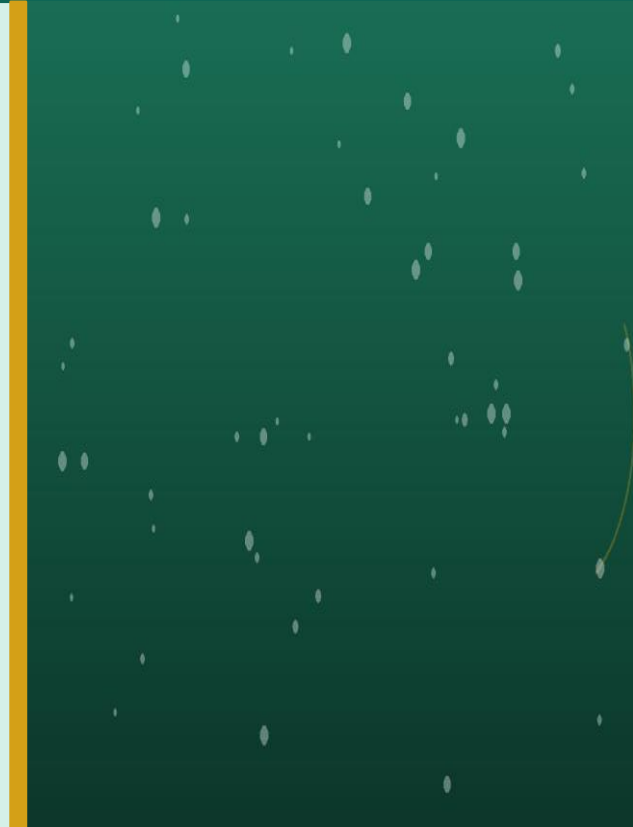
Investment
gap vs. world

- **Inadequate digital infrastructure** hampers adoption of e-governance platforms and real-time data systems.
- **Traditional communication** (phone calls, letters) remains dominant in public service delivery, limiting timely data exchange.
- The **7×** gap between Nepal's R&D investment and the global average causes deteriorating academic competitiveness.
- **Underinvestment perpetuates reliance on external technical assistance** and donor-driven research agendas.

Fragmented Official Development Assistance



- **Fragmentation is acutely felt when major donors abruptly discontinue aid** without adequate transition planning.
- **Overlapping mandates** result in resources being inefficiently allocated across organizations working on identical issues.
- **Coordination mechanisms**, while improving, **remain insufficient** for coherent, nationally-owned programming.



Policy-Evidence Trap & Technical Capacity



The 'Policy-Based Evidence' Trap

- **Policymakers seek evidence only to justify already-made political choices**, inverting the evidence-to-policy relationship.
- **Persistent preference for anecdotal evidence** over rigorous data leads to misleading national generalizations.
- **Political imperatives frequently override technical recommendations** in budget and program design.



