



External Evaluation of TTI Phase Two

Second Interim Report

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November 17, 2017

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ACBF	African Capacity Building Foundation
ARSD	Annual Review of Social Development
CBGA	Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability
C&E	Strategy for Program Communications and Engagement
CPR	Centre for Policy Research
CRES	Consortium pour la Recherche Économique et Sociale
CSEA	Center for the Studies of the Economies of Africa
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
EDRI	Ethiopian Development Research Institute
FC	Full cohort
FUSADES	Fundación Salvadoreña para el Desarrollo Económico y Social de El Salvador
HR	Human resources
IEA Ghana	Institute of Economic Affairs
IPAR Rwanda	Institute of Policy Analysis and Research
IPS	Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka
ILAIPP	Latin American Initiative for Public Policy Research
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
KIPPRA	Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis
MISR	Makerere Institute of Social Research
NAEB	National Agricultural Export Board
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
QA	Quality assurance
PCS	Policy Community Survey
RPO	Regional Program Officer
SC	Sample cohort
SoI	Story of influence
SPDC	Social Policy and Development Centre
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
ToR	Terms of Reference
TTI	Think Tank Initiative
TTIX	TTI Exchange

Executive Summary

PURPOSE AND ORGANIZATION

This Second Interim Report of the Evaluation of Phase Two of the Think Tank Initiative (TTI) presents interim findings and suggested midway lessons of this Phase of the Program. It is part of the Evaluation's mandate "to provide independent, timely and actionable feedback to allow for the adaptive management of TTI, as well as providing rigorously documented and validated learning about the program." At this halfway point, the Report primarily follows up on the Evaluation's Phase Two baselines, established in 2016, which have been used as the basis for data collection here and against which further progress will be assessed up to 2019 in the Final Evaluation Report.

This Report presents the main baselines, findings and potential lessons for consideration. By intent and agreement, it is a limited progress review of emerging findings in specified priority areas –centred on the key challenges of think tank sustainability– while conserving Evaluation resources for the comprehensive Final Report. At the same time, this Report reflects wider input on the full cohort (FC) of grantees than its predecessor, and includes findings and insights from 17 evaluation case studies underway with grantees. It also includes a section setting out baselines and assessments of progress to date on TTI's high-level program learning objectives.

In terms of organization, a short introduction situates the Interim Report in relation to the Terms of Reference (ToR) and the agreed Inception Report for the Evaluation, together with a brief review of the methodology and quality assurance applied, noting the limitations that were encountered. The main body of the Report is organized around the three pillars of the Initiative – organizational development, strengthening research quality, and enhancing policy engagement.

The three overall Evaluation questions refer to effectiveness, outcomes and broader lessons respectively:

Question One: In what ways does TTI support lead, or fail to lead, to stronger and more sustainable think tanks? How has this been achieved? Where evidence exists that TTI support has failed to contribute to the strengthening and improved sustainability of think tanks, what are the reasons? [This question is mainly addressed in the sections on organizational development and research quality.]

Question Two: To what extent do stronger and more sustainable think tanks lead to changes in policy and practice? How has this been achieved? If evidence does not exist that strong, sustainable think tanks lead to changes in policy and practice, what are the reasons? What is the evidence of TTI contributions? [This question is mainly addressed in the section on policy influence.]

Question Three: What lessons can be drawn from the TTI experience regarding effective support to think tanks? [Some preliminary findings and conclusions are presented in this

Second Interim Report, but this question will primarily be addressed in the Final Evaluation Report.]

Other brief sections outline the overall conclusions, recommended course corrections and emerging lessons. Finally, the Report includes recommendations on future directions for the Evaluation itself.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the development processes observed among grantees reflect stability and continued progress towards TTI objectives. A solid majority of grantees do not foresee major problems arising with the end of TTI in itself, although broader contextual challenges are emerging. For those who do have significant concerns, there is a general feeling that the current period may be a ‘calm before the storm’. Apprehensions around the expiration of TTI support are primarily related to the prospective reduction of the flexibility and independence that this long-term core support has provided. Many grantees are relatively optimistic that their absolute funding levels can be sustained, but the quality of that funding is likely to decline due to a greater reliance on commissioned research and in some cases consultancies.

During the period under review the organizational situation for the large majority of grantees has been strikingly stable. There are growing concerns among many (but far from all) grantees about future senior staff retention after TTI. This is not just TTI-related, but also due to reduction in other core and longer-term program funding, and other factors.

With regards to capacity development efforts, in the past year several grantees have joined vigorously in TTI-supported action research on business models and resource mobilization. Other support (e.g., for the Latin American Initiative for Public Policy Research —ILAIPP) has generated mixed levels of interest and engagement. The role of core funding in capacity development now seems to be in a consolidation phase in that capacity ‘retention’ is a more pressing concern than capacity ‘development’. There is a growing ‘red flag’ concern among some of the grantees that have relied on TTI support for (especially) senior staff salaries. But this is seen as part of the overall resource challenge and there are few dedicated strategies to address it. Opportunity Funds have in some cases provided clear, relevant support to capacity development, through helping to develop networks and methods. In others, they have functioned as an additional window for funding research projects or community development activities. Although these projects contribute to capacities through ‘learning by doing’, they have not so far shown themselves to be consistently well-tailored to capacity development goals.

A significant number of grantees are currently/recently developing new strategic plans, and TTI is important for advising them in these processes and providing them financial resources that create space to think strategically. However, local factors and informal dialogue dominate strategic planning in most cases. After Phase One of TTI, strategic planning efforts have become largely owned and used by the grantees themselves.

Resource mobilization plans are sometimes being integrated into strategic planning. There are

trends towards a stronger focus on funding diversification. Realistic costing is increasingly recognized as important, but the grantees' power to influence the levels of overheads that can be charged is uncertain. It is too early to judge how far the discussions of new approaches, such as endowments, will lead and whether they will support more comprehensive business plans.

Improving reputations are leading to significant growth in demand for research from many grantees. However, challenges with costing and fears in relation to stability of long-term funding are leading to hesitance among some in employing the new staff that will be required to respond to this demand while maintaining quality. There are indications among a few grantees of a growing reliance on engaging temporary 'research associates' to address these gaps. The Evaluation Team judges this to be a pragmatic approach. But it may potentially become problematic if it is based on assumptions that quality can be maintained without a critical mass of core staff. There are a good number of positive examples of more cooperation with international research institutions, helping to enhance research quality. Negative trends in some countries are generally due to government tensions and weak demands for research from governments and funders.

The evidence in the Second Phase of TTI has not indicated any substantial change in grantees' research quality assurance procedures *per se*. Quality assurance is often still informal and more related to process (engagement with policy stakeholders and peers), rather than formal review of outputs, a finding which is confirmed and emphasized by outside observers. The Evaluation Team can conclude that the generally strong 'organizational culture' of critical discussion on research quality is being sustained and further embedded among grantees.

There are a number of cases of collaborative research leading to capacity development opportunities, but this is not consistently supported under prevailing funding modalities. The grantees reluctantly accept the reality that most funders focus on products and have limited interest in investing in capacities for quality research. But they also highlight that strong think tanks are able to influence this in some instances.

Grantees commonly perceive modest but positive trends towards more and, in some cases, deeper gender focus, but their ambition levels and capacities still vary widely. TTI's contributions have mostly been through training and experience-sharing. Some mention that other donors are leading on support to a gender focus in research.

Some grantees describe a 'calm before the storm' situation in terms of maintaining future independence with the approaching end of TTI support. Their ability to maintain independence and credibility vis-à-vis funders is stable for now, but there are risks on the horizon to ensuring credible policy influence if they, as some expect, will need to 'chase consultancies'. Overall, grantees have found diverse and creative pathways to policy influence, with the common denominator being their 'positioning' in their respective national (and occasionally international) policy discourses.

With regard to communications, the findings show a clearly positive trajectory. There is strong evidence of learning underway in these areas and general confidence among grantees that these gains will be maintained. The Evaluation Team notes some warning signs, however, related to

heavy reliance on TTI support for communications units, combined with uncertainty about whether increasingly project-oriented funders will cover the costs of maintaining these units within project budgets.

Finally, the Report reviews TTI's own activities –underway and planned– to meet its essential learning and lesson-sharing objectives. It examines both ongoing, internal learning and adjustments in the Program, and the high-level learning and lesson-sharing from the Program. The First Interim Report of the Evaluation, supplementing internal learning based on monitoring and interaction with grantees, proved to be a learning landmark –virtually all the conclusions and recommendations helped point to course corrections that are now being pursued. The TTI Strategy for Program Communications and Engagement (C&E), revised in January 2016, provides the basic framework and baselines for assessing progress toward the objectives of wide lesson-sharing. This Second Interim Report summarizes progress to date against the Strategy's sub-objectives and its plans and steps to reach its targeted audiences, convey TTI's main messages, and to deploy each of its selected tactics or tools, including different knowledge products and events.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COURSE ADJUSTMENTS

Naturally, in the 'last lap' of a long-term program the focus of attention shifts from internal dynamics to distilling useful lessons from TTI to future relationships and partnerships in supporting think tanks. The recommendations of this Second Interim Report emphasize steps that should be considered to ensure that the TTI legacy contributes to the wider realm of policy research and reflection in the grantees' regions and sectors of operation. The Evaluation Team recommends the following course corrections during the remainder of Phase Two:

1. Consider developing a specific output as part of its work on what is tentatively entitled the "TTI insights on think tank sustainability" to draw attention to the factors that promote or obstruct staff retention. This could highlight the importance of stable financing of core staff for think tanks to remain resilient and to thrive over time.
2. The positive experience of the action research on business models and resource mobilization can be reinforced through follow-up, tailored combinations of training and advice.
3. The experience of the Opportunity Fund suggests priorities for investing in capacities to operate 'above and below' the conventional research foci. These would include both capacities to engage in national/regional/international networks, and in research, data collection methods and perhaps training focused on sub-national governance.
4. Realistic costing is central to think tank sustainability, but it is an area where think tanks sometimes feel rather powerless. TTI could consider developing a communications product as part of its "TTI insights on think tank sustainability" work to inform prospective funders of the importance of recognizing actual costs.
5. The Evaluation Team suggests that TTI's work on sustainability insights ensure that reference is made to concrete minimum standards for maintaining core functions. This could be done by complementing the 'good practice' standards with some 'red flag' warnings of what may indicate major risks to sustaining a 'critical mass' of capabilities.

6. The Evaluation Team suggests in the future commissioning a ‘light touch’ ex-post review of how grantees have continued on their capacity development paths approximately two years after the end of the TTI program.
7. TTI’s work on producing “TTI insights on think tank sustainability” would benefit from an explicit focus on the importance of sustainably positioning these organizations for independence as a way to ensure credibility in the future.
8. To better support learning, adjustments could be considered in the Stories of Influence (SoI) approach to encourage a more analytical narrative, including a focus on describing the conceptual and strategic ‘positioning’ of the grantees, beyond the instrumental dimensions of policy influence.
9. It is recommended that the Regional Program Officers give priority to querying grantees with regard to their commitments to ensuring that communications departments remain staffed. As part of the recommendation above concerning recognition of actual costs, special note should be given to encouraging funders to cover the costs of having communications units in place.
10. TTI should consider also developing a specific TTI insight product on the role of funders in promoting think tank sustainability (i.e., to send a clear message that sustainability is not just a matter for think tanks themselves, but also of the donors which support them), to be jointly launched by the grantees and donors at the end of the Program.

1. Introduction

1.1 THE EVALUATION PROCESS FROM INCEPTION TO FIRST AND SECOND INTERIM REPORTS

The Evaluation Team began the evaluation process with the approval of the Inception Report in July 2015. The Inception Report described the overall methodology for the evaluation and included a detailed matrix that guided the initial data collection. As described below, the evaluation focus has since then been somewhat narrowed to give priority to key areas for learning.

For the First Interim Report the Team first focused on structured analysis of data on the Full Cohort (FC) of 43 grantees, followed by field visits to the thirteen Sample Cohort (SC) think tanks and attendance at regional meetings in South Asia and West Africa (and brief engagement with a regional meeting in Latin America). Over 200 interviews were undertaken, as well as a range of more informal interviews at the regional meetings and the Think Tank Initiative Exchange 2015 (TTIX 2015). The Team Leader and the Learning Coordinator attended a meeting with the TTI Team in Ottawa in February 2016 to review progress and plans for the First Interim Report. After meetings between the Evaluation Team, TTI and the Executive Committee, that draft report was revised to reflect the feedback received and was then approved at the end of June 2016.

The First Interim Report included the establishment of baselines. These have been used as the basis for data collection for this Second Interim Report and will also serve for the final stage of the Evaluation. In this Report, the evidence has been expanded to include both SC and FC information based on interviews with all grantees and Regional Program Officers (RPOs) complemented by other data. Preliminary findings are now deepened and widened, also reflecting changes in the conditions for think tank development in different countries and institutions, and evolving concerns related to the ending of TTI support. Overall, however, this Report largely confirms the findings from the First Interim Report.

In order to make the most effective use of appropriate, obtainable data the Evaluation Team concentrated its data collection and analysis for this Report on the following:

1. FC analysis using existing monitoring data focused on a number of specific issues;
2. Brief Skype interviews by the Evaluation Team (where possible, short visits have been made in conjunction with other travels) with the FC grantees, using a standardized questionnaire format focused on key issues;
3. Visits to the SC focusing on the issues in the designated baselines, which are being partially addressed through the selected case studies and triangulated through findings from interviews with knowledgeable external observers.

Building on the First Interim Report, this Report is an updated and deepened progress review of emerging results of TTI Phase Two. The Evaluation Team has calibrated this effort to ensure that sufficient Evaluation resources will be available for the Final Report.

