



2011-2012 Think Tank Initiative Annual Report

SUCCESS

ENABLING



© International Development Research Centre 2013

This report is printed on FSC-certified recycled paper.
To reduce environmental impact, few copies have been printed.
However, the complete report can be found on the
Think Tank Initiative website at www.thinktankinitiative.org

Design: H3Creative Inc.



The Think Tank Initiative supports 49 independent policy research institutions in the developing world. These think tanks effect change in their societies. They strengthen public policy debates and promote more objective, evidence-based decision-making to help improve the lives of their fellow citizens.

WELCOME

FROM THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Think Tank Initiative is firmly grounded in IDRC's longstanding tradition of supporting research capacity to solve practical development problems and help developing countries become more self-reliant. TTI has built upon that tradition with a strategy that combines core funding and capacity development support to Southern policy research organizations in ways that enable them to build on their own strengths and their own wisdom about the communities they serve.



Jean Lebel
Vice-President, Programs and Partnerships
International Development Research Centre
Member, TTI Executive Committee*

A few years into the program, we are starting to see the impacts of that strategy. Whether it's influencing the way elections are held in Ghana, improving access to basic infrastructure in Peru, or bolstering affirmative action in India, TTI-supported think tanks are making a difference in ways large and small, but always significant to the lives of the people in their countries.

These stories, and many more, were shared at the *Think Tank Initiative Exchange* in Cape Town in June 2012. Like the Exchange itself – one of the largest gatherings of Southern think tanks – these stories demonstrate the

power of peer learning, and show just how much we can benefit from each other.

The Think Tank Initiative is a long-term endeavour because we know it takes time to establish the foundations for success. All of us involved in TTI – our program team, funding partners, advisors, and, of course, the think tanks themselves – are learning as we go and using this knowledge to have a more meaningful impact.

Now in its fourth year, the Initiative has attracted international attention and its funding partners have begun to discuss its renewal in 2014. An external evaluation is underway, and we all look forward to gaining more insights about which aspects of the program have been most catalytic, and what we can be doing to have an even greater impact.

In the meantime, on behalf of IDRC and the Executive Committee, I'm proud to share with you some of what we've learned about think tank success this year.

Jean Lebel

* TTI's Executive Committee is its decision-making body, and includes representatives from the five donors funding the Initiative.

WELCOME

FROM THE INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY GROUP

South Africa is a well-known example of the power of successful, home-grown think tanks. The growth of robust, independent research institutions in my country over the last two decades has fostered a social and economic revolution and extraordinary growth.

South Africa's success is an inspiration for other think tanks, and we are seeing a growing number of locally-based and independent think tanks emerging to help address issues in their countries. Over the years, they have become more sophisticated, and in doing so they have themselves become stakeholders in the sphere of policy.

The work of think tanks differs tremendously according to their political context, and their impact cannot be overestimated. The *Think Tank Initiative Exchange* held in Cape Town this June was a unique opportunity that brought truly heterogeneous organizations together to discuss what it means to be successful, and how local research can help shape successful development



Felix Seuffert

Rashad Cassim
Head of Research Department
South African Reserve Bank
Member, TTI International Advisory Group*

outcomes. It was wonderful to see so many colleagues engaged in passionate conversation.

Achieving success is not easy, especially within the variety of contexts that challenge Southern policy research organizations. And it does not happen overnight. For those that have been successful, their success has been earned through the dedication of highly skilled people who often sacrificed remuneration for their work.

The Think Tank Initiative is enabling the diverse array of Southern think tanks, not only to achieve individual success, but also to engage in dialogue together along the way. It is also providing the sustained funding that will give them the time and resources they need to grow in capacity, quality and influence.

On behalf of the International Advisory Group, I invite you to share in our dialogue on success.

Rashad Cassim

* Ten policy research and management experts make up our International Advisory Group, which guides the program. They advise our funding agencies and our staff on strategic directions and funding recommendations.

CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

About the Think Tank Initiative	1
The Think Tank Initiative in Brief	2
2011-2012 in Review	4
 TTI Exchange 2012	8
 Defining Success	10
 Policy Engagement	12
 Research Quality	15
 Organizational Effectiveness	18
Year Ahead	22
The Think Tank Initiative Team	23
The Think Tank Initiative Governance	24
The Think Tank Initiative Donors	25
Financial Summary	26



ABOUT THE THINK TANK INITIATIVE

What is the Think Tank Initiative?

The Think Tank Initiative (TTI) is a multi-donor program dedicated to strengthening the capacity of independent policy research organizations in the developing world. Launched in 2008 and managed by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the Initiative is a partnership between IDRC, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) and the Netherlands Directorate-General for International Cooperation (DGIS).

What is a think tank?

Think tanks are complex and there are many ways to define them. At its most basic, a think tank is an organization that engages in research and advocacy on public policy issues. The think tanks we support are based in developing countries and focus on social and economic issues, primarily at a national level. Through their research, they look for innovative solutions to some of their countries' most urgent problems.

How does the Think Tank Initiative work?

The defining feature of the Initiative is that it provides think tanks with general funding that is not earmarked for specific projects. This support allows the institutions to attract, retain and build local talent, develop an independent research program, and invest in public outreach to ensure that research results inform and influence national and regional policy debates.

TTI also provides ongoing capacity development support to these organizations, ranging from individualized mentoring to group learning and exchange.

Where does the Think Tank Initiative work?

TTI currently provides 49 think tanks with core, non-earmarked funding in the following 22 countries:

East Africa:	Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda
West Africa:	Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal
Latin America:	Bolivia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Paraguay, Peru
South Asia:	Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka

How is the Think Tank Initiative managed and governed?

