

Project Title: Phase 2 Institutional Support

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Institution Name: REPOA

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Final Technical Report

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Executive summary

The Think Tank Initiative (TTI) has contributed significantly to the development of institutional capacity over the last five and a half years of implementing the second phase. Additional research capacity has resulted from long term training of staff to PhD level, and specialized-short term pieces of training on various aspects of research, such as research methodologies and new software applications. Research capacity was also enhanced through learning-by-doing by engaging senior visiting research fellows who worked with researchers to turn various pieces of analytical work into published materials in the form of journal articles or books.

Organizational capacity has equally improved significantly over the project period. Our M&E system has been strengthened by increasingly adapting to online reporting framework that has made it easy to record outputs and events attended by staff in the country and outside the country and their contribution in a timely manner. The administrative and support staff have been provided with short-term skill upgrading courses, which enabled the organization to improve efficiency and to engage more successfully with national and international organizations for joint research projects, pieces of training, and policy engagements. Staff increasingly participated and contributed to policy debates at global and regional workshops and conferences, which have served to both influence regional policies and to deepening REPOA's identity beyond national borders.

The organization's communication strategy has been reviewed and implemented, with a view to expanding the organization's outreach to policy and decision makers, and other development stakeholders inside and outside the country. Over this period, publications of working papers, journal articles, policy briefs, and books increased. Several policy dialogues were organized to discuss implications of policy and recommendations resulting from various researches. These have led to growing recognition of the contribution of REPOA and demand for direct input to policy reviews by different ministries, departments and government agencies as well as international organizations. More engagement with the media has served to disseminate our research outputs, events, and views on different policies to the public more effectively. REPOA's Annual Research Workshop has continued to attract more policymakers from all levels because of the relevance of our thematic choices, quality of our resource persons, quality of presented papers, and the diversity of participants.

The core support of TTI has significantly contributed to the strengthening of the organizational capacity and credibility as a nationally and internationally recognized Think Tank on public policy matters.

Objectives and Progress towards Milestones

The impact of TTI's support has been broadly felt across the three pillars of organisational performance. Through this support, REPOA has been able to:

- i. **Broadened the scope and quality of strategic research portfolio to timely and adequately respond to policy needs** – TTI's support has enabled REPOA to design and adapt a flexible strategic research programme consistent with Tanzania's Long-Term Perspective Plan for realising Vision 2025. This has increased the policy relevance of REPOA's research, enabling it to address existing gaps in evidence-informed policymaking in Tanzania. Specifically, TTI's support has helped REPOA to increase direct engagement with stakeholders in national policy processes, for example the preparation of Tanzania's Oil and Gas Policy 2013, review of Employment Policy 2014, preparation of Tanzania's Second Five Year Development Plan II in 2016, the development of the National

Private Sector Development Policy in 2018, as well as a functional review of government in the context of decentralisation by devolution that has underpinned the drafting of a new National Decentralisation Policy. Improved quality of our research has led to a 100% increase in the number of peer-reviewed publications between 2009 and 2018, and increased citation and referencing of REPOA outputs in national and international media

- ii. **Strengthened internal capacity to deliver quality and substantial evidence for informed policymaking** – REPOA has been able to improve the quality of its workforce through the successful training and retention of 4 PhDs. This represents a 200% increase in the number of PhD qualifications at REPOA. Further REPOA has also managed to train and retain 2 Masters’ level researchers, provide the equivalent of 2 new trainings for non-research staff a year since 2010, enhance engagement of visiting research fellows by over 40%, establish a sound M&E framework and audit functions for efficiency and improved accountability, and promoted a 50:50 employment rate for women and men since 2014.
- iii. **The enhanced network of individual and institutional collaborators** – Outcome 3 in REPOA’s current strategic plan calls for the dissemination and utilisation of knowledge produced by research. TTI’s support has been vital in realising this mandate by facilitating 10 Annual Research Workshops, REPOA’s annual flagship event interfacing policy, research and academia. This has enhanced long-term and short-term collaboration with leading national and international policy and research institutions. Examples include our collaborative research work with UN-WIDER, CMI, and engagement in the Southern Voice network on Post-MDGs data revolution and contribution to SDG development process. In addition, REPOA has been able to improve participation in national and international policy coordination forums by over 300%, expanded its database of experts by 100%, and successfully coordinated 10 national high-level policy dialogues in the period under support. In addition, our linkage between research and policy has been demonstrated by our international recognition by other think tanks as was the case at the 2018 TTI Exchange in Bangkok and the ranking by the University of Pennsylvania for the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP).
- iv. **Invested in performance-enhancing state of the art physical and technical infrastructure** – TTI’s support has also been directed towards strengthening of REPOA’s ICT and network infrastructure. This has seen the streamlining of IT security for enhanced reliability and fault tolerance. Other improvements to the ICT infrastructure include enhanced support for cloud computing for enhanced remote working and backup solutions, ongoing review and overhauling of REPOA’s website, the introduction of new survey technologies that have halved fieldwork costs and time between 2013 and 2018, and the enactment of an organizational ICT Policy in 2016. Indirectly, TTI’s support for REPOA’s ICT infrastructure has enabled a re-allocation of resources that have enabled the expansion of physical office space by 100%.
- v. **Improved dissemination and linkages with civil society organisations, media and other non-state actors** – TTI has strengthened REPOA’s ability to engage with policy stakeholders directly. This has been aided by the increased publication of bite-sized policy briefs from 43 in 1995-2009 to 64 in 2010-2018. In addition, there has been an increased number of Kiswahili translated publications by 200% further widening the audience of REPOA’s research outputs, an expansion of REPOA’s mailing list and network of domestic collaborators (mainly civil society organisations),

