Roadmaps
A Guide for Intellectual Entrepreneurs

The Samriddhi Story

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Beginnings

This document captures the story of Samriddhi’s formation and operations from the very inception phase. It also highlights the experiences and reflections Samriddhi has gathered over the past eight years of establishing itself as a think tank in Nepal, in the hopes that it helps other young organizations with a similar mission.

As the name suggests, Samriddhi, The Prosperity Foundation started with a vision of a prosperous Nepal. An enthusiastic group of young people who worked to create a vibrant discourse on democracy for about a decade, came to realize that democracies are not sustainable if they cannot deliver. In this context, a democracy that could deliver had to promise freedom and prosperity to their people. Hence, the young minds founded an institution with that very vision, addressing the issue right at its core by working on the components that could bring more freedom and prosperity to Nepali society.

In terms of political freedom, political awareness and civil liberties, Nepal has come a long way, especially following the People’s Movement in April 2006. However, the real longing for democracy in Nepal comes from the country’s long history of economic deprivation, and once civil liberties had been affirmed, the economic growth aspect needed to be taken seriously. If economic growth is taken seriously, the chances of another major political setback occurring in the near future is very high, and would lead the country further into deprivation. Hence, with this strong realization, on the backdrop of Nepal’s major political transformation, which led to the writing of a new constitution, Samriddhi was founded in April 2006.

With its simple slogan, “Prosperity is possible...all it takes is sound ideas,” Samriddhi was founded with the understanding that there was a much needed discourse on the ‘sound’ ideas that make prosperity and freedom possible.

Realizing that the path to prosperity is wealth creation and the pre-requisite of wealth creation is an environment of economic freedom that fosters the spirit of entrepreneurship, Samriddhi now has these issues at the center of its vision and day to day work.

Founding Phase: Setting up a solid foundation takes time

Beginning in December of 2004, it took seventeen months for Samriddhi to work on the basic aspects of setting up the organization. It took meticulous effort to find a core team, build the knowledge and skills of the team members, and to set up a primary network and support system.

The founding phase is exciting, especially for those who are present at the inception. However, it generally takes bringing together a bigger team to set a strong footing. The challenge lies in being able to transmit similar levels of energy and excitement into members of the team who join after the inception.

Developing a core team: A mission-based organization can in many ways be different than starting other kinds of organizations. This is a key point to remember while developing your core team. Therefore, other than looking into skills, capacities and qualifications of the members of the core team, it is equally important to find those individuals who are like-minded or open minded when it comes the mission of your organization. And from a realistic perspective, during the founding phase, resources are extremely limited. Samriddhi's strategy was to find people who could be interested in the mission and to motivate them to start contributing on a pro bono basis. Friends and people that you have worked with or met before starting the new organization can always be a good pool to look to in order to indentify these kinds of potential team members. It is important to convey to new or potential team members the very important mission they will be advancing.

Once the team starts coming together, it is important to start talking about the core principles and beliefs that the organization adheres to. Doing short formal or informal sessions with team members is a helpful way
of establishing shared values. Encouraging team members to read and reference books and reading materials relevant to the mission can be very helpful. As time passes, it is also helpful to transfer the responsibility of leading these value-based sessions to newer members of the team.

Self-development and capacity building of the team: Once you build your core team, the next step is to work on self-development, which involves equipping your team with the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding of how to run an organization. To this end, Samriddhi established relationships with organizations who have done substantial work in similar areas such as, the Friedrich Nauman Foundation (FNF), Center for Civil Society (CCS), Atlas Economic Research Foundation, Institute for Humane Studies (IHS), Cato Institute and others. We were constantly searching for capacity building opportunities (whether training, fellowships, internships or mentoring relationships) within these organizations to train our team members. This had two distinct strategic advantages. First, the capacities of your team members are enhanced and secondly, these opportunities serve as incentives for team members who are working on a pro bono basis or being nominally paid. Through these opportunities team members not only established long-term relationships with these organizations, they also returned to Samriddhi with a better understanding of the programmatic and management aspects of running a think tank.