The Initiative is housed at IDRC's headquarters in Ottawa, with program officers based in the regional offices of Montevideo, Delhi, and Nairobi. TTI is governed by an Executive Committee, composed of one representative of each funding agency, and by an International Advisory Group (IAG) made up of ten renowned experts in the fields of policy research and management.

How long is the Initiative?

Strengthening policy research institutions is a long-term endeavour. The Think Tank Initiative is, therefore, envisioned as a 10-year program. The five donor partners have jointly committed approximately CAD 113 million to its first phase, slated to end in mid-2014. An external evaluation of the Initiative is helping shape its second phase.

IN BRIEF

THE THINK TANK INITIATIVE

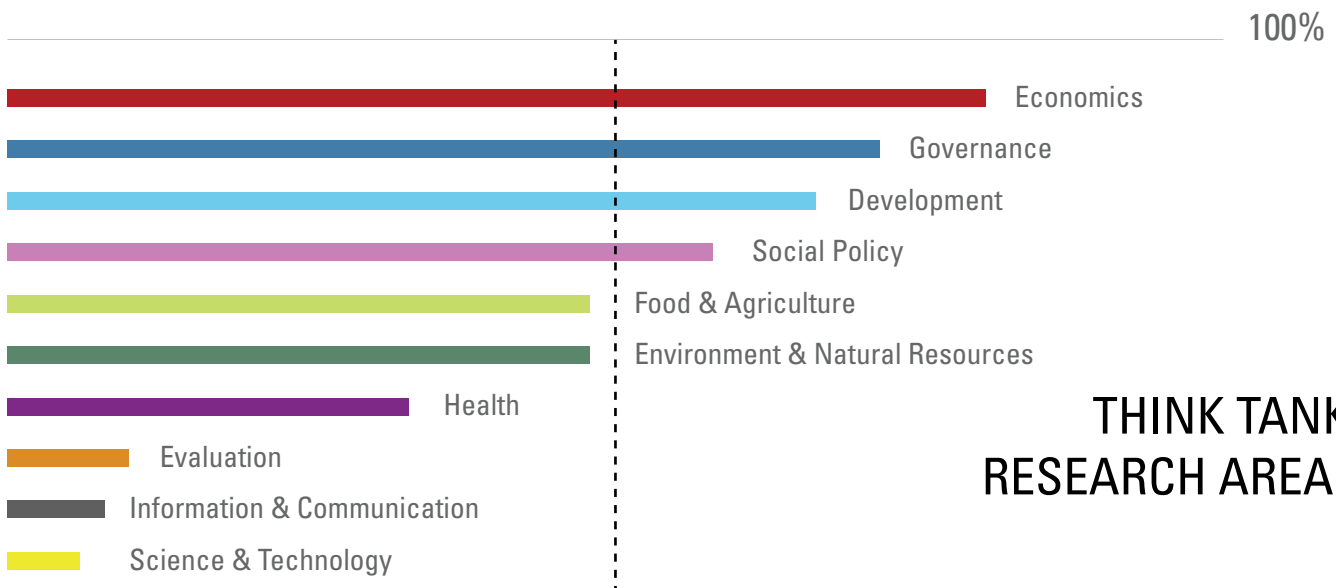




49 Think Tanks

22 Countries

3 Regions



- \$42M** William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
- \$42M** Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- \$14M** International Development Research Centre (IDRC)
- \$9M** UK Department for International Development (DFID)
- \$6M** Netherlands Directorate-General for International Cooperation (DGIS)



REVIEW

2011-2012 IN REVIEW

2011-2012 built on the solid foundations established in the previous years, marking full program implementation with all of the regional cohorts. It also convened the first gathering of all the institutions funded by the Initiative in a global exchange of experience, knowledge and practice.

The Initiative set out two main priorities for 2011-2012. The first was to increase capacity development in the areas of resource mobilization, monitoring and evaluation, and policy engagement. The second was to develop a robust and meaningful research and learning agenda on the role that think tanks play in formulating policy in developing countries.

Capacity Development

In 2011-2012, the Think Tank Initiative continued to focus on supporting its funded institutions beyond providing core grants. This included ongoing, direct interaction between program officers and think tank staff, as well as dedicated assistance from subject matter experts. In addition to one-on-one support, TTI's capacity development program also emphasized peer-to-peer collaboration, learning and exchange between the supported institutions.

Thematic Workshops

TTI holds several thematic workshops each year based on an assessment of the think tanks' needs, as well as in response to specific demand from them. These events are designed to enhance the impact of individual think tanks while encouraging sharing and participation among them. In 2011-2012 TTI held workshops on Monitoring and Evaluation, and on Resource Mobilization:

- Regional Monitoring and Evaluation workshops held in Tanzania, Rwanda, Nigeria and India increased the institutions' understanding of monitoring and evaluation strategies and processes. These events also set them on the path to establishing internal systems for measuring the effectiveness and impact of their work.
- Regional workshops on resource mobilization were also held in Senegal, Ghana, Kenya and Paraguay. These events supported participants in outlining resource mobilization strategies for their institutions and identifying capacity gaps that they are now beginning to fill in order to implement them.

The centrepiece of the year was *The Think Tank Exchange: Enabling Success*, held in June 2012 in Cape Town, South Africa. This event was an unprecedented meeting of minds that generated enthusiasm as well as significant learning, for the think tanks and for the Initiative itself. Read the feature report on page 8.