and a 50% increase in participation at national and international policy advocacy forums. REPOA has seen increased invitations to participate in interviews on both radio and TV stations on different matters locally and internationally. REPOA work is also cited in the newspapers locally and globally. The enhanced communication has also strengthened REPOA's presence online. REPOA has seen an increased number of followers on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram pages, which are great avenues for sharing outputs and promoting debates among the youth and technology-savvy population.

- vi. **Strengthening of REPOA's financial sustainability:** The TTI conducted training in 2017 to its grantees, REPOA being one of them, on how new business models for sustainability. The motive behind this training was to prepare grantees to diversify their funding sources as the TTI programme was coming to an end towards the beginning of 2019. This training improved REPOA's funding position in two ways:
- Internal capacity to write funding proposals has improved significantly. This is reflected in the number of proposals for the longer-term projects which REPOA has been able to secure recently. In line with this is the ability to match activities with costing, which enables the institution to absorb full costs of projects and contribute to sustainability fund.
 - Capacity to negotiate with potential donors for core funding has improved significantly. Part of the training focused on the strategies to deepen identity, to scope and understand funders interests, and aligning them to local research demand. This has enabled REPOA to secure core funding from its traditional donors and to attract new funders.

Synthesis of results

Reflecting on the primary outcomes of the grant, the following were observed:

- ♣ REPOA staff understands and believes that the credibility of the organization is dependent on the quality of its work and capacity to influence policy changes based on evidence generated from scientific and robust research. The staff understands that teamwork is necessary, and this spirit has enabled REPOA to work with other research institutions on joint research, training, or policy dialogue.
- ♣ REPOA's capacity building efforts for both researchers and research users (for example media, policymakers, researchers) have raised the institutional profile, expanded its network of followers and users of its research findings.
- ♣ REPOA's multiple methods of policy influence, dissemination and proactive engagement by researchers have helped to expand its reach to policymakers. For example, recent work on service delivery indicator (SDI) survey 2014 and 2017 stimulated policy debates in the sectors of education and health, strengthening delivery mechanism including school inspectorate; teacher's training, and enhanced drug availability in primary health facilities. Another example is REPOA' research work on decentralization experience in Tanzania, which led to the Government engaging REPOA to review the allocation of functions between different levels of government, which is a significant input into the review of the national policy on decentralization currently in progress.
- ♣ Organizational strengthening requires a combination of actions, for example, training, improvement in staff incentives, investment in ICT infrastructure, and support for researchers to

engage with policymakers. The flexible design of this project meant that the organization was able to sequence project activities in line with priorities and the prevailing environment. This flexibility was essential for the success of the project.

- ♣ The success of this project can be attributed to its essential design feature, that is, addressing the binding constraints, or priority areas of support as identified by the institution. The three result areas identified by REPOA have improved significantly over the past five years, which have raised the credibility of the institution over time and increased its funding from other donors.
- ♣ This project aimed at supporting institutional strengthening through core financial support as well as technical support. This complemented the gaps that could not be filled by other donors, mainly traditional core support. TTI phase 2 covered the period that many donors had ended their core support, keeping earmarked project funding. TTI funding helped to meet critical institutional core costs and strengthening the organizational capacity that was necessary for the organization to sustain the quality of its work and credibility needed for its sustainability. The relationship was managed through a clear, transparent and objective allocation of funds and reporting to all donors and stakeholders. Many of our funders were invited to attend our various vital events, including the Annual Research Workshops and their contributions were equally acknowledged.

Problems and Challenges

In general, no significant issues related directly to project development. The programme officer and the TTI team maintained close contacts with REPOA and provided technical support and advice whenever needed. A significant challenge related to the severe decline in core funding from other donors in the first three years of the TTI phase 2 project. The effect of this situation was mitigated through flexible adjustments along the budget lines as agreed with TTI, and the initiative by TTI to bring together regional Think Tanks to develop new business models for sustainability of Think Tanks. These helped to reposition our resource mobilization approach, reaching out to non-traditional partners and deepening institutional identity, which has helped to grow the funding base.

In addition, while TTI has improved capacity to write quality technical proposals, financial proposals have remained a challenge. One critical element of effective financial proposal is the full costing for projects. However, many project funders are reluctant to meet certain costs, such as institutional overheads, at the same demanding lower rates charged for staff time.

Administrative Reflections and Recommendations

Our experience with the TTI project has been more of a success than a failure. It has strengthened our networks and understanding of global challenges affecting Think Tanks and different strategies to overcome them. While it has been generally difficult with other funding sources, it is recommended that similar IDRC projects could consider more significant amounts of funding per institution but built within a framework of endowments, or a combination of funding modalities. Even if initial returns to endowment fund would be small, such an approach could attract funding from other sources to grow the endowment for sustaining Think Tanks.