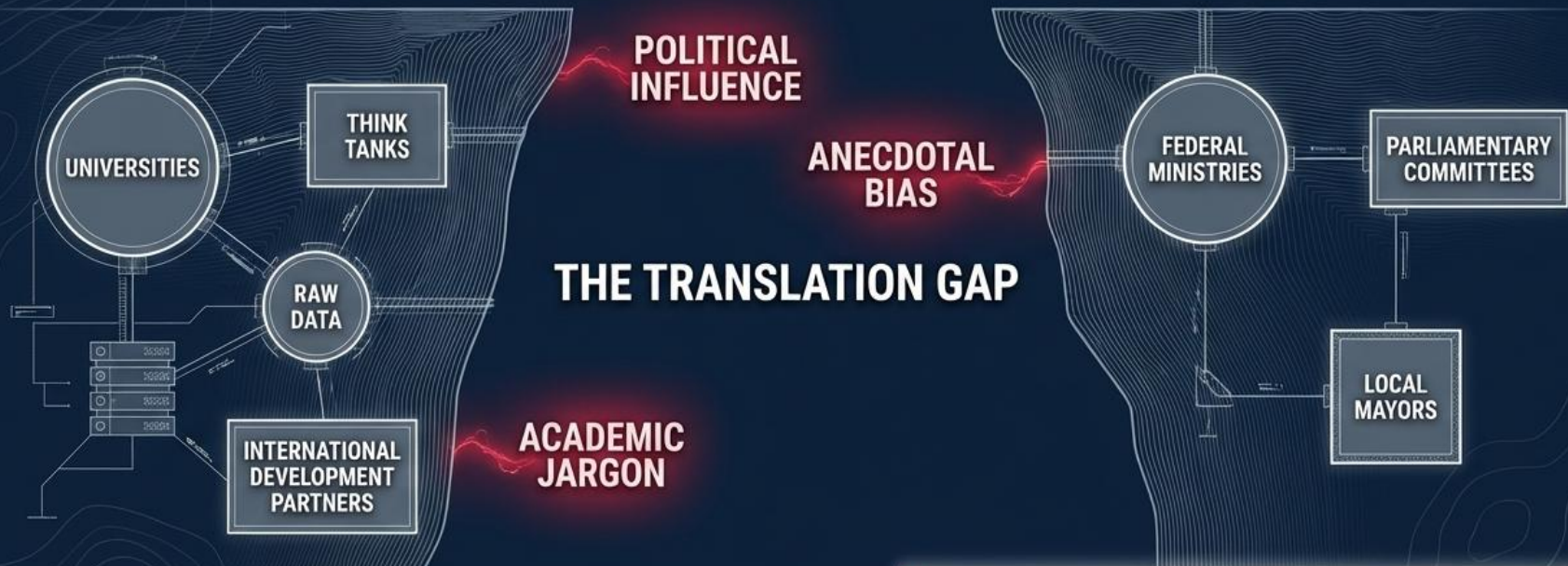
Lawmakers' Technical Capacity

- **Limited technical capacity of elected representatives** hinders evidence-informed decision-making in legislatures.
- **Representatives often struggle to interpret statistical analyses** or modern data visualizations.
- **Training programs on evidence literacy remain sporadic**, poorly resourced, and not institutionalized.

THE TRANSLATION GAP: KNOWLEDGE VS. POWER

CLIFF A: KNOWLEDGE

CLIFF B: POWER



WE ARE CURRENTLY TRAPPED IN A CYCLE OF **POLICY-BASED EVIDENCE** (FINDING DATA TO JUSTIFY POLITICAL DECISIONS).

WE MUST BUILD THE BRIDGE TO EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY (USING DATA TO FORMULATE DECISIONS).

Section 5

Barriers in the Policy - Research Disconnect

Two cultures, communication failures, federal complexity & staffing gaps



Two Cultures & Communication Gaps



- A persistent ‘two culture’ divide: **researchers and policymakers operate in separate environments** with limited mutual understanding.
- **Research is often conducted based on self-interest** rather than nationally identified priority areas.
- **Researchers use technical jargon** (p-values, confidence intervals) that non-specialist policymakers cannot interpret.
- **Lack of accessible dissemination means research ends as reports** ‘collecting dust on shelves’ without influencing decisions.



Federal Complexity & Political Influence



- Overlapping mandates between federal, provincial, and local governments create conflict, confusion, and **accountability gaps**.
- Local representatives' **party loyalty forces them to prioritize central agendas over locally generated evidence**.
- **Financial and political dependence on the federal center constrains** evidence-informed local budgeting.



Section 6

Sectoral Insights

Public health, climate resilience, education & policy lab innovations



Public Health Trajectories



- **COVID-19 catalyzed recognition of rapid evidence synthesis** and real-time data sharing as essential governance capacities.
- **Nepal faces a 'triple planetary crisis'**: climate change, environmental pollution, and biodiversity loss - all health threats.
- **Health data systems remain fragmented** across NHRC, provincial health offices, and development partner databases.
- **Investment in health systems research is critical** for pandemic preparedness and Universal Health Coverage goals.