Some overall points of note at this stage are:

1. At this mid-point in a four-year process this Report has been geared to provide an input into TTI's progress assessments and possible course-corrections on the Program, as well as to measure progress against the Phase Two baseline presented in the First Interim Report. Further progress against the baseline will be assessed again for the Final Evaluation Report.
2. The second phase of data collection has further clarified the Evaluation Team's understanding of the existing sources and limits of data, taking account of the diversity of practice that exists among grantees and their respective contexts.
3. Across different evaluation questions there are pronounced differences in the relative balance, and levels of confidence in the evidence derived from the different data sources. All the results reported reflect triangulation between several sources and grantee cases, but precise quantitative results are necessarily limited in many cases, and the Team has resisted imposing simplistic quantitative ratings or scales where the boundaries of categories of responses have been 'fuzzy'. To have done so might have obscured, for example, the much richer qualitative data in the SC findings. Where the Evaluation Team's confidence around each major finding and possible lesson is weak or moderate, this is acknowledged explicitly in the Report.
4. In reviewing the findings, the Evaluation Team has identified several emerging cross-cutting themes -most notably relating to trends towards sustainability- where organizational development, research quality and policy engagement play interrelated roles. A central example is the progress of grantees towards achieving a critical mass of capacity¹.
5. Baseline data and steps for measurement agreed upon in the First Interim Report are summarized in the following section. They are included throughout this Report in green shaded boxes, followed by the evidence collected, and then summed-up in concluding boxes with the key findings and lessons derived on each baseline.

1.2 AGREED FOCUS FOR SECOND INTERIM REPORT

Discussions with the TTI Team in April 2016, during the finalization of the First Interim Report, and reinforced in the Executive Committee meeting of April 2017, emphasized the importance of focusing this Report on issues related to sustainability and resource mobilization. The aim is to contribute to:

1. TTI efforts to maintain the development trajectories and legacy of the Program;
2. Informing current and potential donors around obstacles and opportunities for supporting think tanks in ways that contribute to sustainability; and
3. Based on peer learning, advising grantees on promising ways to strengthen resource mobilization and sustainability.

¹ This term is borrowed here from physics, where it denotes the amount of fissile material needed to maintain a self-sustaining chain reaction. As elaborated in this report, it is applied in the case of think tanks to refer to a sufficient mix of key elements – human and intellectual, material, organizational and reputational – needed to sustain a viable think tank over time.

Importantly, grantees themselves emphasized the need to accentuate these issues during the course of data collection as they highlighted their concerns and interest in learning about how to pursue sustainable business models.

2. Methodology

2.1 APPROACH FOLLOWED

The Evaluation design is theory-based, centred on assessing performance against the TTI theory of change and its revised results framework². The agreed methodological approach — of “realism” focused on “contribution”³ — has proved highly appropriate in coming to grips with a non-directive program working with a complex theory of change in a highly diverse set of contexts. It has provided a way to delve into how the grantees themselves are bringing together organizational development, enhancement of research quality and policy engagement as part of their own endogenous capacity development processes, while grappling with their particular contextual risks and opportunities.

The Evaluation Team has used the richness of its emerging findings to explore and categorize key factors impacting on these processes, adopting a slightly modified perspective on the TTI theory of change. TTI emphasizes (particularly in the Phase Two Capacity Development Strategy⁴) the extent to which readiness to break out of ‘business as usual’ enables grantees to take advantage of TTI support. The Evaluation highlights how much choices between innovation and ‘business as usual’ are determined by local conditions. The diverse institutional trajectories, contextual opportunities and obstacles to development facing each grantee will heavily determine the relevance of TTI capacity development support.

The agreed evaluation approach recognizes that multiple causal influences are at work and does not try to impose simple, linear attribution of results to the program interventions. Realist evaluation theory (Pawson 1997) stresses how it is the reasoning and decisions of actors in response to the resources or opportunities accompanying an intervention that will determine whether or not, or to what extent, it works as intended. Neither the TTI Program nor the Evaluation has attempted to judge the progress of the grantees against any single ‘model’ of what a think tank should be, in recognition of the diverse trends and goals among the grantees.⁵

The Evaluation has accepted this complexity and built frank and evidence-based assessments of contributions. Thus different underlying influences in each grantee’s context are central to understanding performance. The importance of these conditions was clear when determining an appropriate and relevant set of baseline indicators in the First Interim Report.

² <http://www.thinktankinitiative.org/sites/default/files/simplified%20results%20framework.pdf>

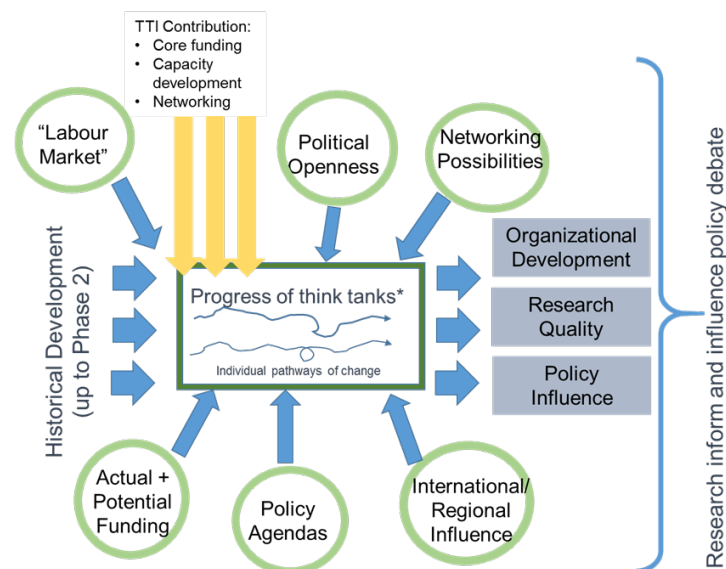
³ Drawing, as indicated in the Inception Report, on the foundational work of Ray Pawson and Nick Tilley, *Realistic Evaluation*. London: Sage, 1997 and John Mayne on contribution analysis, Mayne, J. The Institutional Learning and Change (ILAC) Initiative, (2008). *Contribution analysis: An approach to exploring cause and effect*.

⁴ Think Tank Initiative Phase 2 Capacity Development Strategy. FINAL. March 15, 2015. January 2016 Status Update: TTI Phase 2 Capacity Development Implementation. The TTI Phase 2 Capacity Development (CD) Strategy was approved by the Executive Committee in March 2015.

⁵ At the end of the current phase of the evaluation TTI has begun work on “TTI insights on think tank sustainability”, but these have been seen as an emerging point of departure for analysis, rather than prescribed objectives.

Figure one below illustrates the Evaluation Team’s understanding of how contribution analysis situates TTI’s support within ongoing internal processes and other external influences in the development of the grantees’ organizations, enhancement of their research quality and ultimately their influence on public policy.

Figure 1 Contribution analysis framework



Throughout the evaluation process the Evaluation Team has made particular efforts to be clear and candid regarding the confidence level that can be placed on different findings, depending on the volume, reliability, comparability and coverage of different data sources. Findings and lessons are largely based on primary evidence collected in this Evaluation, supplemented by a review of TTI reporting.

The Report is structured around the aspects of the TTI Theory of Change related to organizational development, research quality and policy engagement that relate directly to the baseline measures agreed upon in the First Interim Report.

For this Second Interim Report the Evaluation Team has used the range of data-gathering tools described in the baseline matrix in annex 1. It has used interview guides and other tools to collect and report the data.

2.2 COVERAGE: THE FULL AND SAMPLE COHORTS

In addition to the data it was able to draw from TTI’s own monitoring, the Evaluation Team’s fieldwork has focused most intensively on the thirteen Sample Cohort (SC) grantees selected in the Inception Phase for in-depth analysis. Approximately two-day visits were made with each SC grantee. An average of approximately 4,5 interviews were undertaken with each SC grantee, including senior management, governance, senior researchers, junior researchers, communications staff and administrative staff. Some interviews were undertaken individually and others in focus groups. Where possible, interviews were undertaken with informed observers and members of the policy community relevant to each grantee, although the inputs that could be obtained from these efforts proved to be limited (11 interviews) and uneven in

quality. Sometimes this reflected difficulties in identifying objective observers during the brief visits to the grantees. In other cases it reflected how observers may have reflected more on the past performance of the grantee as they were not fully aware of recent changes.

Full cohort (FC) data was collected mainly from two sources. The first was Skype interviews (and where possible face-to-face interviews) with all grantees. A standard questionnaire was used. These interviews took approximately one hour. This FC data was triangulated with interviews with Regional Program Officers (RPOs), with whom the Evaluation Team reviewed each grantee individually.

The total number of interviews undertaken for this report (excluding ongoing dialogue with the TTI Program Team and interviews with RPOs on FC grantees) was 119.

Additional data used to assess the FC included the following:

- Review of available Opportunity Fund reporting
- Review of Stories of Influence
- TTI data on staffing patterns
- TTI data on proportion of grantee budgets funded by TTI
- General TTI reports, blogs and other publications
- Interviews with TTI RPOs on FC grantees

2.3 CASE STUDIES

Illustrative case studies of progress made or key issues were originally identified in the first phase of the Evaluation and have been followed up, using a methodology designed to ensure that data collected is as traceable and comparable as possible. During the first evaluation stage the Evaluation Team agreed with SC grantees on possible case studies to be developed over the course of Phase Two. The case studies have been selected to be forward-looking, setting a baseline and describing the initial processes that will be followed in the coming years. The selection of the cases reflects examples where the Evaluation Team and the SC grantees have agreed that further exploration will provide a strong degree of learning. This has meant that grantees' ownership of the case study data collection has been stressed. A 'downside' is that this opportunistic sample may not provide a fully structured or comparable overview of processes across the different regions. In some instances, there is continuing enthusiasm by grantees in developing the case studies as the work evolves. In others, it has proven more difficult to secure the necessary level of engagement of the sample grantees in the case study process. All these factors indicate that the case studies are a valuable additional source of qualitative data, but make no claim to be formally representative across the Program.

The primary foci of the case studies are:

1. To unpack and verify the underlying *theories of change* in grantees' strategic efforts toward organizational development, research quality, sustainability and policy influence.
2. To anchor the analyses of the Evaluation in a rich understanding of the *contexts* in which the think tanks operate.
3. To provide a more in-depth picture of the *categories* of think tanks and the ways in which they are changing or perhaps even shifting along the continuum of different categories

over time.

4. To understand the ways that TTI *core support and capacity development* inputs are contributing to these changes.

The case studies are being developed fully over the course of TTI Phase Two and the data presented in this Report are excerpted from the case work underway, focusing on salient issues related to the key evaluation baselines.

2.4 LIMITATIONS

The first limitation to note applies to the expectation for the entire Phase Two Evaluation. The Team's work in the first stage already established that there are unusual limits to how much comparable data can be generated and collected in this Program. The rich diversity among the grantee institutions and their respective contexts would clearly dilute the relevance of attempts to evaluate against over-generalized standards.⁶ Second, and equally important, any attempt to impose standardized expectations on grantees would be incompatible with the basic 'aid-effectiveness' philosophy underlying the program and would be resisted by these autonomy-minded institutions. Further, the Evaluation Team has been constrained and cautious about adding additional burdens on grantees, and has sought ways to build confidence and offer added value in its dealings with the SC grantees in particular.

Other limitations have included difficulties in engaging substantially with a wider group of representatives of the policy communities surrounding the SC grantees, as noted above. TTI's Policy Community Survey (PCS) is expected to provide an important overview in the final evaluation stage. Even there it will be difficult as there is an inevitable time-lag and variability in how their 'policy communities' come to recognize changes in the work of the grantees.

Notwithstanding these limitations, it remains our judgement that –as reflected in the baselines from the First Interim Report– a successful evaluation can be carried out rigorously and usefully, for both learning and accountability.

2.5 QUALITY ASSURANCE

A full quality assurance (QA) system has been applied to both the process and the products for the Second Interim Report. This system calls on distinct and cross-checking roles and responsibilities for the Team Leader, Project Manager, Quality Assurance Advisor and Project Manager of the Evaluation. In order to safeguard the necessary separation of functions, the Quality Assurance Advisor, based in Ottawa rather than Stockholm, is also kept at one step removed from the mainstream work of the Team around evaluating against TTI Objectives One and Two, and is not involved in the related data-gathering analysis and synthesis until it reaches the QA stage. His methodological inputs at preparatory stages and separate role as Learning Coordinator provide complementary opportunities for quality testing and assurance throughout the evaluation cycle. In order to minimize any potential conflict, he is accountable

⁶ For example, some standards applicable to more 'advocacy' oriented TTs would be inappropriate for the more 'academic' grantees and vice versa.

to the Project Manager, and his quality assurance reports provide transparent, rated assessments against the specified QA criteria. In relation to his distinct responsibility for coordinating the Evaluation against Objective Three, the Program Manager and Team Leader serve to assure quality on the process and products.

As agreed from the outset, the Team's own QA system is expected to be complemented by the Project Authority's own quality assurance process. This will not necessarily imply acceptance of the conclusions of the evaluation, but rather its adherence to the ToR and Inception Report, quality against the accepted Evaluation Quality Standards, and accessibility to intended audiences.

3. Findings (processes/progress in grantee organizations, and the effects of TTI contributions)

3.1 OVERALL ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

This chapter is structured around the findings related to the different sub-dimensions of organizational development identified for attention:

- Recruitment and retention
- Gender and organizational development
- Capacity development modalities
- Strategic thinking and monitoring and evaluation (M&E)
- Resource mobilization and business plans
- Financial and organizational sustainability

For each of the selected topics, the agreed data baseline and steps for measurement agreed upon in the First Interim Report are summarized below in the first green shaded boxes. These are followed by a presentation of the key evidence collected and then concluding green shaded boxes with the key findings and lessons derived in this Second Interim Report.