TTI also supported the participation of the Latin American cohort in the workshop *Using Knowledge for Effective Policy Influence*, which was co-hosted by the Consorcio de Investigación Económica y Social (CIES) and Grupo FARO in Lima, Peru. The Initiative also organized a half-day meeting with the directors of the participating Latin American think tanks to discuss how to support collaboration among the institutions. This discussion in turn led to the creation of TTI's Matching Funds mechanism (see below).

In addition to these events, TTI has held a series of webinars on topics ranging from substantive issues (such as how southern think tanks can contribute to the post-MDG agenda), to practical subjects (such as scenario planning, media relations and online tools).

Policy Engagement and Communications (PEC) Program

In addition to the dedicated one-on-one mentoring and coaching provided by TTI's program officers, the Initiative also launched the Policy Engagement and Communications (PEC) Program. The PEC program supports TTI-funded institutions to promote their research in ways most likely to have policy impact. The program provides think tanks with customized capacity development through the support and ongoing input of a mentor. The PEC program also gives think tanks the opportunity to join in a community of practice where they can share experiences, learn together and ultimately improve how they communicate their research. The program began in francophone West Africa in December 2012, and will be phased in by region in 2013.

Matching Funds

In 2011-12, TTI established the Matching Funds mechanism to provide small, but catalytic additional funding to TTI-supported think tanks. Recipients are selected through a competitive process, and these funds allow them to achieve their long-term objectives through innovation and collaboration with each other and with other actors.

A typical example of a Matching Funds project is the *Network of LAC-TTI Policy Research Organizations*. Executive directors of TTI's funded think tanks in Latin American met with the primary objective of exploring the opportunities and challenges of developing a network to define a regional research agenda and intervene in the policy dialogue at this level.

Another noteworthy project is *Southern Voice on Post-MDGs (2015)*. This collaborative, cross-continental project aims to create a channel for think tanks to join in the ongoing global discussions on a new framework and targets for the post-2015 Millennium Development Goals. It addresses the need to develop the institutional capacity of think tanks as 'centres of excellence' and also aims to leverage Southern voices to influence the global development agenda.

Research and Learning Agenda

In 2011-2012, TTI developed a coherent research and learning agenda to capture lessons about supporting think tanks. These will be shared with the Initiative's funding partners, the funded institutions and other development actors, in order to influence future programming and funding for policy research organizations in developing countries. The research agenda focused on three key objectives: producing evidence about what think tanks need to succeed in a variety of contexts, supporting research on think tanks by the funded think tanks themselves, and understanding the demand for policy research. The following are some examples of the studies the Initiative is undertaking and sponsoring in these areas.

What think tanks need to succeed

- *How does context affect the success of think tanks?* explores the opportunities and challenges facing think tanks in different contexts so that they can position themselves, and be supported, most effectively.
- *Think Tanks and Universities: Complements or Competitors?* aims to understand the relationship between think tanks and universities as complementing and/or competing stakeholders in the national policy arena.
- *Organizational Capacity for Quality Research*; a collaborative action research process where five TTI grantees are reflecting upon, and analyzing, the nature of the processes they undertake in order to develop their organizational capacity for quality research.

On think tanks by think tanks

- *Analyzing and measuring success of think tanks (led by GRADE, Peru)*; explores whether improvements in organizational performance can be monitored through the construction of appropriate indices.
- *Stories of successful influence – the impact of think tanks’ work on policy (led by Grupo FARO, Ecuador)*; maps examples of successful influence of the work of think tanks and to analyze what characterises “success”.

Demand for policy research

- *Policy Community Study*; investigates the kind of information policy actors need and how they access it.
- *Donor Support to Policy Research in the South*; aims to understand how other donors support policy research and how TTI can help “shift” these funding practices towards more support.

All research results will be available on TTI’s website (www.thinktankinitiative.org).

Events

TTI staff, funded institutions, donors and international advisors took part in a number of international, regional and national events during 2011-12. The following are two noteworthy experiences:

World Bank–International Monetary Fund Annual Meetings

At the 2012 World Bank-IMF meetings in October, TTI hosted a panel discussion as part of the Civil Society Policy Forum. The panel brought together representatives of three TTI-supported think tanks – the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) of Bangladesh, Research on Poverty Alleviation (REPOA) of Tanzania, and Grupo FARO of Ecuador – to share their experiences and analysis of the potential of think tanks to promote local solutions and influence global thinking. Drawing on extensive practical experience, the panel highlighted opportunities that can arise from more systematic learning between think tanks and key development actors about the successes and the failures of policy research.

Think Tank Funders’ Forum

TTI convened a meeting of funders of think tanks in London, UK on December 3 and 4, 2012. The Think Tank Funders’ Forum set out to create an opportunity for funders and supporters of think tanks to share experiences, learn from each other, and concretely think about how best to provide their support.

Participants from the African Capacity Building Foundation, AusAID, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Centre for Development and Enterprise, Climate and Development Knowledge Network, DFID, DGIS, Global Development Network, IDRC, Norad, Think Tank Fund, and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation shared what their programs are trying to achieve and how, and explored the potential for working together more effectively. Eager to build on the momentum coming out of the TTFF, participants decided to focus on five concrete activities to be completed within 100 days, including generating case studies on how think tanks manage their finances and summarizing their collective experience on the costs/benefits of different forms of support for think tanks.