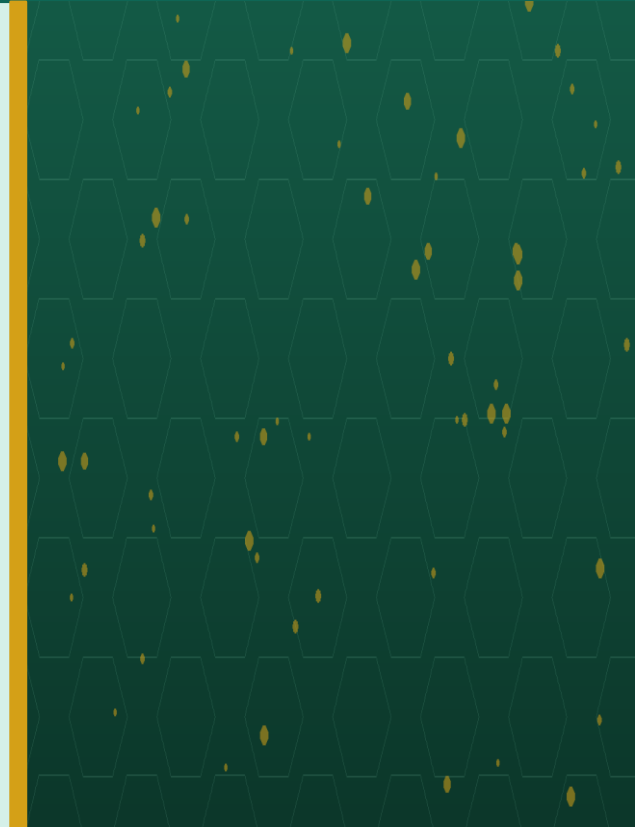
Policy Lab Success Stories



- **KU Policy Lab:** Uses design thinking to co-design evidence-based solutions directly with public service offices.
- **Data for Development (D4D):** Released post-disaster datasets and built the BIPAD national disaster portal.

These cases demonstrate targeted institutional innovation can successfully bridge research, technology, and policymaking.

Replication and scaling of policy lab models could accelerate evidence uptake across Nepal's governance sectors.



Section 7

The Way Forward & Recommendations

Evidence synthesis, data democratization, accountability & diaspora networks



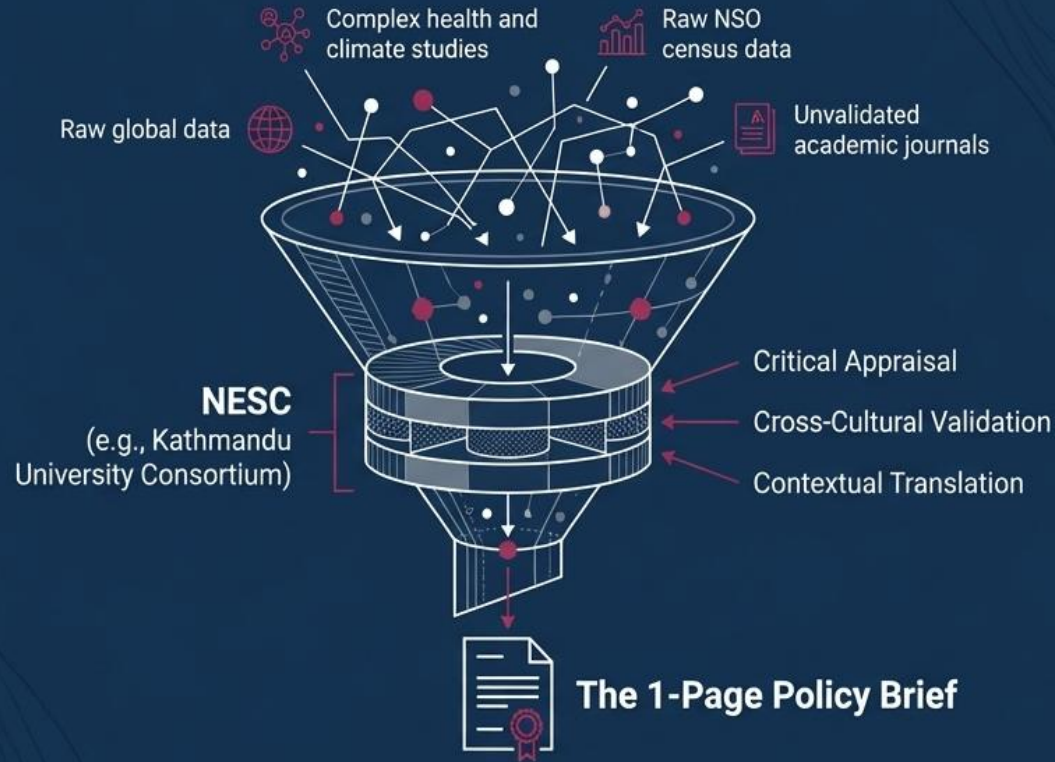
Institutionalizing Evidence Synthesis



- **Establish a National Evidence Synthesis Centre (NESC)** as the hub for systematic review and policy brief production.
- **Integrate Cochrane-style evidence synthesis approaches** into national policy development and budget preparation.
- **Build a national registry of ongoing and completed research** to prevent duplication and consolidate knowledge.
- **Train evidence synthesis specialists** embedded within key ministries and the National Planning Commission.