Recruitment, retention and overall organizational development

Baseline One: Recruitment and retention	Staffing has been significantly strengthened. Retention has (at least temporarily) been improved due to the creation of more stimulating intellectual environments, better working conditions and also access to resources to pay competitive salaries and top-ups.
Measurement (from First Interim Report)	It is judged unlikely that there will be major quantifiable changes during the remainder of Phase Two given that the grantees will retain access to TTI support and perhaps use this support to consolidate ongoing investments (e.g., in physical facilities). What will be important for the Evaluation to monitor is <i>how grantees are now working out ways to retain qualified staff</i> , particularly those currently financed with core funding, and how they are preparing to maintain human resource development trajectories when core support ends. For example, this might include new strategies to compensate for increasing difficulties in paying strongly competitive salaries, top-ups, etc., or if necessary reducing the numbers of qualified staff. This will be analysed through tracing examples in the SC that provide an in-depth understanding of the internal and contextual factors around sustainable human resource and organizational development.

STAFF RETENTION

SC findings indicate that for the time being staff retention is not generally seen as a pressing problem, but there are growing concerns among the leadership of the grantees regarding the future. The confidence rating for this finding is high given the consistency of feedback. The factors underlying these concerns for different grantees include:

- Approaching end of TTI support

- Phasing out of (the few) other sources of core support, most notably, the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF)
- Economic recession-related factors that reduce general access to funding
- Global uncertainty
- Domestic political tensions that may threaten future existence

Taking account of these factors, perhaps the most common uncertainties expressed were about the ability to retain staff returning from education abroad. One grantee reports developing a career plan for staff to encourage retention and others describe focusing on the need to think proactively about ways to keep such staff.

Several SC informants report that a modicum of progress is being made on staff retention. Some judge their situation to be stable, with one grantee noting that their proportional reliance on TTI support for salaries had been reduced from 60 to 50 percent. A few are in what appears to be advanced stages of discussions on major new research programs, some of which involve core support or relatively flexible funding that has enhanced optimism about prospects for future staff retention. Due to the diversity of examples the confidence rating for this finding is moderate.

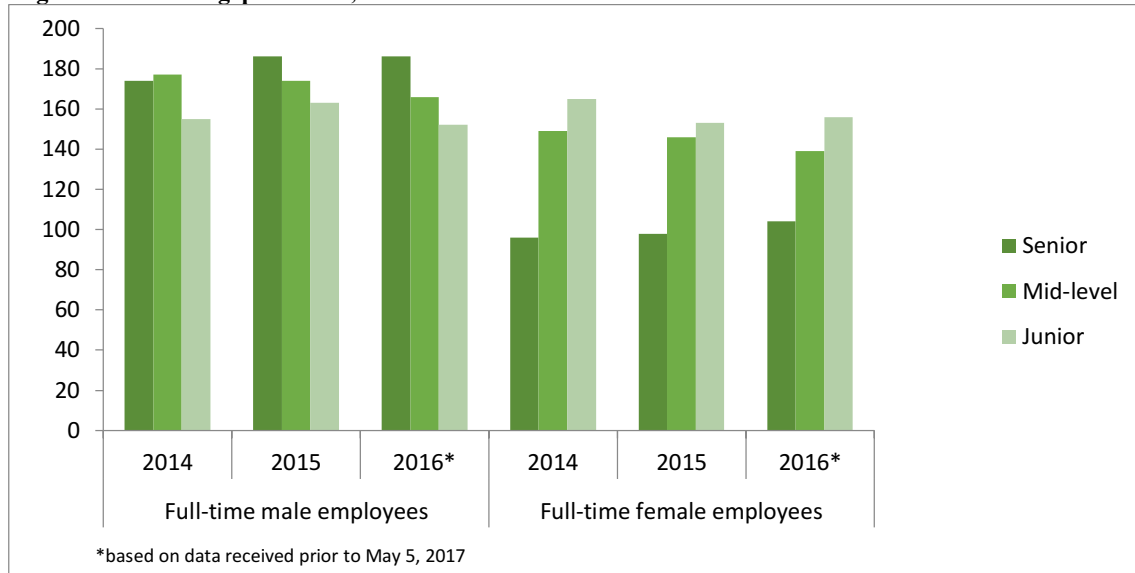
STAFFING PATTERNS

Baseline Two: Gender and organizational development	Among all the grantees combined staff there is a major predominance of male senior fulltime staff (197 to 102 female). There is better gender balance at mid-levels (179 full time male staff to 154 full time female staff). There is a slight predominance of women at junior levels (166 full time female staff/164 full time male staff).
Measurement (from First Interim Report)	Monitoring data will be used to measure changes in staffing patterns with particular attention given to senior fulltime staff. SC data will be used to triangulate these findings with qualitative data regarding the factors that may contribute to changes.

Only two SC grantees report significant changes in staffing patterns. One reports an increase that is expected to continue, and another reports a small decline.

TTI data on changes in staffing patterns corroborates these overall findings and demonstrates strikingly little change over time.

Figure 2 Staffing patterns, full cohort



Source: TTI data

Key findings from second Interim data collection phase on overall organizational development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimal changes can be seen in staffing in numbers and gender balance; some volatility among communications officers. There are growing concerns among many (but far from all) grantees about future staff retention, post-TTI. This is not just TTI-related, but also due to reduction in other core funding; some examples of shrinking funding have been noted due to reduced demand for evidence, donor preferences for transactional and project-only funding, etc. Country contexts vary. The main finding during this period is the striking stability in staffing patterns, despite grantees' rich descriptions of both growth in demand for their research and challenges related to their volatile environments.
Related lessons and suggested course corrections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The centrality of the challenge of staff retention is becoming (sometimes painfully) apparent to those grantees with a high level of dependence on TTI support as the end of TTI support comes nearer. However, there is a risk that <i>retention</i> is less galvanizing than <i>growth</i>, and may get insufficient attention given its importance for sustainable organizational development. In recognition of this, TTI may want to develop a specific output as part of its work on the "TTI insights on think tank sustainability" to draw explicit attention to the factors that promote or impede staff retention. This could be a tool to highlight the importance of <i>stable</i> financing as a precondition for think tanks to be able to thrive over time. In a period of uncertainty it appears that, if possible, grantees prefer to minimize both staff lay-offs (as long as possible) but are also cautious about responding to increased demand with expansion of core staff.

3.2 CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT

Baseline Three: Capacity development modalities	The Evaluation Team judges that, at the end of Phase One, capacity development modalities had been broadly targeted and therefore (with the exception of core funding) had not responded sufficiently to individual grantee needs and expectations.
Measurement (from First Interim Report)	Through discussions with SC stakeholders and review of TTI reporting the Evaluation will trace TTI's process of adapting capacity development modalities over the coming years – spontaneous and cue-response examples will be important. We will also trace the steps being taken to apply emerging lessons on effective capacity development, some of which may be anchored more in regional initiatives. On the basis of experience to date, it should be noted that the prospects for regional leadership and ownership of new capacity development initiatives will almost certainly be uneven – strongest in Latin America and weakest in East Africa (reflecting the very different levels of development and ownership for regional networking).

TTI'S ROLE IN CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Findings in this Second Interim Report strongly reinforce the overall conclusion from the First Interim Report that core funding continues to be a key factor enabling grantees to develop capacities internally. In addition, TTI has invested considerably in regional capacity development initiatives over the past year, specifically in engaging the Latin American Initiative for Public Policy Research (ILAIPP) in leading efforts in Latin America, and the Action Research on Business Models in Africa (which is discussed in more detail below). South Asia initiatives have been slower in getting established. Furthermore, the last round of Opportunity Fund support has begun to be reported on, as discussed below.

REGIONAL TTI CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

Regarding regional initiatives, RPOs judge that approximately 18 grantees are actively engaging and benefiting from TTI's regional capacity development initiatives; ten are not benefiting or only a little; and in ten cases it is difficult to judge at this point. To explain the limited participation, constraints on their capacity to set aside time to learn and absorb new skills from training initiatives are mentioned by a few. At the opposite end of the spectrum, for a few others the level of training is seen as being too basic, which illustrates the difficulties in designing training for such a diverse range of grantees. In South Asia, regional capacity development efforts have thus far been more limited than in the other regions.

SC interviews suggest that the Action Research on Business Models in Africa is the TTI capacity development initiative currently generating the most enthusiastic levels of interest. At this stage, it is too early to assess the outcomes of this support in the form of new overall 'business models', but grantees are clearly reflecting seriously and in new ways on their resource mobilization strategies and related issues.

Responses to queries in relation to ILAIPP training have been more mixed. It should be highlighted that this reflects the varying demands and (often low) expectations of receiving additional knowledge from this relatively basic training. The uncertainties facing ILAIPP and the hesitations about engaging with ILAIPP among some grantees indicate that it is premature for the Evaluation Team to present firm findings in this regard. More conclusive findings regarding the outcomes of this capacity development support will be included in the Final Evaluation Report.

Case Study One: ILAIPP –Developing capacity for capacity development

The *Iniciativa Latinoamericana de Investigación para las Políticas Públicas* — ILAIPP is a regional association of the eleven think tanks supported by TTI. It was created at the end of 2013 at the Guatemala City meeting of the Latin American grantees. ILAIPP has three broad objectives:

- Develop knowledge and proposals to enrich public policy and development debates
- Create an exchange, discussion and learning space for think tanks in the region
- Promote institutional capacity strengthening actions for the member think tanks⁷

ILAIPP is very much a work in progress. Its three main objectives have been achieved to different extents, with the first two —generating knowledge and creating exchange spaces— pursued through the creation of research networks, and the third —building capacity— achieved through various consultancies, mainly related to business models, and the launching of seven training modules offered and taken by researchers from the ILAIPP members. TTI has particularly focused on encouraging ILAIPP's role in becoming a regional hub for capacity building. During 2016 the ILAIPP Secretariat designed and organized seven training modules, most of which were offered by one or two TTI grantees for researchers in other members of the ILAIPP network. It is too early to assess their outcomes, but interviews suggest that the different pre-existing capacities and learning priorities are making it difficult to select and design a package of support that is in broad demand among ILAIPP members.

The Evaluation Team judges that the future of the network in relation to training will be dependent on strengthened commitment and consensus on overall priorities for capacity building among ILAIPP's membership. This will in turn depend on the existence of a highly engaged Executive Committee, with a clear shared vision of the future.

OPPORTUNITY FUNDS

Reporting from the most recent round of Opportunity Funds shows the following categories of support:

- Three examples of initiatives to develop capacities through new forms of networks;
- One example of a project specifically targeted to developing capacities for research to support local government planning;
- Three examples of projects that are mostly community-development related; and

⁷ *Estatutos "Iniciativa Latinoamericana de Investigación para las Políticas Públicas – ILAIPP*, Noviembre 20, 2014.

- Three examples of projects that are difficult to distinguish from other research initiatives, although one focuses clearly on the development of new skills for dissemination.

The Evaluation Team has assessed these as illustrative examples from which lessons can be drawn in relation to the Opportunity Fund modality based on available reporting (no interviews were undertaken). It is recognized that these categories of projects could have resulted in different outcomes in other contexts.

The interest of grantees in developing networks indicates that these are important priorities for them, but in hindsight it appears that a more tailored approach to network development would perhaps have been more appropriate than using the responsive Opportunity Fund modality. Reporting can be interpreted to suggest that one-off funding for network-related studies and events has certainly been useful. At the same time, the benefits of these initiatives would be much greater if they were better situated, at the outset, in clearer information and assumptions about how each might eventually become sustainable or at least attract mid-term funding to continue.

Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA) used Opportunity Fund resources to develop capacities and methods for engagement with local government. This example appears so far to be unique, but may include lessons that could be applied elsewhere. It is an initiative that was clearly directed towards developing methods and organizational capacities to fill a recognized and strategically important gap in data collection and research, and therefore responded to a clear need. The Evaluation Team notes that decentralization processes in other countries may also be generating similar demands for new methods and capacities among think tanks to engage in learning from meso-level policy processes.⁸

By contrast, from the available reporting the Evaluation Team has more difficulty in distinguishing the explicit ‘learning by doing’ capacity development processes in regular ‘research projects’ that were funded. This may have occurred, but the reporting provides insufficient basis for judging these outcomes.

Three initiatives involve grantees working directly with communities to respond to development concerns. The reporting is judged by the Evaluation Team to be unclear regarding what the role is of ‘research’ in these projects and with that the justification for them being implemented by a think tank (even if their mandates include both ‘thinking’ and ‘doing’). Their relevance for developing or scaling up priority capacities within think tanks is thus unclear, particularly given the undefined theory of change in relation to the contribution of think tanks in

⁸ EDRI has used TTI support to initiate a system of training of mid-level and senior public sector managers, which was originally intended to focus on the national level. Due to demand, it is now coming to be directed more at regional (i.e., sub-national) government.

critical research that can be used to support broader diffusion of the ‘models’ being developed. Here again, the Evaluation Team recognizes that this may reflect the quality of the reporting where the nature of the sphere of influence of the think tank is not adequately described. It is true that some think tanks may enhance their credibility by demonstrating their capacity to ‘do’ and not just to ‘think’, but the justification for giving priority for using scarce capacity development resources available for this (given that the ‘thinking’ aspects receive so little attention) is judged by the Evaluation Team to be weak. Other examples of think tanks engaging operationally (e.g., the work of the Consortium pour la Recherche Économique et Sociale (CRES) described in Case study five below) can be interpreted as suggesting that this may be more relevant when pursued through larger-scale bilateral engagements with donors in their respective countries, since paths towards diffusion of the models being developed are somewhat more evident and they may lead to more long-term partnerships between think tanks and operational agencies.