SUCCESS

DEFINING

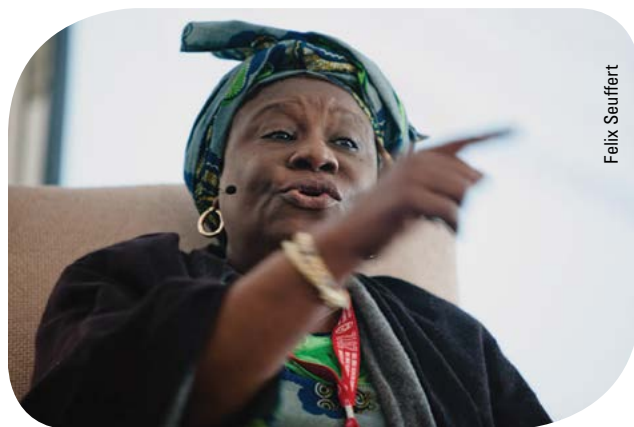
A key event this year – both for the Initiative as a program and for the think tanks engaged in it – was the *Think Tank Initiative Exchange 2012* held in Cape Town. This first-time global gathering of the TTI-funded think tanks drew primarily on the experiences and wisdom of the think tanks themselves. Read on to find out more about this flagship meeting and some of the thinking derived from it.

THE THINK TANK INITIATIVE EXCHANGE 2012

Top Thinkers from 20+ Developing Countries Meet In Cape Town

When think tanks come together to discuss international development issues, it's usually in New York, London or Geneva. But when top international experts met in June 2012 to discuss how local knowledge and research can shape successful development outcomes, they gathered in Cape Town, South Africa.

More than 150 participants were in Cape Town from June 18 to 20 for the *Think Tank Initiative Exchange 2012: Enabling Success*, the first global meeting of all of the think tanks funded by TTI. Representatives from each think tank, TTI staff, members of the International Advisory Group and donors were joined by experts and journalists for one of the largest gatherings of think tanks from the global South.



Marie-Angélique Savané, member of TTI's International Advisory Group



Minister Trevor Manuel opens the Exchange

Trevor Manuel, the Minister responsible for the South African National Planning Commission, gave the keynote address. The event featured a broad range of presentations grouped around TTI's core themes of policy impact, research quality and organizational effectiveness. A Knowledge Expo, open throughout the event, showcased the achievements of the think tanks.

The TTI Exchange 2012 was a think tank-led event with the institutions supported by TTI taking a central role in sharing their experiences. "Impact" was an important theme, and the think tanks illustrated their work with practical examples. For example, Andrea Ordoñez, from Grupo FARO in Ecuador, presented a summary study of 12 cases of policy impact (see page 8) that illustrate how Southern think tanks contribute to local solutions.

As its name suggests, the purpose of the Exchange was to learn more about what makes a think tank successful and to share concrete actions and strategies for achieving success. It also aimed to encourage networking and collaboration among TTI-funded think tanks, advisors and donors; to articulate future directions of the Initiative; and to contribute to the emerging field of study on Southern think tanks.

One of the highlights of the TTI Exchange was the Donor-Think Tank Dialogue. A panel of think tank leaders, donors and other experts discussed the relationship between funders and recipients.

The dialogue touched on issues ranging from how donors define think tank success to the benefits of core funding over project grants. It gave think tanks the opportunity to speak candidly with donors and, in turn, to hear directly from funders about their expectations and how they make their funding decisions.



Peter Evans (DFID) and Shekhar Shah (NCAER) discuss the relationship between donors and think tanks



Abdoulaye Diagne (CRES), Flaubert Mbiekop (TTI) and Simon Carter (IDRC)

The Exchange enabled the think tanks to identify ways to improve their performance. It also allowed funding partners a window on the impact of TTI support to policy research organizations.

Many discussions took place around TTI's three focus areas of policy engagement, research quality, and organizational effectiveness. The following pages draw together a shared vision of success, based on the wisdom of the think tanks themselves.



Roxana Barrantes (IEP) speaks about research quality

SUCCESS

DEFINING SUCCESS

Ultimately, for any think tank, success is about impact. All think tanks aim to have the kind of impact on public policies that will improve the lives of people. For each of the institutions supported by the Think Tank Initiative, which represent a wide diversity of social, political and cultural contexts, impact looks a little different:

- For the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) in Ghana it's influencing a bill setting out multi-partisan guidelines for peaceful and orderly presidential transitions.
- For the Development Analysis Group (GRADE), it's contributing to an infrastructure program that gives more than two million rural Peruvians access to clean water, electricity and roads.
- For the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies (IIDS), it's helping to bring about a new affirmative action policy for the private sector.

Given their potential to influence national development, it's important to explore more deeply what contributes to success for Southern think tanks in their myriad contexts. And no one is better placed than the think tanks themselves to understand those contexts. That's why this year TTI focused on engaging the think tanks it supports in articulating their visions of success and how to go about achieving it.



Anshu Bharadwaj (CSTEP)

TTI's Exchange was central to that exercise. The Exchange was organized around TTI's three focus areas, which are:

Policy Engagement

To have meaningful impact, think tanks need to be able to engage decision-makers. For this reason, many of the TTI-funded think tanks see the strength of an institution's relationships and its ability to network as vital to success. They advise building and nurturing relationships with a range of stakeholders, from policymakers to media, and from donors to the average citizen.



Quality Research

For many think tanks impact is rooted in putting together a compelling case for a policy. Research needs to draw on evidence taken from local contexts and be based on the best available methods, as recognized by peers. Producing such high quality research is a key element of sustained success and allows a think tank to make an important contribution to knowledge, stimulate ideas and creativity, and build its own credibility in the process.

Organizational Effectiveness

Producing high quality research in a way that will influence a range of key stakeholders is a complex task that can only be accomplished by an effective organization

that is able to integrate its research, engagement and communications functions. Most of the institutions TTI supports agree that strong leadership and governance are essential to organizational effectiveness. Some add that holding a strong organizational vision is a very basic ingredient of success.