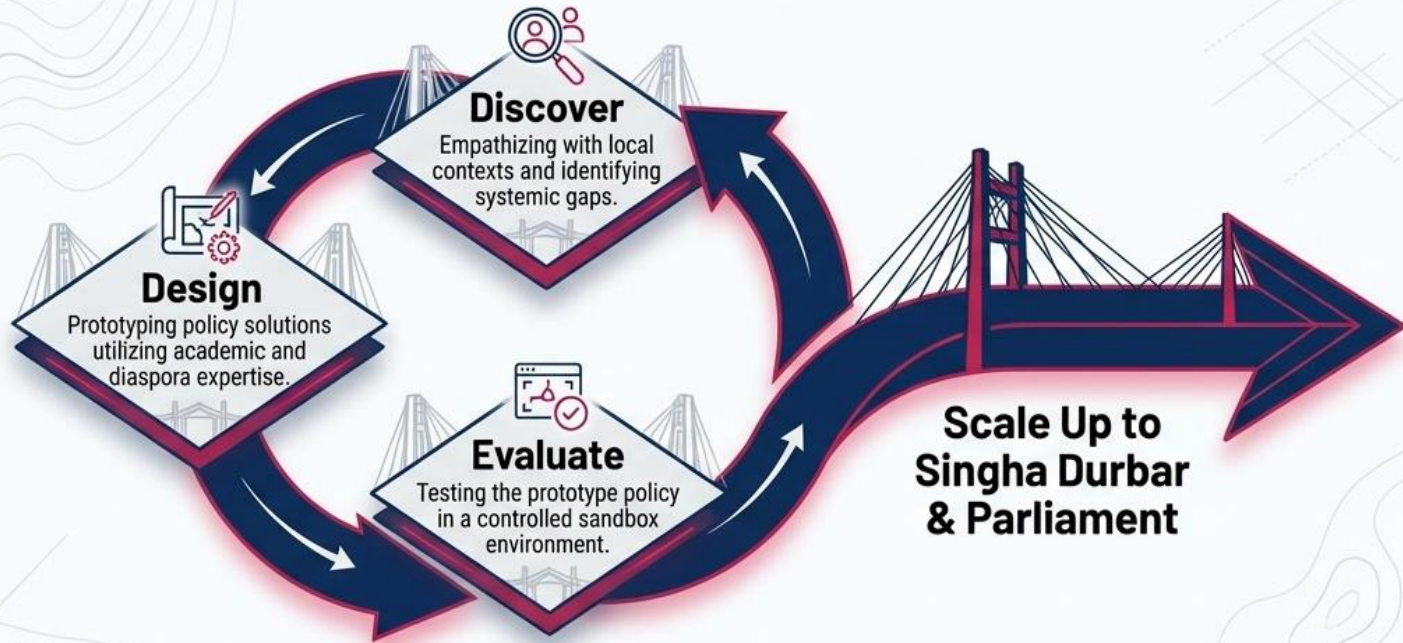


Solution I: The National Evidence Synthesis Centre (NESC)



Outcome: Decision-makers receive localized, immediately actionable intelligence directly on their desks, eliminating the barrier of academic jargon.

Solution II: The Policy Lab Sandbox (University to Singha Durbar)



Value Proposition for Ministry

De-risks public policy. Test locally, evaluate rigorously, and only commit federal budgets to proven solutions.

Solution III: Embedding Knowledge Brokers

Activation Curve



Current Momentum: The British Academy & Green Tara Nepal initiative is currently training 25-30 academics and civil servants to bridge the translation gap across all three tiers of government.

Section 8

Conclusion & Future Directions

From 'policy-based evidence' to genuine evidence-based policymaking



Conclusion

- Nepal's journey from 'policy-based evidence' to genuine EBPM requires a multifaceted, system-wide transformation- not piecemeal reforms.
- Success demands: bridging the knowledge-power disconnect; serious investment in data infrastructure; and ensured research integrity.
- Federal decentralization is both opportunity and challenge creating space for locally relevant evidence while demanding unprecedented coordination.
- Sustained multi-stakeholder investment is essential: government commitment, independent institutional capacity, and reformed donor engagement.

"Evidence is not enough - institutions must be willing and able to use it."

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