Key findings from second Interim data collection phase on capacity development support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There has been a very positive response to Action Research on Business Models in Africa; other support (e.g., for the Latin American Initiative for Public Policy Research —ILAIPP) has generated mixed levels of engagement. • ILAIPP remains a fragile institution, and its capacity to develop rapidly into a member-owned vehicle for capacity development may have been overestimated. • Core funding’s role in capacity development is now more in a consolidation phase; i.e., capacity retention is a more pressing concern than capacity ‘development’. • The Opportunity Fund mechanism has in some cases provided clear, relevant support to capacity development, mostly through development of networks and in one case development of new methods to adapt research methods to sub-national analysis. In others, it has functioned as an additional window for funding research projects or community development activities. Although the research projects contribute to capacities through ‘learning by doing’ it has not proven to be a modality that was well tailored to sustained capacity development. The capacity development value of think tanks engaging in community development activities appears limited.
Related lessons and suggested course corrections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Evaluation Team endorses TTI’s decision not to continue with an additional round of the Opportunity Fund. • Other current capacity development modalities remain appropriate, despite some risks facing ILAIPP, thus no major changes are recommended during the remainder of Phase Two. • The positive experience of the resource mobilization action research can be reinforced through follow-up tailored combinations of training and advice. The most notable example is the planned support to interested African grantees for strengthening their capacities for writing research proposals. • There may also be other areas where such targeted and tailored training

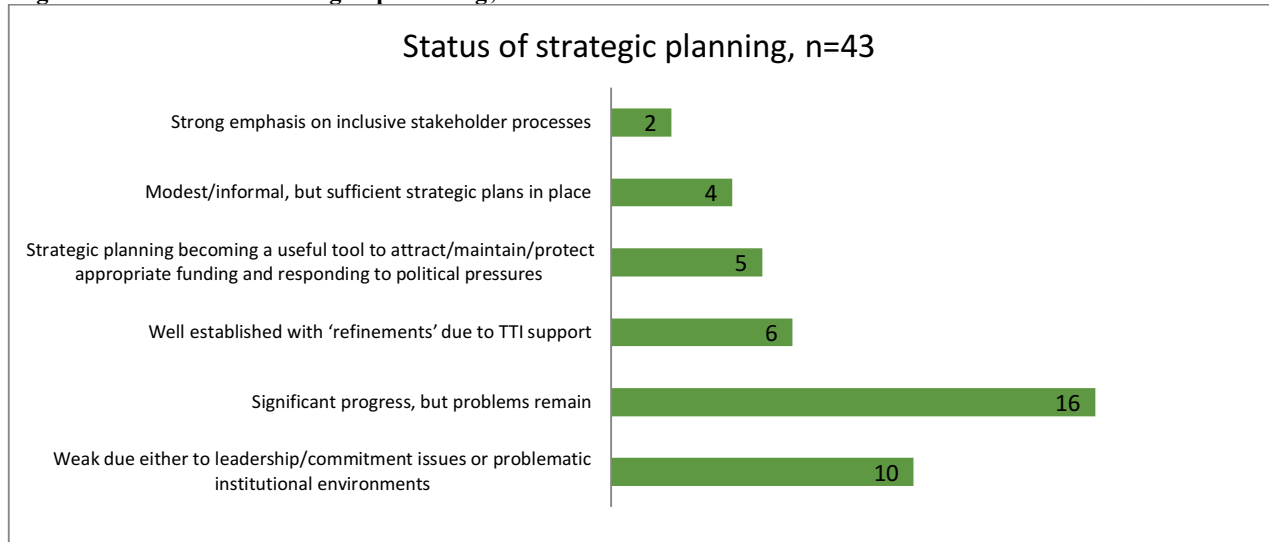
	<p>support may be requested, arising out of current initiatives (e.g., skills such as gender budgeting analysis, how to manage endowment funds, etc.) and funds that had been previously earmarked for the Opportunity Fund should be reallocated accordingly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experiences may be too anecdotal to draw firm recommendations, but the record of the Opportunity Fund may suggest the value of developing capacities to operate ‘above and below’ the conventional arena, i.e., to engage in (a) national/regional/international <i>networks</i> and (b) research, data collection methods and perhaps training focused on <i>sub-national governance</i>.
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3.3 STRATEGIC THINKING AND MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Baseline Four: Strategic thinking and M&E	<p>At the end of Phase One, grantees have strengthened their capacities and space for strategic thinking. Some were already strong in this respect at the outset, whereas others were weak. However, <i>in many instances the time and space for strategic thinking is reliant on temporary TTI core funding</i>. The range of formality of strategic planning is variable, as are the roles of leadership and governance. <i>The extent to which M&E systems are informing strategic planning is generally low.</i></p>
Measurement (from First Interim Report)	<p>The Evaluation will use SC interviews and discussions with RPOs to <i>trace whether and how changes are underway in the SC grantees’ processes for developing their organizational capacities for formal and informal strategic planning, with particular attention to whether and how the currently relatively informal processes (a) move towards greater formality, (b) are being anchored in governance structures, (c) draw on strong leadership (including leadership succession processes), and (d) are informed by monitoring and evaluation systems</i>. The evaluation will not assume that less formal governance and strategic planning are necessarily obstacles to development. Rather it will explore how factors related to leadership and positioning support strategic thinking.</p> <p>The Evaluation judges that the most important aspect of M&E systems (but also currently the weakest) should be that of tracing policy engagement and ultimate influence. Thus in the SC the Evaluation will identify and track any efforts related to integrating a greater focus on these outcomes into M&E systems during the course of Phase Two, particularly as part of the case studies of research programs. Interviews with the RPOs and FC will also be used to identify other examples of change, but it is recognized that evidence obtained in the brief FC interviews will probably only be indicative.</p>

FC and RPO interview findings, graphically illustrated below, indicate that the large majority of grantees are currently undertaking or have recently completed strategic planning processes, but have reached quite varied stages. RPO interview responses in relation to strategic planning among the FC indicate progress among most grantees, but with more than half described in ways indicating that they are either weak or still struggling (figure 3).

Figure 3 Status of strategic planning, full cohort



Source: RPO interviews 2017

TTI'S CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC PLANNING

The participants in the Action Research on Business Models all report having utilized that support to inform relevant parts of their strategy development. The accompaniment role in this input was particularly appreciated and there are initial signs that this may help the grantees in reflecting, over time, about the ways that a business model should bridge concerns about resource mobilization with overall strategic planning.⁹ In a couple of cases, SC grantees state that TTI has had a significantly different role compared to other donors in supporting grantees' own thinking. A few grantee comments about the advice received contrast this with the approaches of other donors who promote strategic planning to serving donor aims. This is a factor that grantees report as being an obstacle in developing their own strategies. Even beyond the action research, SC findings generally highlight the important advisory role of TTI RPOs in strategic planning.

Nonetheless, TTI support should be seen in the context of the overwhelming dominance of local, often highly-politicized, ongoing processes that influence what is judged to be 'strategic'. The stories that the FC and SC tell regarding their strategic planning processes generally indicate how TTI was a welcome and important boost in a long-term process of developing strategic thinking and consultation that usually began before the receipt of TTI support and is expected to continue after the funding ends. The Evaluation Team judges the confidence of this finding as strong due to the consistency of these comments.

⁹ See <http://www.thinktankinitiative.org/blog/think-tank-sustainability-africa-early-reflections-action-learning>

FC grantees report a generally positive view of TTI's support to strategic planning (figure 4). Findings are diverse, and in some cases anecdotal, but together indicate a clear trend. Most comments indicate that this support was primarily felt during Phase One, and that now the results are becoming apparent and also more internally driven. A few have used TTI funding to contract consultants who are helping with preparation of new strategic plans. Others stress the highly consultative and/or reflective nature of the planning processes. Some emphasize how the selection of research priorities in these plans reflects their positioning in the political sphere and decisions about how to maintain independence. Some mention the need for plans to include a significant degree of flexibility to leave room to respond to emerging issues. References to stakeholder consultation are common and the Evaluation Team interprets this to suggest that strategic planning efforts are seen as opportunities to build relationships and consensus on the way forward. Some describe their engagements with Boards (and occasionally membership) on strategic planning in similar terms indicating that the process is used for consensus building. A few see discussions of strategy as an opportunity to agree on how to respond to institutional crises.

Figure 4 TTI contributions to strategic planning, full cohort

Has TTI contributed to your strategic planning efforts during Phase Two, and if so how much and in what way?				
	No		Yes	
2nd interim report findings	0	3	13	15
			11	

Data source: FC interviews 2016-2017

ROLE OF GOVERNANCE IN STRATEGIC PLANNING

FC findings about the role of governance structures indicate that they are playing a somewhat greater role. From the total number of FC interviews, responses regarding governance structures were categorized and are presented in figure 5 below. Some responses were difficult to categorize and therefore only 32 responses are included in the data presented. Their roles are quite varied, and include the following:

Figure 5 Governance roles, full cohort



Source: FC interviews 2016-2017

SC interviews show a modest increase in the extent to which grantees report their governance structures are active and engaged in developing strategies (figure 6). Particularly in Latin America, RPO interviews describe a shift from strategic planning being seen as a donor requirement (noted as a problem in Phase One) to being recognized as a useful and natural part of their own governance and management processes. In other regions, the picture is considerably more mixed, with strategic planning occasionally being effectively described as secondary in relation to the overall quality of leadership and/or governance.

Among those in the SC with effectively functioning Boards (11 of 13), the general tendency is towards modest to high increases in engagement where this has been weak in the past, and no change where the Boards were already actively engaged. Figure 6 presents the baseline (SC) data, with little change noted in the data collected for this report. At least two grantees have experienced significant shifts in the political leanings of their Board, which have created a considerable but manageable degree of tension.

The role of leadership within the organizations in contributing to strategic planning is somewhat higher than governance, but both are strong (figures 7 and 8).

Leadership succession is underway with some of the grantees. SC findings are somewhat anecdotal but generally indicate that these processes are perceived to be unproblematic. The Evaluation Team judges that in cases where there is dependence on very well-known executive directors, who effectively personify a few of the grantee organizations, the situation may eventually prove to be somewhat more problematic than reported in interviews.

The Evaluation Team has been informed that TTI will be launching a new Fund for Strengthening Organizational Leadership, Management and Governance later in 2017 to enable senior staff and governance to take advantage of capacity development opportunities of their choice. It may be useful to follow-up on the quality and diversity of the support pursued at the end of TTI, both to inform about the range of opportunities available and also as an (implicit) indicator of priorities for strengthening governance and leadership.

Figure 6 Engagement of governance structures in strategy, sample cohort

Extent to which grantee governance structures are active and influential in strategic development efforts, SC										
	Very limited			Moderate					Strong	
Baseline findings*	1	0	0	1	2	2	1	3	1	2
2nd interim report findings**	0	0	0	0	2	3	4	3	0	1

Data source: *Sample cohort interviews 2015-16, ** Sample cohort interviews 2016-17

Figure 7 Engagement of leadership in strategy, sample cohort

Extent of grantee leadership (executive director, research coordinator, etc.) are proactively engaged in strategic planning process, SC										
	Very limited			Moderate					Strong	
Baseline findings	0	0	0	1	0	0	3	1	3	5

Data source: Sample cohort interviews 2015-2016

Figure 8 Engagement of governance structures, full cohort

Are boards and other governance structures taking on a stronger or weaker role since January 2015 and is so how and why? FC					
	No			Yes	
2nd interim report findings	0	5	14	17	6

Data source: FC interviews 2016-2017

FORMALITY OF STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESSES

Compared to the First Interim Report there are no major changes in the formality of strategic planning (figures 9 and 10). The SC generally report what appears to be more concerted attention to strategic planning, albeit largely through informal dialogue. The ratings in figures 9-11 below on formality are somewhat contradicted by the more informal practices that grantees describe when explaining their processes in interviews. Figure 11 can be interpreted as indicating that many grantees perceive that their planning processes are well in place and that further formalization is not required.

The Evaluation Team interprets the responses in interviews as indicating that there is (with a couple of exceptions) a strong desire to maintain clear, explicit research priorities that reflect what is relevant for their respective countries. Comments indicate pride in ownership over planning processes that reflect their own perception of needs. At the same time, this ideal is tempered by recognizing the importance of more informal consensus-building and flexible innovation around the selection of these priorities. A majority of the SC (77%) report no intention to further formalize strategic planning efforts, as there is widespread satisfaction with current approaches.

Figure 9 Formality of strategic planning processes, sample cohort

Level of formality of the grantees' state of strategic planning, SC										
	Very limited		Informal/intuitive						Formal/structured	
Baseline findings*	0	0	1	1	0	4	3	2	2	0
2nd interim report findings**	0	0	0	0	1	2	4	4	1	1

Data source: *Sample cohort interviews 2015-2016, **Sample cohort interviews 2016-2017

Figure 10 Formality of strategic planning, full cohort

Would you judge stratic planning efforts to be currently characterized by formal, structured processes? FC					
	No			Yes	
2nd interim report findings	1	3	7	23	8

Data source: FC interviews 2016-2017

Figure 11 Steps taken towards formal strategic planning, full cohort

Are steps being taken to move towards more formal processes and if so how and why?					
	No			Yes	
2nd interim report findings	16	5	8	11	3

Data source: FC interviews 2016-2017

An important overall finding by the Evaluation Team, which is not accurately captured within a ‘formal versus informal’ dichotomy, is the complex, non-linearity of processes. The Evaluation Team judges that strategic thinking is not being (and should not be) pursued as a technical process. The case study of Makerere Institute of Social Research’s (MISRs) process of developing a strong and forward-looking strategy despite what can only be described as a governance vacuum exemplifies how a grantee has succeeded with strategic planning amid seemingly overwhelming governance challenges.