This section shares the highlights of this year’s program-wide dialogue on success and the elements that help think tanks achieve it. Read on for a summary of the conversation and a sampling of just some of the many voices representing Southern think tanks.

To find out more, listen to others, or to join the dialogue, visit our website at www.thinktankinitiative.org

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“Success is contextual. Its definition should be dependent on the respective objectives of the organization”

Assefa Admassie; EEA/EEPRI, Ethiopia

“The fact that a think tank exists and continues to produce quality work, has visibility and reputation, and achieves its objectives is a sign of success”

Frannie Léautier; ACBF, Zimbabwe

“Success is influencing a government to change a policy that you never thought they would change”

Goran Buldioski; Think Tank Fund

“I hope that the pursuit of success will never destroy values”

Debapriya Bhattacharya; CPD, Bangladesh

“Success is also based on strong academic contributions to knowledge”

Roxana Barrantes; IEP, Peru

ENGAGEMENT

ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS: POLICY ENGAGEMENT

Policy engagement – that is, participating effectively in the policy-making process – is critical to achieving impact. Based on the opinions they shared in Cape Town, many of the TTI-supported think tanks agree that strong relationships with decision makers are an important foundation for effective policy engagement.

To use these relationships to their best advantage, however, think tanks first need to understand the policy cycle and its related processes. Knowing what’s possible and realistic within the system puts them in a better position to engage in policy discussions. Being aware of the process and the timetable for formulating policy also lets them know when and with whom to collaborate at different points in the cycle, well before policy is established.

In addition to interaction with policy makers, many of the think tanks point out that it’s critical to engage with a full range of other “stakeholder-allies” – such as

Build strong relationships with decision-makers.

Identify and engage with other stakeholders and allies.

Engage stakeholders early, often and over a long period of time.

Be open and transparent.

Understand the policy cycle and formulation process.

Develop in-house capacity for outreach, communications and advocacy.

non-governmental organizations, media, the private sector and average citizens. They recommend identifying all stakeholders for a given policy issue and engaging them early, often and over a long period of time.

Engaging effectively with all these stakeholders also means that think tanks need to be able to communicate well with diverse audiences. Communications are so important that some suggest starting them even before the substantive research begins. Many of the TTI-supported think tanks are developing their in-house capacity for communications, advocacy and outreach and some are also using

social media to establish and maintain their networks.

This year, TTI held several webinars on different aspects of communications to address the think tanks’ demand. The newly-launched Policy Engagement and Communications (PEC) Program (see page 5), will also provide broader and more individualized support over the coming year.

ENGAGEMENT

ON ENGAGING IN THE POLICY PROCESS



Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), Ghana

“The role of think tanks is to undertake research in policy gaps. We measure success by policy change, and initiate sustained advocacy campaigns to create national consensus on an issue. A key Ghanaian example involved the drafting of the presidential transitional bill. The absence of a smooth political transition following elections was threatening to undermine democracy, and there was clearly a need to regulate the process of transition to put an end to the acrimony and bitterness that had marked previous transitions. IEA prepared a draft bill and invited key stakeholders, including political parties and civil society, to comment and partake in the process. Presidential candidates for the 2008 election pledged support to the bill and, in his 2009 state of the nation address, the new president pledged commitment to its legislation. The bill was introduced in parliament in 2010, and became law in 2012.”

Instituto de Estudios Avanzados en Desarrollo (INESAD), Bolivia

“INESAD has found a niche as a facilitator between development agencies and NGOs on the one side and the Government of Bolivia on the other. We have created practical, scientific tools that can help these two parties work together to focus interventions to achieve better outcomes, identify important bottle-necks, and visualize expected outcomes for decision-makers and stakeholders. So far, such tools have been developed and used in the areas of health and deforestation policies.”

Centro de Análisis y Difusión de la Economía Paraguaya (CADEP), Paraguay

“CADEP is building capacity and empowering civil society through an ‘International Economy Observatory’ that is changing the terms of the debate on Paraguay’s trade and international policy. This observatory includes databases, research publications in different formats (bulletins, research articles, reports, and editorials), and videos; all these available in a dedicated space in CADEP’s website. This Observatory has made the Paraguayan Central Bank revisit its statistics on Paraguay’s commercial account, which is contributing to a more accurate and evidence-based debate on the future of Paraguay, in particular, its presence and role in Mercosur, a topic that has proven critical under the country’s current political juncture.”

LET'S TALK POLICY ENGAGEMENT

"Think tanks need to network with various stakeholders, including interest groups, local communities, policymakers and other actors. It's a two-way street – you have to be prepared to give and receive information."

Samuel Wangwe (REPOA, Tanzania)

"We need to undertake direct policy outreach towards citizens and local leaders."

Godber Tumushabe (ACODE, Uganda)

"Embrace media and civil society as research allies! Media is looking to think tanks as a source of fresh, up to date, and concrete information. Adapt materials for different media formats, like Facebook and radio."

Mauricio Díaz Burdett
(FOSDEH, Honduras)

"Building local legitimacy and influencing policy requires engaging with local people and gaining the support of those for whom you are finding solutions for. Local resource mobilization can be part of increasing legitimacy."

Neelam Makhijani (Resource Alliance, UK)

"The nature of content has changed with the advent of the Internet. [...] Now you can communicate using digital means from the second that you start a research project."

Nick Scott (ODI, UK)

"Build relationships with those with who will be affected by the research!"

Professor Sukhadeo Thorat
(ICSSR, India)

"Create a basis for sustained interaction. Get key stakeholders involved in either the research or formulating research at an early stage – target the critical decision makers."