Market scan: To set up an organization in an actual sense, it is also important to carve out the space for the kind of work you will be doing. This means doing the necessary market research and identifying other organizations offering similar services or providing services related to the ones you are envisioning. Of these organizations, some could be potential allies, and some fierce competitors.

While scanning the market environment, it is not only important to look for organizations, but also individuals and local knowledge that you can use to your advantage. We went around meeting leaders of several established organizations within Nepal to share our intentions and to understand their work and approach. Each of those organizations was then able to offer insights about other potential organizations or individuals to meet with to gather more information. One of the advantages of doing a market scan like this for us was that we already had local individuals and organizations that were advocates of our organization and offered positive references and recommendations when needed.

The great story: Everyone connects to a great story and it can be very helpful when your organization has one. April 2006 was a time of great significance in Nepal’s political discourse with the “Second People’s Movement” taking place in Nepal. This marked the re-emergence of political freedom and the beginning of the creation of a more democratic nation. However, a political change as huge as the Movement could only lead the country towards growth if its emotional outcry was supported by proper policy guidance, and backed by knowledge and comprehensive analytical understanding. Therein emerged our story — Samriddhi: The Prosperity Foundation came into being as a think tank that envisioned a prosperous Nepal, and would provide the policy guidance and knowledge needed to achieve that vision.

Establishment Phase: Understanding the nuts and bolts

For Samriddhi, the establishment phase lasted for 26 months between May 2006 to June 2008.

The transition from having an idea or a vision to giving it a shape, structure and legality is all about understanding the system and the environment you work in, and complying with the necessary legalities and formalities. Only then can your organization come into formal existence. The first task is registering your organization and fulfilling all legal requirements. After this, developing a primary infrastructure, which not only involves basics such as office space and necessary amenities but also building a primary operation team (which may or may not be the core team developed during the inception phase). At this phase, giving due attention to organizational safety and the safety of individuals working with you can be important considerations.

It is understandable that, at this stage the organization will be eager to get involved in many issue areas and projects. The team members who are passionate about the mission would like to see instant change and therefore,
it is likely that you will feel pressure to do anything and everything in an effort to make a big difference at the earliest possible moment. However, experience shows that big change is an accumulation of several small changes and can take quite a while to achieve. It is important to realize that there are limitations to what your organization can feasibly accomplish given your circumstances and it is important to make the best use of your resources and opportunities. What is important now is to plan out the strategic vision of the organization.

**Strategic Planning:** Strategic Planning is an organizational process of setting up a Vision, Mission, Goals and Objectives that help the organization find its identity and decide its thematic areas. For Samriddhi, the first strategic planning meeting decided the vision, mission, goals and objectives of the organization which have then been revised over the years. The knowledge and skills brought in by team members after attending the Think Tank MBA conducted by the Atlas Network was very helpful for Samriddhi in setting up these strategies. View other Atlas training opportunities at AtlasNetwork.org/ALA. Samriddhi spends a healthy amount of time in strategic planning processes every year. We begin with preparatory work that we do in the office before each planning meeting. During this preparatory process, we meet various stake holders of our work including our Board of Directors, advisors, experts and supporters and ask them their input on the process. Following this, the whole team goes for a residential meeting for three days, where the process is followed intensely. We look into our work and critically assess all the programs of the organization in these three days and come up with new ideas and strategies. A draft strategic framework is prepared based on this which goes to the Board of Directors for discussion and approval. Once approved, small thematic teams take up the task of developing activities and a plan of action to be implemented during a certain span of time.

Here is an example of Samriddhi’s organizational framework:

**Vision**

Samriddhi, The Prosperity Foundation, envisions a free and prosperous Nepal where individuals can live a dignified life in a vibrant and democratic society with equal access to opportunities and respect for the rule of law.

**Mission**

To promote the ideas of freedom-civil, political and economic-through public policy recommendations (based on independent research), educational programs and public participation for a free and prosperous Nepal.

**Objectives**

In order to realize its vision, Samriddhi sets the following objectives for itself, coherent to the principles and practice of freedom.