Case Study Two: MISR Uganda –Developing a vision within a governance vacuum

It might be assumed that strong governance is a precondition for strategic planning and achieving visionary reforms in a think tank. The MISR experience suggests that this assumption is not always valid. Since TTI support began (and indeed long before), MISR has been operating without a clear and operational governance structure. Despite this, the organization has undergone a fundamental restructuring and has a clear vision for its work. However, during the course of TTI Phase Two, MISR has encountered a number of severe political and institutional challenges to implementing its visionary agenda.

At the start of TTI Phase One a new director was appointed who ‘inherited’ a strategic plan for 2007-2017 that was weak and completely unaligned with the needed reforms. Furthermore, MISR’s governance structure as a someone autonomous but also anomalous institution within Makerere University had ceased to function. TTI Phase One and the beginning of Phase Two have involved MISR finding ways to continue internally-led strategic *planning* even if there has been no governance structure in place to approve formal *plans*. Until early 2016 this planning primarily involved building structures and institutional arrangements within MISR focused on critical reflection over pressing research needs and defining responsibilities for guidance and direction in the absence of more formal governance oversight. TTI support has proven vital for both enhancing the physical facilities at MISR and creating conditions for flexibly exploring new and more appropriate areas of research. At the start of Phase Two as the university systems and bureaucracy continued to cause difficulties and uncertainties. The absence of clear governance structures defining MISR’s role within the university meant that MISR’s direction was dependent on its own internal leadership, and its director in particular.

2016 proved to be a volatile and disturbing year for MISR and Makerere University more generally. In the Spring a researcher at MISR who had refused to undertake teaching duties levelled serious and sensationalist accusations against the MISR leadership. This appears to have marked a turning point away from the *de facto* acceptance that had prevailed in the governance vacuum. Some actors at the university saw this ‘scandal’ (which had attracted considerable media attention) as an opportunity to take greater control over what was seen as a ‘rogue’ institution, whereas others saw it as an opportunity to critically assess what MISR had achieved and move towards greater clarity with continued autonomy. An independent commission conducted an extremely thorough and detailed review. It concluded that MISR had achieved extraordinary results in raising the standard of MISR social science and humanities research. The appropriateness of MISR’s innovative approaches was seen as even suggesting lessons for broader university reforms.

This process is not necessarily in line with the conventional categories of expected TTI results, but it does highlight how TTI’s flexible core support can create conditions for finding alternative paths to forming a strategic vision and decisive management even without the underpinnings of governance and strategic planning that are perhaps assumed to be essential.

USE OF M&E SYSTEMS TO INFORM STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Figure 12 Use of M&E systems to inform strategy, sample cohort

Extent to which strategic plans are tracked and informed by M&E systems, SC	Moderate									Strong
	Very limited			Moderate						
Baseline findings*	1	2	1	3	2	1	1	2	0	0
2nd interim report findings**	0	0	0	1	1	0	5	4	2	0

Data source: *SC interviews 2015-2016, **SC interviews 2016-2017

Figure 12 indicate a notable increase in how grantees perceive their ability to use M&E systems in following their strategic plans. In the SC, M&E systems *per se* are generally judged not to have undergone significant changes since the First Interim Report, but comments suggest that they are used more effectively. TTI contributions have mostly been in relation to enabling the employment of either senior (e.g., directors of research) or mid-level staff with M&E responsibilities. Problems are still significant, as five of the 13 grantees acknowledge that their systems and structures for M&E are not very useful or utilized for organizational learning. Some describe in various ways how they are struggling to move from an output to outcome focus and in a couple of cases even note awareness of dangers of anecdotalism in reporting on policy influence. In several instances the RPOs acknowledge uncertainties regarding the use of M&E among grantees, which is reflected in the weighting in figure 13.

Figure 13 Links between M&E and strategic planning, full cohort

Do you see weak/strong links between M&E systems and the information needed to inform strategic planning processes? FC										
	No link to strategic goals									Strong links to strategic goals with explicit indicators
2nd interim report findings	0	2	0	0	4	12	6	7	7	

Data source: RPO interviews 2016-2017

Key findings from second Interim data collection phase on strategic thinking and M&E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TTI support to strategic planning during Phase One is now yielding results as almost all grantees now pursue their own, internally-driven processes. • TTI has been important for providing advisory support to think strategically. • Local factors and informal dialogue dominate strategic planning in virtually all cases. • Grantees are working to improve the use of M&E and report growing importance for strategic planning. • However, many note a lack of progress in using M&E to support their organizational learning due to the inability to overcome long-standing tendencies to focus on output reporting tailored to respond to donor demands rather than their own needs.
Related lessons and suggested course corrections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Final Evaluation Report will provide an important opportunity to take stock of the extent to which M&E is expressly included in strategic plans. • Furthermore, these interim findings point towards the importance of using the Final Report as an opportunity for broad critical reflection over the different paths that think tanks follow to develop capacities for strategic thinking.

3.4 RESOURCE MOBILIZATION AND FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Baseline Five: Resource mobilization and business plans	<p>At the end of Phase One, financial sustainability appears to remain a somewhat distant objective for most (but not all) grantees. Most still lack clear resource mobilization/business plans, and where these exist data shows that significant levels of implementation are low.</p> <p>Currently the focus of grantee efforts to achieve sustainability is often on individual components of a 'business model' rather than a broad strategic approach. The Evaluation has not yet seen significant evidence of <i>comprehensive new business models</i> emerging.</p>
Measurement (from First Interim Report)	<p>A major focus of analysis for the Evaluation in the coming years will be to trace changes to concretize and operationalize broader and more concerted efforts beyond the existing shared <i>concern</i> about the future and relatively <i>piecemeal or informally planned efforts</i> to achieve greater financial sustainability. The Evaluation will recognize that some informal approaches among the best-established grantees remain quite effective. In this way the evaluation will document the manner and extent to which viable 'business models' emerge and are implemented. The Team will continue to monitor grantees' progress in establishing and implementing resource mobilization/business plans.</p> <p>These aspects will be developed further in case studies during Phase Two, emphasizing but not exclusively focusing on Latin America and Institute of Policy Analysis and Research (IPAR) Rwanda. These cases will provide deeper insight into the processes that the grantees may be undertaking as some seek to move beyond intuitive or relatively piecemeal approaches to resource mobilization and the possible emergence of broader 'business plans/models'. Note that the thinking has proceeded furthest on this in Latin America, so these cases are likely to be illustrative of possible paths to sustainability, but may not be representative of the processes (or lack thereof) elsewhere.</p> <p>Interviews with the FC and RPOs will be used to identify other examples of change, but it is recognized that evidence obtained in the brief FC interviews may only be indicative.</p>

TOWARDS A MORE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

Figure 14 Steps towards comprehensive resource mobilization, full cohort

Are you taking steps to take on a more comprehensive approach to resource mobilization? FC				
	No			Yes
2nd interim report findings	1	7	8	21

Data source: FC interviews 2016-2017

Figure 15 Existence of 'business models', FC

Does your think tank have a 'business model'? FC				
	No			Yes
2nd interim report findings	3	4	13	19

Data source: FC interviews 2016-2017

Comments in RPO interviews emphasize the growing awareness among the grantees of the

risks to financial stability they are facing after the end of TTI support. Approximately eight are described as facing a variety of significant challenges to the decline of other sources of funding that they had relied on in the past. Two were mentioned as likely to scale down their activities after the end of TTI support, but the Evaluation Team judges that there are more grantees that are likely to reduce their research portfolios. There is a reluctant recognition among those grantees facing major income gaps that they may need to lay-off core staff, with a resulting risk of being drawn into a vicious cycle due to reduced quality, reputation and capacity to pursue new research initiatives.

FC interview findings indicate that grantees see themselves as moving towards more comprehensive resource mobilization efforts (figure 14), and most see themselves as having a ‘business model’ in place (figure 15). These findings are corroborated in interviews with RPOs who judge that approximately 75% of grantees are making progress towards consolidated resource mobilization strategies. Figure 16 corroborate these findings and indicate a modest improvement since the First Interim Report. The Evaluation Team judges the confidence of this finding to be medium, given the diversity of perspectives on what constitutes a ‘business model’.

Figure 16 Status of resource mobilization plans, sample cohort

Status of the grantee's resource mobilization/ business plans, SC										
	Non-existent				Piecemeal and/or intuitive				Strong	
Baseline findings*	0	0	1	1	3	2	3	3	0	0
2nd interim report findings**	0	0	2	0	0	2	5	2	2	0

Data source: *SC interviews 2015-2016, ** SC interviews 2016-2017

SC interviews (and the case studies below) indicate a generally high level of recognition of the importance of more intensive resource mobilization efforts. Confidence in this finding is high, reflecting these widespread concerns. They report, in various ways, a close link of resource mobilization to overall strategic plans, which in itself can be seen as indicating a shift away from piecemeal efforts. Overall the Evaluation Team judges at this point that ten of the thirteen SC grantees have adopted fairly comprehensive ‘business models’ (albeit with various aspects of business models in place that predated TTI support).

A few highlight that their business model is being driven by their research plan, i.e., that they are choosing what financial resources to pursue in accordance with their judgement of sources that are likely to support their research priorities. In these cases, the research director may have a significant *de facto* role in resource mobilization, e.g., through developing collaboration with international research institutions, and there were some comments in interviews stressing the importance of better research proposals for overall resource mobilization. These findings are somewhat anecdotal, which reflects how perspectives on ‘business models’ may vary depending on whether a respondent is a researcher (focused on drafting quality proposals) or a manager (focused on income streams).

The grantees recognize that their access to different sources of funding reflects their different (actual and intended) positioning and roles in the policy research community. Related to this, a few grantees explicitly frame their resource mobilization strategies in relation to the potential resources that they do *not* want to mobilize to ensure independence and credibility. This may include funding from certain foreign countries or their own government, over-reliance on consultancies, and in a few cases the private sector. This illustrates some of the difficult choices facing think tanks when deciding on how to anchor resource mobilization in strategic plans.

Interviews exposed a few significant examples of hopes of finding a ‘silver bullet’. This is notably reflected in the FC discussions about endowment funds in Africa, where there is rising interest, but no clear indications in interviews of how this capital investment might be mobilized (e.g., the small quantities being discussed include mentions of reserving a percentage of overheads generated on contracted work). At the same time, there are optimistic intentions for how the earnings from endowments will be spent to cover core costs.

TYPES OF RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

The following figure summarizes the main resource mobilization sources described by SC grantees.

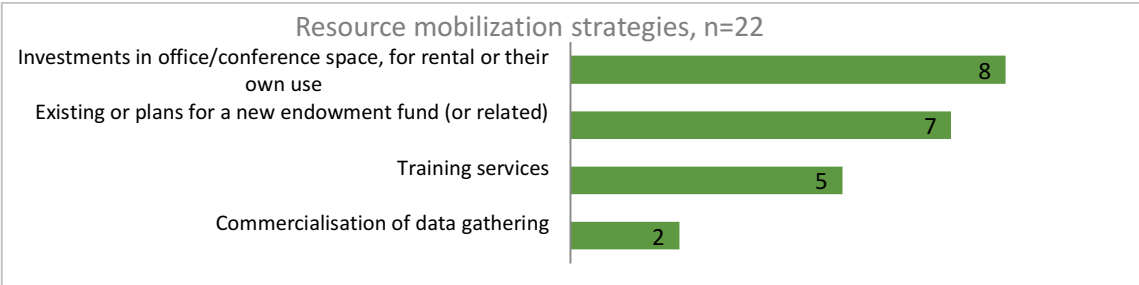
Figure 17 Approach to resource mobilization, sample cohort



Source: SC interviews 2016-2017

Examples of options for resource mobilization being considered in the FC are summarized in figure 18.

Figure 18 Examples of resource mobilization strategies, full cohort



Source: FC interviews 2016-2017

With some notable exceptions, most strategies are focused on pursuing international funding, with little optimism regarding increased funding from local philanthropists or the government. Only a few pursue funding from national research councils, which may be related to these funds being restricted to universities. Even though the private sector is seen to be a ‘priority’, comments overwhelmingly suggest that grantees are not optimistic about the responsiveness of these sources.

In addition to the strategies noted here for generating more income, the SC and FC interviews highlighted an overall awareness of the need to seek greater efficiencies, rationalization and even consider future downsizing in order to respond to an increasingly constrained funding environment.

Case studies three and four describe two processes undertaken in moving towards more diverse and comprehensive resource mobilization efforts (Center for the Studies of the Economies of Africa (CSEA) and IPAR Rwanda). They highlight the processes that are underway towards structured efforts to undertake resource mobilization through efforts to think through more comprehensive business models.

Case Study Three: CSEA’s steps toward financial diversification

Demand for research in Nigeria is weak and engagement with policy makers remains very challenging. This is partly due to the political climate where polarization among political parties in government and in opposition discourages use of research to inform policy directions.

Partly due to this weak demand, as well as the time required to develop partnerships, CSEA’s Phase Two goal: “To increase the number of funding partnerships by 50% within 3 years to contribute towards institutional long-term sustainability”, has been recognized as extremely optimistic, but it is being pursued systematically.

CSEA has categorized and identified potential major donors from its database and contacts which include national and international grant-making organizations, as well as resource persons and individuals with whom the Centre can partner to attract more project-based funding. Moving forward, this will form the basis for CSEA’s Fundraising Plan. At the same time, work has been undertaken to increase the number of research and information outputs to emphasize the results to potential financiers. CSEA has made progress in relation to current and new outputs (papers, updates, research contributions) and established relationships with intended users. There are also several prospective partnerships which include provision of commercialized services and research products.

Case Study Four: IPAR’s process towards a resource mobilization strategy

The IPAR Resource Mobilization Strategy, which was initially drafted in 2015. IPAR is now in the midst of finalising its 2016-2021 Strategic Plan, wherein resource mobilization had been partially integrated at the same time as new initiatives are being planned, inspired and informed by the TTI Action Research on Business Models. IPAR saw the need to update and partially rethink resource mobilization plans, particularly in light of the impending phase-out of the main sources of core funding. Resource mobilization is thus not a new concern, but pressures are soon to become acute.