Raghavan Suresh (PAC, India)

"If the agenda of the think tank is to bring about policy change, it cannot completely contract out advocacy."

Elizabeth Aliro Birabwa (EPRC, Uganda)



ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS: RESEARCH QUALITY

Most of a think tank's work focuses on its research. That makes the quality of research critical not only to a think tank's success, but also to its very identity and reputation.

The wisdom expressed among TTI-supported think tanks is that before they can even start to produce quality research, they need to be able to identify gaps where their research can make a meaningful contribution. To do this, they must understand the policy process and the political environment in which their research will play a role. And once they identify the gaps, they need to produce the research quickly in order for it to be relevant.

Across various fields of study, many TTI-supported think tanks assert that focusing research on their specialties is the route to success. Others, however, argue that institutions need to maintain some flexibility in order to remain relevant.

Despite this debate, most of the think tanks agree that quality research is based on reliable evidence. Benchmarking the quality of research – that is,

Identify gaps where research can be helpful.

Develop a culture of evidence-based research and quality data.

Use peer review systems to ensure quality.

Produce research quickly in order to be relevant and helpful.

Attract and retain a sufficient number of high-calibre research staff.

Collaborate and partner with academic institutions and other research partners.

measuring an institution's research quality against similar institutions and best practices – has been identified as one way to help improve research quality. Several of the think tanks have also expressed interest in peer review systems. Supported by a series of TTI workshops this year (see page 4), many of the think tanks have begun to develop monitoring and evaluation systems that will, among other things, help ensure the quality of their research.

Of course, high-quality research would never be possible without high-quality researchers. Many think tank leaders have shared the challenges they face in attracting a healthy mix of senior and junior

research staff. And once they get them, think tanks need to make ongoing investments in staff in order to keep them. Those able to invest in continuous learning for staff can become particularly productive.

Partnerships and collaborations among think tanks and with other organizations can also help to augment a think tank's own in-house expertise. TTI's Matching Funds program (see page 5) is fostering this kind of collaboration.



ON PRODUCING QUALITY RESEARCH

Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo (GRADE), Peru

“GRADE has a strong track record of applied research in social policies, education, poverty, health, rural development and the environment, among other issues. GRADE’s research staff conducts high quality, rigorous research, resulting in findings sustained by solid empirical evidence. But GRADE’s researchers do not only carry out research, they also participate in advisory boards and consultative committees at the local and international levels, and directly engage with government officials to discuss policy proposals. GRADE’s researchers are so active, in part, because of institutional incentives such as support to publish in peer reviewed journals and funds to mentor junior researchers.”

Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE), Uganda

“Since securing TTI funding, ACODE has invested in boosting the quality of our research and policy outreach work. First, the development of a staff performance score card has helped define the range of quantifiable staff research products. This is designed to improve research productivity and move the organization towards performance-based staff remuneration. Secondly, TTI support provided resources that have enabled us to invest in submitting ACODE research papers to a peer review process. A publications policy and an external peer review systems is now being developed.”

National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), India

“As anyone who has run a think tank knows, there are no shortcuts or magic bullets to high quality – in attracting talent, providing the right environment, producing output, or reaching out to policymakers, the public, and press. NCAER’s contract research for government and the private sector forces us to meet the market test of quality, relevance, and impact. For our own-funded research we fall back on traditional quality enhancement mechanisms, including external reviews, aiming at higher-quality outlets for opinion pieces, and refereed publications. A growing list of world-class NCAER Non-resident Senior Fellows provides research guidance and help in identifying new talent.”



LET'S TALK QUALITY RESEARCH

"Evidence is a stock of knowledge, created through a flow of quality research – one piece of research is not enough to count as evidence."

**Werner Hernani-Limarino
(Fundación ARU, Bolivia)**

"The research agenda should be forward-looking, with projections for future needs."

**Mauricio Díaz Burdett
(FOSDEH, Honduras)**

"Local peer reviewing and perhaps a national peer review journal can help ensure the quality of research, especially in environments with no strong research community."

**Andrea Ordóñez
(Grupo FARO, Ecuador)**

"We need to pursue young researchers actively – maybe through internships targeted at university students in the diaspora. The things that attract quality researchers are market-related pay, flexible hours and long-term job assistance."

Antonia Mutoro (IPAR Rwanda)

"A quality research culture is one where mistakes are seen and corrected quickly through a system of internal peer review."

Romeshun Kulasabanathan (CEPA, Sri Lanka)

"A think tank needs a critical mass of full-time researchers – it may be difficult to build the capacity of a think tank, but it can be even more difficult to sustain research capacity."

**Mustafizur Rahman
(CPD, Bangladesh)**

"Start by identifying the low-hanging fruits where think tanks can influence the agenda."

**Louis Kasekende
(Bank of Uganda, IAG member)**

"Validate the policy solution through engagement with academia, private sector, and grassroots organisations and publishing materials."

Raghavan Suresh (PAC, India)



ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS: ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

No matter the quality of its research or the relationships it has with policymakers and other stakeholders, if a think tank is not well run and able to sustain and maximize its resources, there can be no long-lasting success. The key to organizational effectiveness is not just to have all the ingredients of success, but also to integrate them into the organizational structure and culture so that they function well together.

TTI-supported think tanks seem to agree that strong leadership is critical to a think tank's effectiveness. Some also view the composition of the board of directors as a factor to be carefully considered for its contribution to success. Of course, boards are as diverse as the think tanks themselves, but at a minimum they need sufficient experience to provide strategic guidance and to serve as ambassadors and fundraisers for their organizations. To carry out the strategic direction set by the board, a

Strong leadership.