1. To conduct research and generate alternative ideas on the social, economic and political agendas to throw light upon the contemporary issues of public discourse and develop policy advocacy documents to bring them into wider rhetoric.
2. To advocate for and monitor the implementation of basic social, political and economic rights while promoting transparency and advocacy as the basis of a prosperous Nepal.
3. To educate, train and empower the public on the value (or importance) of an active citizenry, ideas of free society and entrepreneurship, and the role they can play at influencing policy level decisions.
4. To develop a comprehensive resource center for public use (especially for researchers, students and policy makers) focusing on the social, economic and political discourse moving forward at a given time period.

Samriddhi’s core programs and activities are guided by its annual strategic plan involving all key members and staff. As per its strategic approach, in order to realize the vision mentioned above, Samriddhi, as a think tank, has set its strategic focus on four major areas consistent with it mission and objectives.

For a free and prosperous Nepal, Samriddhi specifically works on the following four components:

- Entrepreneurship Development
- Improving Business Environment
Economic Policy Reform
Discourse on Democracy

Samriddhi approaches these aspects with a three-tier approach:

- Research and Publication
- Education and Training
- Advocacy and Public Outreach

Besides the key founding principles and goals of the organization, other aspects of the establishment phase also include development of the branding strategy, logo, development of communication and marketing tools (website, brochures, business cards), etc.

Samriddhi’s logo resembles a traditional ceramic terracotta pot and is a traditional symbol of prosperity. The design depicts four design carvings in the pot that demonstrate the four core principles of the organization: individual freedom, rule of law, free markets and limited government. The symbol was later developed into a real ceramic pot that serves as piggy bank and is offered to our supporters so that they can save coins every year and contribute them back to the organization.

Start Up Phase: The first few steps are the toughest

For Samriddhi, the startup phase marks five years of public operation between July 2008 and June 2013.

After the establishment of a basic infrastructure, both in terms of determining the basic vision and work areas of the organization and the physical infrastructure, the organization should now be ready to launch and operate in the public sphere. This is the phase where the organization has to start performing.

Developing products & ventures: The initial task is to develop products and/or ventures that are able to create good value and a reputation within the market. Initially they could be small, capitalizing on low hanging opportunities and building small accomplishments. For Samriddhi, we started with producing landmark books such as F.A. Hayek’s The Road to Serfdom in Nepali, holding “policy talkies” where contemporary economic issues could be discussed in the light of certain policies and many others.

With time, Samriddhi was able to launch a number of its flagships projects. Arthalaya, (School of Economics and Entrepreneurship) which started in 2008, went on to become an award winning program which promoted entrepreneurship and the ideas of economic freedom among the young people of Nepal. Similarly, other Samriddhi ventures like “Thursdays with an Entrepreneur,” Nepal Economic Growth Agenda, Campaign for a Livable Nepal etc. are examples that have created a ‘Samriddhi’ brand in Nepal’s political-economic discourse.

Development of great products is also a matter of learning by doing and re-adjusting to the lessons learned in the process. However, products that have been successful at a given point may not remain pertinent within changing contexts. Therefore, it is always important to reassess and re-adjust your programs to best address current circumstances. Some ventures may need to be phased out, and new ventures may need to be added. It is a continuous process of creating and refining your products and ventures over and over.

However, to be able to introduce new products and ventures into the market, two aspects are very essential: A) Recruitment (as well as team building and training team members) and B) Fundraising and Networking

Recruitment, team building and professional development: As was mentioned earlier, recruiting in a mission based organization can be very different from recruiting people under other circumstances. It is a tough challenge to bring the right people onto the team. But once you’ve found them, team members must then gain important skills and knowledge that enable them to perform in their respective roles. Training your team members is an ongoing process, since they are constantly evolving and growing to take up different roles and more responsibilities—which then require further training, education, skill development, etc. If an organization does not have a well-skilled team, it will not be able to deliver.
Finding Funding: Just as important as the team, a steady flow of necessary funds is what keeps an organization going. Fundraising is a crucial aspect of ensuring the sustainability of the organization. This involves connecting to allies at home and abroad, making active efforts to reach out and network and getting good referrals. Given the context of Samriddhi’s operational climate, fund raising has not been an easy task. Samriddhi started with an ambitious and diverse proposed funding portfolio with specific targets and strategies for each portfolio. Samriddhi’s revenues can be divided into the following categories:

1. Sales – Goods and Services
2. Individual Private Investments
3. Sponsorships
4. Cost-shared Joint Programs
5. In-kind contributions
6. Awards and Unrestricted Grants
7. Partnerships
8. Annual Dues

The development of Samriddhi’s logo emblem into a practical piggy bank has been one of the most creative ways to attract individual private investments into Samriddhi’s work. Each year, hundreds of individuals send back the piggy banks to Samriddhi and get a replacement.