Rwanda has very few think tanks and therefore there is no basis upon which to draw lessons about what constitutes a 'normal' business model in the local context. The dearth of think tanks, and the fact that institutions of higher education are in a phase of rapid expansion in producing graduates, and therefore have limited capacity to take on policy research, have meant that the demand for think tank outputs is greater than the supply of relevant, well-grounded research. However, this demand-pull has also led to an emerging market for policy analysis which is encouraging the establishment of consulting firms and increasing involvement of international research institutions and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). This competition affects IPAR, both in terms of competing for commissioned research contracts and research funding, and also competition to attract and retain qualified staff. The latter is of particular note, as core funding from TTI and ACBF has in recent years enabled IPAR to pay better salaries and create more attractive conditions for staff than would otherwise be the case.

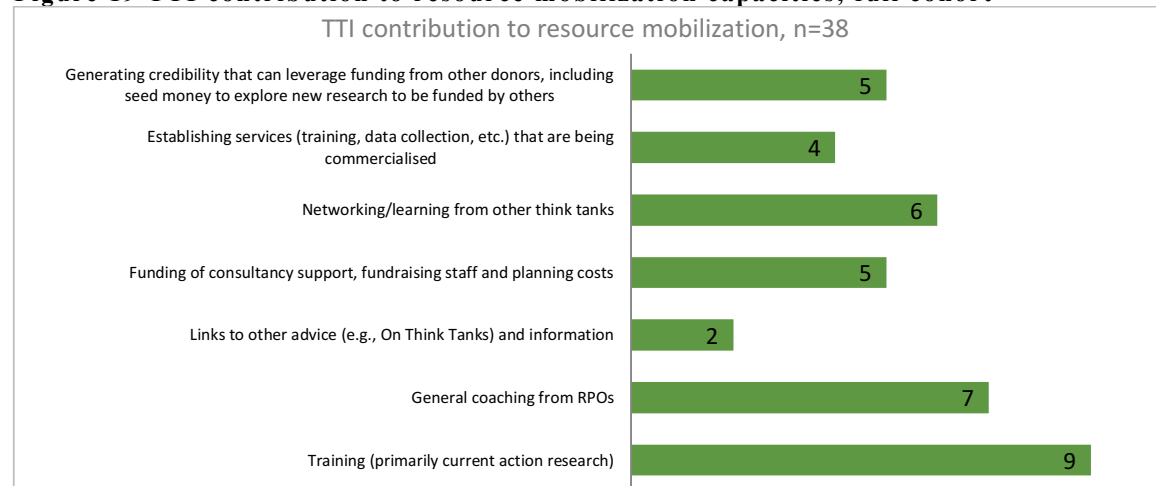
Strong internal capacity is an essential condition for resource mobilization, but IPAR recognizes that this is somewhat of a 'chicken or egg' challenge, as a significant amount of reasonably long-term funding is required in order to attract and retain high quality researchers, but those researchers first need to be in place to attract and retain the funding. Rapid growth in demand for IPAR's work has not been matched by equally rapid growth in staffing, particularly in terms of senior researchers. During the period of the last strategic plan staffing levels remained low in relation to the greatly expanded research portfolio. This suggests that IPAR may be facing a 'costing crisis' and 'continuity crisis' if the additional workload is not accompanied by sufficient revenues to employ qualified staff to do the work. IPAR has been able to support some non-permanent staff from shorter term funding as 'research associates', which can be seen as a partial and pragmatic solution to this challenge. It is recognized, however, that a critical mass of at least a few permanent senior research staff is essential for credibility and continuity. Even more challenging, although realistic costing of research programs is clearly a growing concern for IPAR staff, the extent to which funders are prepared to cover actual costs remains to be confirmed. Realistic costing levels will rely on a proactive dialogue with funders to ensure acceptance that costs are covered.

TTI CONTRIBUTIONS TO RESOURCE MOBILIZATION PLANNING

TTI's contributions to resource mobilization have, in the view of the Evaluation Team, been ramped up somewhat late in the program in the hope of yielding clear-cut results before funding ends. For some well-established grantees, especially in South Asia, effective resource mobilization practices were in place already before TTI. However, it should also be noted that the contributions of TTI, particularly accompaniment, over some years in Latin America and the more recent action research initiative in Africa, have been highly appreciated. The TTI contributions are significant, but need to be viewed in relation to what the grantees clearly see as a longer-term process of adapting to shifting opportunities and obstacles in their own environments.

FC interviews present a varied picture of the contribution of TTI to resource mobilization (figure 19).

Figure 19 TTI contribution to resource mobilization capacities, full cohort



Source: Full cohort interviews, 2016-2017

Overall, FC findings clearly indicate strong contributions to grantee efforts.

Figure 20 Extent of TTI contribution to resource mobilization, full cohort

How much as TTI contributed to resource mobilization? FC				
	Little			Considerable
2nd interim report findings	4	6	8	12

Data source: FC interviews 2016-2017

RESPONDING TO 'RED FLAG' RISKS TO FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Baseline Six: Major risks for financial sustainability	There are considerable 'red flag' issues in several grantees due to reliance on TTI support for all or part of salaries of senior staff. This is in turn related to insufficient diversification of funding.
Measurement (from First Interim Report)	<p>The Evaluation will trace steps being taken in the SC to build specific alternative funding models to cover key senior leadership posts that are currently financed through TTI core support. Where additional income does not materialize, the Evaluation will document processes to respond, including possible preparations for reductions in staff and programming.</p> <p>Interviews with the FC and RPOs will be used to identify other examples of efforts in this regard, but it is recognized that evidence obtained in the brief FC interviews may only be indicative.</p>

FC interview findings indicate that almost all grantees are using TTI resources to fund at least a proportion of senior leadership posts, though that proportion varies considerably. Bearing in mind the different shares of TTI funding in their overall budgets, a large majority judge that they will not experience major difficulties in covering essential salary costs after the end of TTI support. Their responses about steps to reallocate resources to cover these costs reflect the grantees' overall budgetary picture and resource mobilization plans. Diverse funding

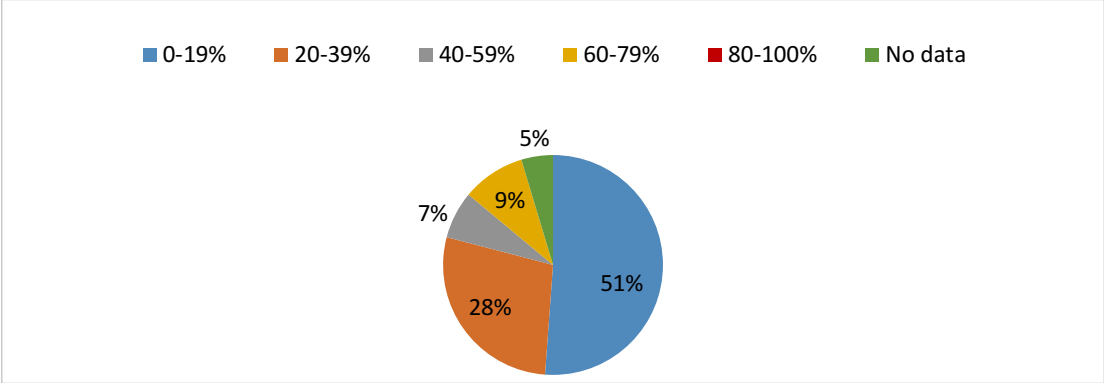
sources provide a greater sense of security, and those very few with endowments in place have a significant expectation of relying on that source to ease the transition.

Regarding the plausibility that grantee resource mobilization efforts will yield sufficient income to largely cover salaries currently financed by TTI, RPOs express optimism for 14, pessimism for five, and cautious uncertainty for nine, leaving a substantial number indeterminate. The confidence rating for this finding is medium, in this case due to the speculative nature of the question.

Within the SC, nine grantees can be judged as warranting a potential ‘red flag’ for their over-reliance on TTI funding for senior staff costs. Their responses all indicate that this is seen as part of their overall resource mobilization challenge and is not being addressed as a separate issue. It should also be noted that even some of those grantees without ‘red flags’ around the funding of leadership roles have tended to use TTI resources for financing communications officers, so this is another area where there are warning signs, as discussed below.

Due to different fiscal reporting schedules it is difficult to present detailed comparable data regarding changes in the proportion of overall grantee budgets financed over time, but there are no indications of significant shifts between the baseline and more recent data. Figure 26 indicates that the majority of grantees receive less than twenty percent of their revenues from TTI, which corroborates other findings that most grantees are not facing major risks with the ending of TTI. This data shows that 20 percent receive over forty percent of their revenues from TTI, which is of course cause for greater concern.

Figure 21 Levels of TTI Phase Two funding as a percentage of overall grantee budgets, full cohort (41 of 43 grantees reporting)



Source: TTI data

Key findings from second Interim data collection phase on re-source mobilization and fi-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resource mobilization plans are in several cases being integrated into strategic planning. There are trends towards a stronger focus on funding diversification, especially accessing private sector support (the latter with limited success apart from private sector affiliated foundations). Endowment funds are comparatively well established in South Asia, and are viewed as an interesting possibility in Africa (spurred by discussions in the Resource Mobilization Action Research).
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nancial sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realistic costing is recognized as important, but the potential to influence the levels of overheads that can be charged is uncertain. • Some grantees are exploring new ways to commercialize, and generate income directly from, research products. • It is as yet still hard to discern concrete steps among many grantees to implement more comprehensive business plans. • The degree of vulnerability of particular key posts to the phasing out of TTI support are mostly, but not entirely, correlated to the share of TTI in their total funding. Red flag risks of financial crises after the end of TTI support are a growing concern among some of the grantees that rely on TTI support for (especially) senior staff salaries. • This is seen as part of the overall resource challenge, and there is a lack of dedicated strategies to address this particular aspect.
Related lessons and suggested course corrections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are some issues where TTI 'encouragement' to focus more on business models may need to be balanced by somewhat more attention to 'critical reflection' around realistic paths forward. One area where this has started has been with regard to defining the implications of starting an endowment fund. • Realistic costing is central to think tank sustainability, and with TTI support some grantees (e.g., Fundación Salvadoreña para el Desarrollo Económico y Social de El Salvador (FUSADES)) have been successful in reaching agreements with donors on more realistic overheads. However, it is still an area where think tanks sometimes feel rather powerless. TTI could consider developing a communications product as part of its "TTI insights on think tank sustainability" to inform prospective donors of the importance of recognizing actual costs when determining overhead levels. • More successful approaches to engaging with the private sector have emerged in attracting support from affiliated foundations (South Asia), whereas there is generally a lack of clear direction for what broader approaches to partnering with the private sector may imply. This is an area where tightly tailored regional capacity development efforts may be appropriate. • There is probably little that TTI can do at this point to address these 'red flag' issues, apart from encouraging grantees to give full attention to sustaining their critical core staff in their business plans for the future. As a potential lesson, future core funding of Think Tanks should guard against the danger of hinging the most critical staff capacities on any single financing source.

3.5 RESEARCH QUALITY

This section presents findings related to the contribution of TTI support to research quality.

The evaluation looks at the following dimensions of research quality:

- Critical mass for sustainability and research quality
- Maintaining and enhancing capacity to ensure research quality
- Positioning for research relevance
- Internal capacities and systems for ensuring research quality
- Gender capacities and research quality

SUSTAINING A CRITICAL MASS OF RESEARCHERS IN A VOLATILE CONTEXT

Baseline Seven: Critical mass for sustainability	Existing data does not provide a basis for quantifiable baseline findings regarding how a reputation for high quality research is being leveraged for greater financial sustainability. But SC interviewees present plausible arguments that this is the case and report various examples of expanding engagements with respected international research institutions and undertaking research programs more selectively.
Measurement (from First Interim Report)	<p>As part of cases studies of grantee research programs, the Evaluation Team will explore evidence of <i>where strategic use of TTI support is generating credibility that is in turn contributing to greater financial sustainability</i>. It should be noted, however, that these examples are likely to be contextually dependent and case specific.</p> <p>The Evaluation will also, in SC and FC interviews, trace the <i>emergence of a 'middle ground'</i> of less restrictive programmatic financing (sources, quantities, types, levels of relations to strategic plans), emphasizing how it began during Phase One and the extent to which it can compensate for the expected severe reduction of core funding at the end of Phase Two. The Evaluation will be attentive to regional trends and emerging categories of how different types of grantee are developing greater capacity to access this 'middle ground' of funding.</p> <p>The extent to which a critical mass could be sustained and leveraged to attract suitable forms of support - if not core funding, at least more appropriate programmatic and flexible support aligned with grantee strategies - would only be fully clear in an <i>ex post</i> evaluation. In lieu of this opportunity, at two further milestones the Team will closely measure (both quantitatively and descriptively) the extent to which SC grantees perceive their organizations to have achieved - and expect to maintain- a critical mass over the course of Phase Two.</p>
<p>What is a 'critical mass' for a think tank?</p> <p>Drawing on the collected SC data, the Evaluation Team sees the key requirements of 'critical mass' to include: highly qualified leadership (executive director and in most cases a research coordinator or similar post); a well-functioning finance and administration department; an effective communications department (or at least a well-placed individual responsible); a balanced and diverse research portfolio that confers credibility, and a sufficient number of senior and junior researchers to undertake the tasks reflected in the organization's strategic goals. Adequate governance is also necessary.</p>	

Baseline Eight: Overall improvements in research quality	The Evaluation Team judges that the determinants of research quality as perceived among the grantees fall into a range of categories and that there has also been a range of ways that TTI support during Phase One has contributed to enhancements.
Measurement (from First Interim Report)	The Evaluation will use case studies in the SC to trace the extent to which the grantees assess that their quality has improved in relation to categories they themselves define, and identify whether and how TTI may have contributed to these advances.