Reliable funding.

Clear vision and goals.

Strong board of directors.

Competent management team.

think tank also needs a highly competent management team and qualified staff capable of implementing it.

Drawing and keeping good staff and maintaining all the necessary functions of an effective organization require predictable financial resources. Funding is critical for the think tanks and, for most, a constant preoccupation. Figuring out the balance between staying true to a vision and following the money – or between long-term and commissioned work – is a source of consternation and debate. The TTI-supported think tanks have differing opinions and diverse strategies for pursuing the financial sustainability that is such a coveted element of success.

TTI's workshops this year on resource mobilization as well as TTI Matching Funds support (see page 5) have helped think tanks begin to outline strategies for financial sustainability beyond the life of the program.

ON BEING EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONS



Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA)

“Effective governance is arguably the most fundamental imperative for successful, effective, and sustainable think tanks. When KIPPRA was established 12 years ago to support policymaking within the Government of Kenya, it was recognized that both operational autonomy and an effective governance framework were essential for us to achieve our mandate. Proper skills mix and representativeness in board membership, adherence to a board charter, performance contracts and evaluation systems, ISO 9001:2008 certification, and regular reporting, monitoring, and evaluation have all contributed to KIPPRA’s improved performance and productivity, enhanced stakeholder confidence, and more stable funding sources.”

Asociación de Investigación y Estudios Sociales (ASIES), Guatemala

“ASIES substantially contributes to public policy debates on priority issues on Guatemala’s national agenda. Our members and researchers are linked to the public sector, the academic world, and the business sector, and share a common vision of democracy and justice. ASIES acts with transparency, academic rigor, efficiency, and an integral comprehension of the national reality. We provide a discussion space, due to our capacity to convene stakeholders, based on the sound technical and academic quality of our work. ASIES is a reliable source for decision-makers, the national and international community, as well as the media. ASIES is valued for its advocacy work.”

Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS)

“Established under an Act of Parliament, the IPS has focused on developing high standards of governance to ensure our credibility and mandate of providing independent, rigorous policy analysis. A board of governors, comprising key stakeholders in the policy process, provides guidance to develop procedures that enhance our financial and operational autonomy. This is complemented by a strong and consistent institutional leadership which has helped develop robust internal structures and processes through a participatory approach. Strategic corporate planning, a long-term vision, and operational manuals for day-to-day management are some examples of the tools put in place to ensure transparency and accountability principles which are shared by all staff.”

LET'S TALK ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

"If you have core funding, you can have the freedom to improve the range of research that you do, to be more creative and to be able to follow what you, as a think tank, believe is important, not necessarily what the donors think is important."

Léonard Wantchékon (IERPE, Benin)

"Staff must have confidence in their leader and understand the decision-making process."

Mustafizur Rahman (CPD, Bangladesh)

"Think tank leaders not only need to be masters of their own fields, but also to have sufficient knowledge of all fields of research under their leadership. They also need to have a high level of emotional intelligence and be able to engage with staff and identify those who may need extra motivation."

Orazio Belletini
(Grupo Faro, Ecuador)

"There is a difference between the performance metrics think tanks have to deal with, compared to for-profit organisations, which have agreed-upon backward-looking performance metrics. Metrics for think tanks are difficult and it can be hard to measure the change made by think tanks. Therefore, boards need to be educated about the differences in performance measurement issues."

Shekhar Shah (NCAER, India)

"Good monitoring and evaluation is empowering for all involved. It is critical to know exactly how the organisation is doing."

Zenda Ofir (Evalnet, South Africa)

"Criteria for selecting commissioned work include publication potential, synergies with existing projects, relationship building, North-South collaboration, time and money."

Lykke Anderson (INESAD, Bolivia)

"A leader must be able to develop and build a strong institutional culture."

Nicolas Ducoté (Government of Buenos Aires, Argentina, IAG member)

"It is important to access only donors or funders who have values aligned to those of the institution."

Kala Seetharam Sridhar (PAC, India)



To watch the presentations
of the Exchange and read further
documentation about the event, please
visit www.thinktankinitiative.org

2013 YEAR AHEAD

The discussions arising from the Think Tank Exchange summarized in the previous pages attest to the complexity of factors that contribute to the success of think tanks in their widely varying contexts.

As the think tanks work through their third and fourth years of funding, TTI will continue supporting each of them – individually and collectively – in pursuing longer-term agendas and building institutional credibility to influence policy.

In addition, in the coming year, the Initiative will focus on three main priorities:

Sharing think tank success and TTI program impact:

TTI will showcase the achievements of the think tanks it supports, as well as program-wide learning and impact in order to better understand how this model of support is working in practice. We will actively work to share these results with think tanks, donor agencies and other stakeholders so they in turn inform and improve their own policies and programming.

Making the broader case for core funding: TTI will keep advocating for core funding to Southern think tanks. We will continue strengthening the evidence that demonstrates the role policy research organizations play in the development process, and convincing others of their value in the design and implementation of sound policies.

Evaluating the program: TTI will also continue to learn through an external evaluation being conducted jointly by the European Centre for Development Policy Management and the Overseas Development Institute. We will disseminate the findings of the evaluation in 2013 as part of our commitment to sharing learnings from TTI's experience.