In a context where individual giving is not a part of the culture, we have often found that donors are willing to offer valuable gifts “in-kind.” For example, production of essential materials for campaigns or free advertising space on TV, radios or billboards, etc. have all been generously donated locally.

Organization Structure: Keeping an organization running is also largely dependent upon developing a functioning organizational structure, making the administrative system solid and also developing an organizational culture that keeps the work environment lively and enjoyable.

In terms of organization structure, Samriddhi has a core team overseen by a board of directors charged with carrying the mission forward. The board of directors helps bring credibility to the organization as it consists of reputable names within the private sector and other related fields in Nepal. They also help us build networks, advise us on strategic issues and provide necessary guidance.

Five departments systematically look after different aspects of the organization’s mission, programs and activities while carrying out day to day operations. The departments are:

1. Research and Publications Department
2. Programs Department
3. Operations Department
4. Coalition Relations Department
5. Administration, Finance and Human Resources Department

Administrative System: When organizations start to employ individuals in a considerable number, developing an administrative system becomes crucial. What has worked for Samriddhi is the organic process of putting systems into place developed by all those to whom it applies. This includes deciding work hours, work-hour flexibility, leave policies, benefits and other minute aspects among the staff. A large part of this has to do with how the organization culture develops. As a mission-based institution, the shared values among the team members determine the culture of the organization. Samriddhi has tried to develop its organizational culture around the values it promotes and the principles it upholds. To this end, the system and culture is determined by ongoing discussion and development by team members, instead of importing readily available systems from other organizations. The underlying principle in doing so has been to make the work place comfortable and productive so that team members can feel at home when they are at work. This has contributed to increased productivity and commitment to work and the mission.

All the aspects related to the organization’s growth, product development, administrative systems and other aspects of operations need continuous evaluation and re-adjustments. While regular feedback and assessment
is continuously performed at Samriddhi by concerned departments, a dedicated time is allocated during the Annual Strategic Review to evaluate and re-adapt the management system.

**Scale-Up Phase: Great Expectations**

*Samriddhi has established the next five years between July 2013 and June 2018 as the scale-up phase.*

Samriddhi has come a long way since its founding in 2006, where it began with volunteers operating from a one room office. Now it has a staff of 22 working in a 2500 sq. ft. well-equipped office. Also, thanks in part to having won the Anthony and Dorian Fisher Venture Grant Award in 2009, awarded to emerging think tanks around the world by Atlas Network, Samriddhi has been able to expand its scope from discussing policy issues with young students, to addressing the business community and policy makers. Building a presence in the area of your work is a great challenge in the beginning phases of an organization. However, the greater challenge now lies in not only sustaining and showing steady growth, but in meeting the expectations that the organization has been able to foster among stakeholders. Over the past five years, Samriddhi has received much appreciation as a young and promising organization. With its unique initiatives and approach, there are growing expectations regarding Samriddhi’s work and ventures in the future. Therefore, the growing realization in the team has been that it is now time to scale up and create bigger impact through its work.

The coming five years of Samriddhi have been envisioned as the time for extracting the best ventures and products from the past five years and taking them to the next level, while also adding new initiatives. The larger goal is to identify and establish an ecosystem where Samriddhi can add value to other like-minded organizations’ work that contributes to Samriddhi’s vision. As a think tank, Samriddhi might not be able to do everything that is needed to bring about a change in Nepal’s political and economic discourse. Creating synergies with other organizations who can fill in the gaps, is a strategy that could work in realizing the broader vision of the organization. In addition to working with other like-minded players, Samriddhi intends to help potential intellectual entrepreneurs establish new enterprises that are likely to contribute to a similar vision of a free and prosperous Nepal. This insight comes from our last five years of operations and a critical assessment of the work and opportunities that lie ahead, as identified in our strategic planning process for the next five years held in 2013.