FACTORS DETERMINING ‘RESEARCH QUALITY’ AND LINKS BETWEEN RESEARCH QUALITY AND FUNDING

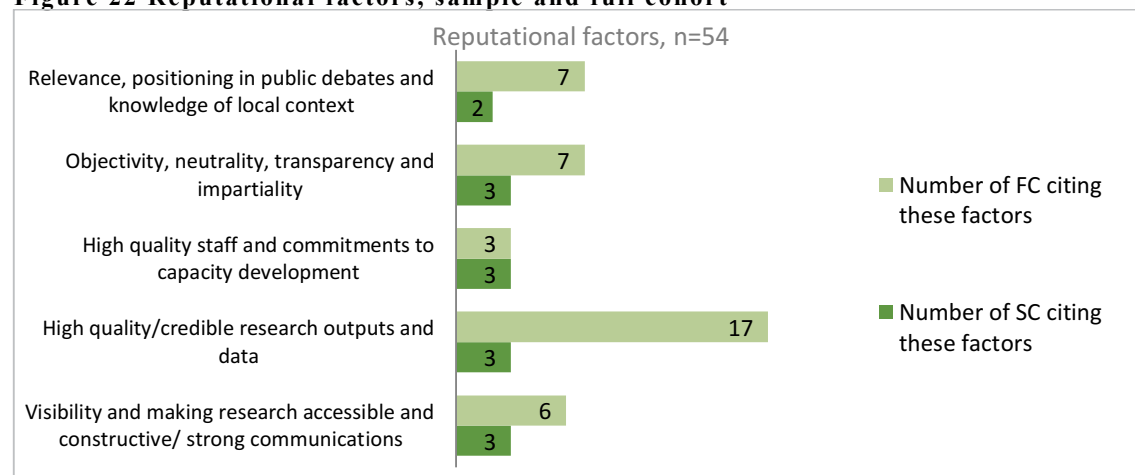
A key finding from the First Interim Report was that for the grantees, ‘research quality is in the eyes of the beholder’. Few grantees put emphasis on conventional academic measures of quality such as counting peer-reviewed publications. Most described quality in relation to credibility among the users of the research. This Report looks further at these issues, including what factors contribute to the reputations of the think tanks for producing credible and useful research. These findings firmly reinforce conclusions from the First Interim Report on the overlap between research quality and policy influence, stressing that ‘good’ policy research is research that is useful and used.

SC grantees report an overwhelming perception that their reputations for quality are improving. The main challenges described (by five grantees) relate to problematic relations with government due largely to perceived ideological differences, which are an obstacle to finding pathways for direct engagement. At the other end of the spectrum, two grantees report that the demands for their research run the danger of exceeding their capacity to respond while maintaining quality standards. With the end of TTI support looming, one of these (others in the FC) is hesitant about expanding staffing to meet these demands. The Evaluation Team judges that the confidence of these findings in a quantitative perspective is not strong due to the diversity (and thus somewhat anecdotal nature) of findings, but that the evidence is unmistakably indicative of types of challenges faced.

Five SC grantees report that improvements in reputation are leading to actual increases in and/or diversification of funding. Others describe how they are being approached more often, sometimes with memoranda of understanding being signed, but with little clear evidence that this potential is crystallizing into the actual mid- to long-term funding required to attract and employ additional senior researchers.

Aspects of the reputations which may help generate support are listed as:

Figure 22 Reputational factors, sample and full cohort



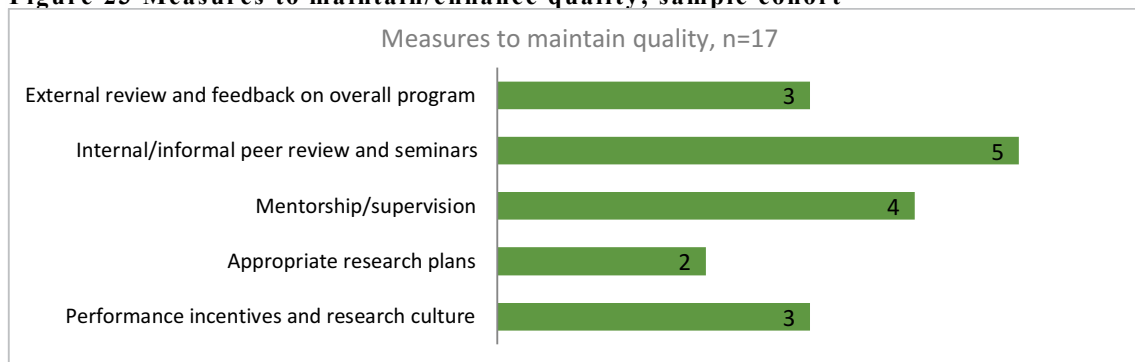
Source: SC and FC interviews 2016-2017

Here again, these findings are confidently judged to reflect the variety of factors, though the proportions are given a lower confidence rating.

Baseline Nine: Formal research quality assurance measures	The <i>actual implementation of formal research quality assurance measures</i> is uncertain, whereas it is clear that an ‘organizational culture’ of critical discussion on research quality is firmly established.
Measurement (from First Interim Report)	As part of SC interviews and in conjunction with developing case studies of research programs, the Evaluation Team will explore further <i>what research quality means among grantees, what steps they are taking to assure the quality of their work, and if/how TTI is contributing to their internal efforts to ensure research quality</i> . This will be particularly important if growing financial pressures impinge on efforts to foster a critical organizational culture or if new forms of partnerships or other changing trends provide ways to reinforce this ‘culture’.

In the First Interim Report it was found that research quality assurance measures were largely in place, though the extent to which they were consistently applied was uncertain. For this reason, significant changes during the remainder of Phase Two were not expected. The Evaluation Team has remained attentive to whether this is correct and has noted no significant change. In interviews during this period of the evaluation the steps being taken to ensure, maintain and enhance research quality have been described as:¹⁰

Figure 23 Measures to maintain/enhance quality, sample cohort

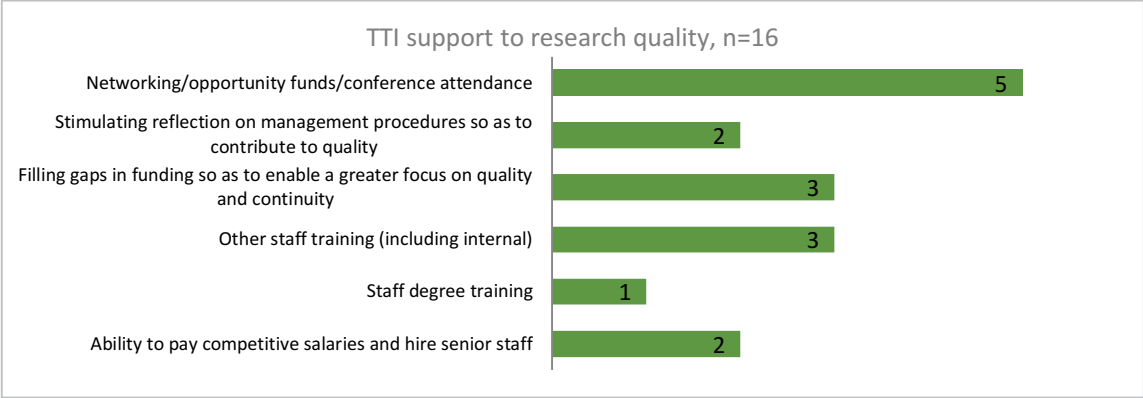


Source: Interviews with SC 2016-2017

TTI contributions to these research quality improvements are described by grantees as including:

¹⁰ NB, there is no reference made to external peer review.

Figure 24 TTI support to research quality, sample cohort



Source: Interviews with SC 2016-2017

A case study of CRES efforts to expand and diversify its portfolio of work while maintaining a focus on quality revealed the interplay between quality of research and the quality of management and nature of relations with partners, particularly in a context of rapid growth.

Case Study Five: CRES Senegal’s capacity to grow while maintaining a quality focus

Yearly flooding in Senegal’s informal urban settlements causes health risks as well as major damage to household and community life. CRES is engaged with the partnership “Vivre avec l’eau/Live with water”, which is intended to build resilience to flooding for 920,000 vulnerable people through an innovative, integrated and community-based approach. CRES was selected by the UK Department for International Development to lead this initiative based on a set of due diligence tests and also evidence of having sufficient financial and administrative systems in place to lead the project. Its connection to the University and its past publications were seen as evidence that research quality could be ensured. A new Team of about 15 staff were hired for the duration of the project and various CRES staff became directly involved in the project as researchers, including the Director of CRES. Such a major and rapid expansion of a think tank, driven by a single high-profile project, presents evident risks of being drawn into areas where capacities to maintain research quality are overstretched, as well as opportunities to develop new capacities. The project was discussed at a larger stakeholder meeting where participants gave CRES the highest rating. This is very encouraging since it raised confidence that their approach is relevant and that research quality is meeting expectations.

MAINTAINING AND ENHANCING CAPACITY TO ENSURE RESEARCH QUALITY

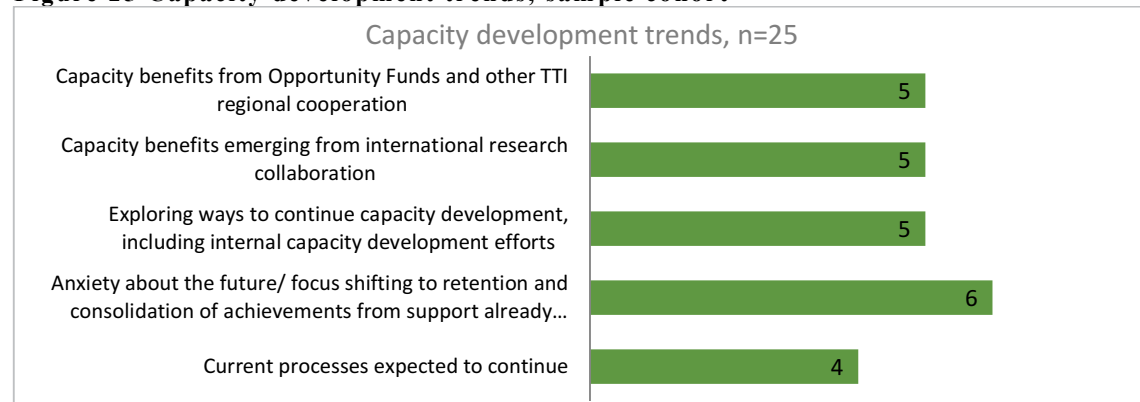
Baseline Ten: Sustaining a critical mass of researchers	Approximately two thirds of SC grantees can be judged to have established a critical mass of senior and rising junior researchers prior to or during the course of Phase One.
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Measurement (from First Interim Report)	The Evaluation Team will assess any changes to the <i>sustainability of Phase One achievements</i> in attaining a critical mass of research staff and the steps being taken to <i>ensure continued research capacity and future strengthening after the end of TTI support</i> . The case studies of research programs, together with SC and FC interviews more generally, will be used to look at (a) how the grantees are <i>leveraging opportunities to develop staff research capacities in the course of undertaking major research programs</i> –e.g., inclusion of doctoral fellowships, mentoring from senior international researchers, etc., (b) <i>building partnerships</i> with local and international research institutions so as to draw on outside capacities, and (c) encouraging <i>a shift in thinking among donors and other key stakeholders</i> away from transactional perspectives regarding the ‘use’ of think tanks to a recognition of the importance of building national policy research capacities as a goal in itself (a concern noted in Rashid, 2012). Assessing this third variable will require interviews with outside stakeholders and findings are likely to only be indicative.
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A few FC interviewees describe how efforts to develop staff capacities are likely to be curtailed in the future. Therefore, some perceive the Phase Two TTI support as their ‘last chance’ to develop capacities leading to a critical mass. These are the exception, however; most grantees are able to cite varied examples of where they have been proactive and successful in identifying alternative opportunities to develop capacities to ensure research quality is maintained. The FC grantees are relatively optimistic about being able to continue related capacity development efforts in the future, as TTI has been just one of many sources for this support. The confidence level for this finding regarding expectations for the future is high due to the consistency of reports of optimism, though the extent to which this optimism is warranted cannot be verified.

Grantees are critical of some donors for their failures to recognize the importance of investments in capacity development. Examples of challenges in efforts to leverage research projects for staff capacity development indicate concerns about a general shift towards more transactional and contracting relations with potential funders, that may exclude access to resources for capacity development. In several cases this is at least partly attributed to changes connected with countries achieving middle income status, wherein aid investments in capacity development are seen as no longer warranted. One grantee notes that longer-term capacity development support, e.g., doctoral fellowships, is earmarked for universities and that this excludes think tanks. However, responses about donor readiness to finance capacity development are very mixed and there are several grantees who are more optimistic, sometimes noting increased access to domestic funding, which is offsetting decreases in international assistance.

Figure 25 Capacity development trends, sample cohort



Source: Interviews with SC, 2016-2017

Case study findings indicate that among some grantees a range of opportunities are being found for building continuing processes to enhance research capacities and quality through synergies with longer-term academic research programs. A key factor of TTI support has been the opportunities it has provided to maintain core in-house senior researcher capacities that in turn can be leveraged to attract additional support.

Case Study Six: MISR land research, using a program for developing the capacities of young researchers

The Land Research program is one of the main MISR research initiatives. The purpose of this thematically-focused research group is not to develop a single body of research, but rather to provide a forum for doctoral students and researchers to discuss and learn from each other's work; and also to expose the research group to broader methodological, theoretical and analytical perspectives. These groups also subject ongoing work to regular critiques and peer review, and as such are central to MISR's approach to ensuring that research quality is maintained. Given the centrality of land to domestic economies and the linkages of land and agrarian issues to the global economy, this topic has particular importance for MISR's overall research agenda. The initial focus of the new phase of the research, now underway, has been on broadening the earlier scope of land research to include greater emphasis on gender and feminist approaches. TTI is not envisaged to become a major financier of this work, but funding to engage a senior research with an appropriate feminist background has been instrumental to allowing this research to develop 'outside the box' of more conventional land research.