THE THINK TANK INITIATIVE TEAM

OTTAWA

Sara D’Arcy
Program Assistant

Julie LaFrance
Senior Program Specialist

Jennifer McDonald
Grant Administrator

Katy Stockton
Program Management Officer

Peter Taylor
Acting Program Leader

Maria Urbina-Fausser
Program Officer

NEW DELHI

Kaveri Gill
Senior Program Officer

Sheeba Varghese
Program Assistant

Samar Verma
Senior Program Officer

NAIROBI

Flaubert Mbiekop
Program Officer

Kui Wagacha
Program Assistant

John Okidi
Senior Program Specialist

Paul Okwi
Senior Program Officer

Diakalia Sanogo
Senior Program Officer

MONTEVIDEO

Carolina Robino
Program Officer

Antonio Romero
Program Officer

Carolina Quintana
Program Assistant

Moreover, a number of IDRC colleagues in Montevideo, Nairobi, New Delhi and Ottawa help TTI across all aspects of its work. Their contribution is critical in meeting the Initiative’s objectives.

GOVERNANCE

THE THINK TANK INITIATIVE GOVERNANCE

International Advisory Group

Rukmini Banerji – India
Director Programs, Pratham

Nancy Birdsall – United States
Founding President, Center for Global Development

Rashad Cassim – South Africa
Head of Research Department,
South African Reserve Bank

Paul Collier – United Kingdom
Professor of Economics; Director of the Centre for
the Study of African Economies, Oxford University

Nicolás Ducoté – Argentina
Policy Director for the Unión Celeste y Blanco (PJ
Federal); co-founder and former director of CIPPEC

Rebeca Grynspan – Costa Rica
UN Under-Secretary-General and
UNDP Associate Administrator

Louis Kasekende – Uganda
Deputy Governor of the Bank of Uganda, Uganda

Rakesh Mohan – India
Professor, School of Management; Senior Fellow,
Yale University

Maureen O’Neil – Canada
President, Canadian Health Services Research
Foundation

Marie-Angélique Savané – Senegal
International Consultant; former Chair of the
Panel of Eminent Persons for the African Peer Review
Mechanism in Senegal

Executive Committee

William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
Ruth Levine – Program Director, Global
Development and Population Program

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
Gargee Ghosh – Deputy Director, Policy and
Advocacy, Global Development Program

Oliver Babson – Senior Program Officer,
Global Development Program

Department for International Development (DFID)
Peter Evans – Senior Governance Advisor, DFID India

**Directorate-General for International Cooperation
(DGIS)**
Sandra Louiszoon – Senior Policy Advisor

International Development Research Centre (IDRC)
Jean Lebel – Vice-President, Programs and
Partnerships Branch

Sue Szabo – Director, Social and Economic Policy

THE THINK TANK INITIATIVE DONORS

About the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people's health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people – especially those with the fewest resources – have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Learn more at www.gatesfoundation.org

About the Netherlands Directorate-General for International Cooperation (DGIS)

The Directorate-General for International Cooperation (DGIS) is responsible for development cooperation policy, its coordination, implementation, and funding. The Netherlands works with the governments of other countries and with international organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and the European Union. DGIS themes include gender, AIDS, education, sustainable economic development, and the environment. Learn more at www.minbuza.nl/en

About the UK Department for International Development (DFID)

The UK Department for International Development (DFID) manages the UK's aid to poor developing countries and leads its fight against world poverty. DFID works with governments in developing countries to help them lift their citizens – the poorest and most disadvantaged – out of poverty by providing proper health care and education, fostering good governance and promoting equitable economic growth. Learn more at www.dfid.gov.uk

About the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation has been making grants since 1967 to help solve social and environmental problems at home and around the world. The Foundation concentrates its resources on activities in education, the environment, global development, performing arts, philanthropy, and population, and makes grants to support disadvantaged communities in the San Francisco Bay Area. Learn more at www.hewlett.org

About the International Development Research Centre (IDRC)

Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) supports research in developing countries to promote growth and development. IDRC also encourages sharing this knowledge with policymakers, other researchers, and communities around the world. The result is innovative, lasting local solutions that aim to bring choice and change to those who need it most. Learn more at www.idrc.ca

FINANCES

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

	Dec 2007 – Mar 2009	Apr 2009 – Mar 2010	Apr 2010 – Mar 2011	Apr 2011 – Mar 2012
Contributions	2,136,173	9,284,824	20,158,103	18,297,571
William and Flora Hewlett Foundation	119,812	1,823,166	8,251,126	6,870,999
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation		6,274,614	8,590,326	6,536,503
DFID			1,232,780	1,425,837
DGIS			1,020,515	2,082,410
International Development Research Centre	2,016,361	1,187,044	1,063,356	1,381,822
Expenditures	2,136,173	9,284,824	20,158,103	18,297,571
Operational Costs	1,299,154	1,923,562	2,447,832	2,317,465
Application and Selection Process	368,217	123,074	57,486	
Monitoring and Evaluation	43,154	164,703	532,728	168,180
Research Expenses				
– Core Grants Programme		5,642,987	14,763,122	13,616,762
– Organizational Development Programme Funds	102,386	380,979	327,887	327,036
– Learning, Synthesis, Publication and Networking		127,165		58,850
– International Advisory Board	110,605	3,200	113,235	57,411
Administrative Cost Recovery	212,657	919,154	1,915,813	1,751,867
Research Expenses by Region	212,991	6,154,332	15,204,244	14,060,059
East Africa		3,156,758	3,661,432	2,847,180
West Africa		2,694,367	3,485,628	3,570,499
South Asia		95,402	2,047,473	1,471,367
Latin America		77,440	3,661,676	3,588,234
India			2,234,800	2,466,518
Global ¹	212,991 ²	130,365	113,235	116,261

¹ Activities carried out in more than one region.

² Expenses during this period were not broken down by region.