The following two aspects have been considered crucially important for the coming phase:

1. **Expanding support base**

   Expanding the support base includes creating more allies, supporters and partners at the national and international level. These could range from sectors such as the media, private sector, academia and much more. However, an important support base also lies in individuals and organizations willing to assist you with the funds required for scaled up operations.

2. **Impact Assessment and strategic review.**

   It is always valuable to have a clear goal of what we would like to achieve. Therefore, to keep us in line with our strategy, it is important to have an impact assessment process in place. This allows us to focus our energy and time in the right direction before it is too late. As the operation in the coming five years is a part of the five years strategy developed in early 2013, annual strategic reviews will remain an important part of our work. Our strategies will need reassessment and recalibration to the changing context. Therefore, we will continue to have bi-annual and annual strategic review sessions in the coming years.

**Impact Phase: The Bird’s Eye View**

*We anticipate that the impact of our work over the last several years and coming five years will start to be seen July 2018 and onwards.*

There is a legend in Hindu Mythology about Arjun, who is considered the hero of the Hindu epic Mahabharata.
According to the legend, Arjun’s teacher, Droncharya hung a wooden bird from the branch of a tree as a target in a test of archery. One by one, he asked his students to aim for the eye of the wooden bird and when they were ready to shoot, he asked the students to describe what they were able to see. The students generally described the tree, the flowers, the branch from which the bird was suspended and the bird itself. Arjun, one of the best students, replied that he could only see the eye of the bird. This story provides an interesting testimony in setting focus.

Organizations that are really motivated towards seeing change in their work need to be able to envision the kind of impact they exactly want to see in ‘x’ number of year(s). Envisioning the impact and boiling it down to details, which in the corporate world is known as setting targets, is really essential in ensuring the success of your movement and your organization’s work.

Setting realistic goals has remained an important part of Samriddhi’s work approach and it has made possible the several accomplishments the organization has been able to achieve over the past few years. With its previous initiatives and the ones planned for the coming five years, there are few specific impacts the organization plans to create. Some of them are:

- 75 percent of major media will regard Samriddhi as an important player in Economic Policy and Entrepreneurship
- At least 10 influential leaders each from five major political parties will consider Samriddhi a valuable resource for information and knowledge.
- At least two Samriddhi members will have weekly media appearances.
- Samriddhi will be invited to at least 50 percent of the forums and meetings held on economic policies
- Samriddhi will help create, incubate and sustain at least five new enterprises that will contribute to advancing freedom and liberty in Nepal.
- Samriddhi will have at least 2000 dues paying general supporters.

As we look back to our excitement and ambition in 2004, when we dreamed of establishing a think tank in Nepal for prosperity, we realize how painstaking and unusual a journey we had to go through. Things did not happen as we had hoped. We had never thought it would take at least 15 years before we reached the impact phase. However, today, we understand more than in 2004, that creating an impactful organization takes quite a bit of effort and energy. The lesson learned is to be patient and continue to do small good things so that they combine to achieve a larger impact. Each think tank will create its own trajectory on its way to success, and is bound to have a unique roadmap. However, the lessons from other think tanks have always been a guiding light and an aspiration to us. Our only successful mantra is, to get moving with an open mind to learn, and be better along the journey. If you are considering starting a think tank and if you really believe in your cause, it’s time to stop considering, and start your think tank now.

Robin Sitoula has twelve years of experience in the nonprofit sector and is the founder and executive director of Samriddhi, The Prosperity Foundation in Nepal. As Executive Director of Samriddhi, he has designed and implemented several research, educational and advocacy programs in areas of entrepreneurship, economic growth, business environment, and democracy and built a reliable team that has resulted in an award-winning institute. He has worked with eight major political youth organizations of Nepal for several years and established one of the largest collaborative leadership programs among contesting parties in Nepal. During 2005 and 2006, he extensively traveled South Asia to help build capacities for youth organizations in the region to be able to better promote democracy and freedom.