Case Study Seven: Coffee research and capacity development at IPAR

Since 2015 IPAR Rwanda has been collaborating with Michigan State University (MSU) in research on coffee production issues in Rwanda. IPAR is benefiting from collaboration with MSU in three areas. First, all researchers get acquainted with new methodologies. Second IPAR is specifically learning about new methods of data collection with tablets, which will increase research efficiency more generally especially in relation to the quality and the cost of data collection. Data entry for this research is being done directly in the field, an approach which is now being replicated in completely different IPAR research projects, such as the performance contract evaluation also known as "Imihigo" which IPAR has been undertaking on a regular basis. Third, the collaboration with MSU constitutes a valuable reference

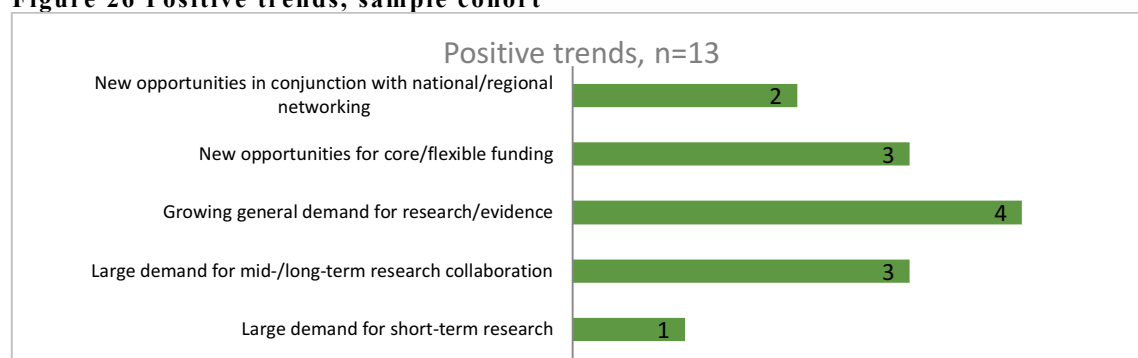
for future research applications. Furthermore, IPAR researchers are benefiting from writing papers together with MSU.

Even if this research is not directly funded by TTI, it has been made possible by TTI support which covers the salary of the Director of Research, who is also the lead researcher for this project. Therefore, the research is dependent on TTI to move forward. Without the core support to have a critical mass of research capacity, IPAR would not be able to pursue a project such as this. However, this also exemplifies the importance of moving towards a costing model that will cover the full costs of maintaining a director of research in the future.

STRENGTHENING A CULTURE OF RESEARCH

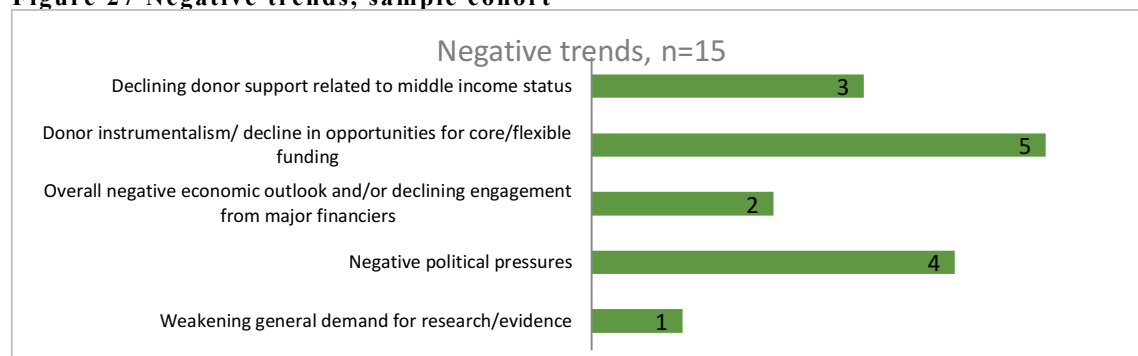
SC grantees overwhelmingly report that their financial situation has enabled them to follow their own research and strategic plans and in so doing continue to develop their cultures of research. However, there is a high degree of variation and uncertainty regarding future trends. Key factors emerging from interviews include the following:

Figure 26 Positive trends, sample cohort



Source: SC interviews 2016-2017

Figure 27 Negative trends, sample cohort



Source: SC interviews 2016-2017

GENDER IN RESEARCH

Baseline	Broad variation in commitments to (and depth of) gender perspectives in research within grantees. Some indications that TTI support during Phase One has encouraged and created space for enhancements.
Eleven: Depth of focus on	

gender in research	
Measurement (from First Interim Report)	Over the course of the Evaluation the Team intended to use a structured questionnaire for gender officers and key researchers promoting integration of gender and feminist perspectives will be used to trace progress across the SC. However, the range of perspectives and levels of engagement and interest made this difficult to pursue.

SC overall judgements on their performance indicate a largely similar level of gender focus (figure 28). Examples raised in interviews present a somewhat mixed picture, and changes are not judged to have been large enough to indicate clear trends. Several grantees report individual research projects with substantial gender dimensions, but a few also acknowledge that these may not be indicative of consistent changes in their organizations. The grantee comments imply a considerable amount of critical reflection on changes that are underway, but also that varying commitments to gender perspectives among individual researchers determine overall outcomes. The variety of these commitments has resulted in somewhat anecdotal evidence and thus confidence in these findings is modest.

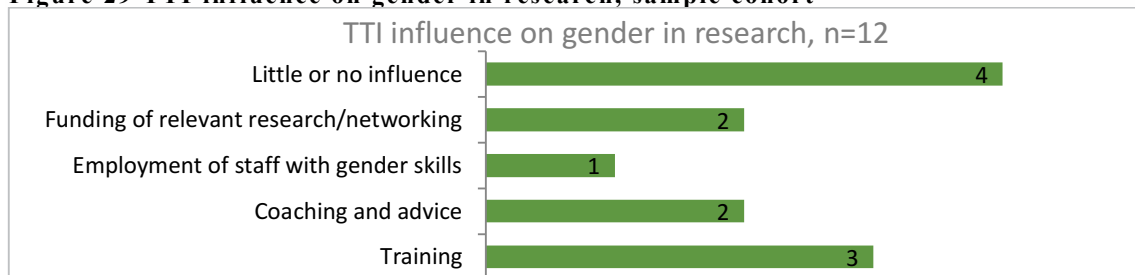
Figure 28 Depth of gender research focus, sample cohort

Ways in which gender is perceived to be consistently brought into the grantee's research	Ways in which gender is perceived to be consistently brought into the grantee's research									
	Minimally				Mainstreaming (incl data disaggregation)				Empowerment/transformative/rights-based	
Baseline findings*	0	0	1	1	2	2	1	3	2	1
2nd interim report findings**	0	0	0	0	2	3	6	2	0	0

Data source: *SC interviews 2015-2016, ** SC interviews 2016-2017

References in the SC to TTI influence on gender-related research are illustrated in figure 29. When describing the reasons for limited influence by TTI a couple of the grantees mention that other partners have played a more major role with more comprehensive support programs specifically focused on gender.

Figure 29 TTI influence on gender in research, sample cohort



Source: Sample cohort interviews, 2016-2017

Case study findings indicate that some South Asian grantees have proactively pursued in-depth gender-related research, with contributions from TTI, which have resulted in significant policy influence.

Case Study Eight: Women and work

Sri Lanka suffers from labor shortages and the participation of women in the formal economy is relatively low. There are gender inequalities in the labor market, with women being concentrated in a narrow range of occupations. The government is seeking to promote inclusive economic growth, but little is known of the non-economic factors that might constrain women's participation in the labor market. The ability of women to enter the labor force in Sri Lanka is amenable to government and employer intervention. These relate to the supply of affordable child care centers, changes in the working environment and the availability of flexible working environments.

In 2011 an Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS) researcher wrote a proposal for funding under the TTI Opportunity Fund on Female Labor Participation Issues in Sri Lanka. The study report was published in 2014¹¹ and her subsequent blogs and newspaper articles have been widely read and cited. Since then she has been part of two further studies on entrepreneurship for women.

The quality of this research was assured in a number of ways¹². Findings were triangulated through multiple methods of data and multiple sources, member checking and spending a prolonged time period in the field. Together this provided a rich, thick description of the findings and a better understanding of the setting/ context.

At the inception of the study an Advisory Committee, consisting of six members, was set up in order to ensure the policy relevance and the quality of research outputs generated by the study. The Advisory Committee was composed of government officials and members from the trade associations. A National Consultation Meeting was held after data collection and analysis to present the initial findings of the study to the main stakeholders and get their feedback.

TTI funding was used to pump prime an area, doing some initial scoping studies and develop the research. The initial funding can be seen to have led to the gradual development of a new thematic area in IPS.

Case Study Nine: Transformative gender research – Safety of women in public spaces in Delhi

Violence against women, both in the public sphere and in the home, has long been on the public agenda in India. Although there are various policies and programs in place, they have clearly failed to address the issue. A number of activist groups in Delhi, and in particular a civil society organization called Jagori¹³, have been running public campaigns, both to draw attention to the issue of violence against women and to demand more effective government response.

Although various policy measures are supposed to be in place, little analysis had been undertaken of the governance arrangements, funding mechanisms and implementation practices intended to support them.

¹¹ Madurawala, S (2014). Female Employment for Inclusive Growth: Trends, Issues and Concerns of Female Labour Participation in Sri Lanka

¹² adapted from Madurawala et al, 2016 p6-7

¹³ <http://www.jagori.org>

Drawing on the interests and previous engagement with Jagori, in 2015 Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA) undertook a study to investigate the complexity in Delhi's governance structures with respect to addressing violence against women, the problems with fiscal policy, and gaps in public spending. It focused on specific sectors and preventive measures such as policing, public bus services and night shelters, as well as responsive services provided by public hospitals to women who have experienced violence. CBGA had worked with Jagori in the past and both saw it as a beneficial study to help support Jagori's arguments and advocacy with evidence, as well as to deepen CBGA's own work on Gender Responsive Budgeting. There was a strategy at the outset to make contact with a wide range of interested parties from civil society and government. One of the most challenging parts of the research was to get the analytical framework for examining the budgets right, as this type of research was new to CBGA. They called on a number of experts from academia, practitioners, and NGOs to get input on how to use a budgetary lens.

The contribution from TTI is very clear with respect to funding since it covered a major portion of the budget. The development of the research process described above benefited from interaction with TTI, leading to processes which have now become internalized at CBGA. There was, for example, a sharper emphasis on peer review in the process of developing the research proposal, and developing institutional measures to build a clear communications strategy.

There have been changes in how CBGA thinks about communication. In the past, the study would first be completed before any thought was given to media and how to create stories from the data, which was largely done at the end. Now, they have started to think about how to develop their communication at the conception stage and make a list of deliverables right at the beginning

Key findings from second Interim data collection phase on re-search quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving reputations are leading to significant growth in demand for re-search from many grantees. • However, challenges with costing and fears about the stability of long-term funding are leading to hesitance by some in employing the new staff that will be required to maintain quality. There is a (perhaps growing) reliance on 're-search associates', which (if used in moderation) can provide flexibility, but if they come to overwhelmingly outnumber core staff can undermine continuity and strategic direction. • There are many positive examples of more cooperation with international research institutions, with related enhancement of research quality. • Negative trends are generally due to political tensions and weak demands for research from governments and donors (in some countries). • No change is noted with regards to research quality assurance procedures <i>per se</i>. • Case studies indicate a growing pride among several grantees in the enhanced quality of their research, particularly in relation to respect for the importance of evidence in policy formation. • Some see this as leading to increases in (or diversification of) funding. • Quality assurance is more linked to monitoring <i>process</i> (engagement with policy stakeholders and peers) rather than formal review of <i>outputs</i>; a finding which is confirmed and emphasized by outside observers. • The Evaluation Team can conclude that the generally strong 'organizational culture' of critical discussion on research quality is being sustained and further embedded among grantees.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While there have not been marked changes in the strength of research staffs of most grantees since the First Interim Report there has been steady capacity development work in many. At the same time, there is growing concern about retention of senior staff as the future capacity to continue paying salaries become uncertain. • There are some cases of collaborative research leading to capacity development opportunities, but this is not consistently supported within prevailing funding modalities. • The grantees reluctantly accept that most donors are not ready to invest in capacities for quality research, but they also highlight that strong think tanks are able to influence this in some instances. • There are striking variations in responses on these issues across the SC and FC. • Grantees generally perceive a modest but positive trend towards more and (in some cases) deeper gender focus. • Their ambition levels for gender related research vary widely. • TTI's past contribution has mostly been through training; some note that other donors are leading on support to a gender focus.
Related lessons and suggested course corrections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As explored in discussions at the Research to Policy Forum in London in April 2017, TTI is actively working to bring together lessons and forward-looking ideas for sufficiently flexible funding modalities to sustain key benefits of current core funding in enhancing research quality, even if the likelihood of continued core funding appears unpromising. The Evaluation Team recommends that this be more explicitly and publicly emphasized as a lesson from TTI. • Furthermore, the Evaluation Team suggests that TTI's work on institutional sustainability insights ensure that reference is made to concrete minimum standards for maintaining core functions. • Positive processes for ensuring research quality are well underway, with a notable lynchpin in ensuring continued improvements being that of having senior research directors in place. TTI dialogue with grantees should stress the demonstrated importance of sustaining these positions, particularly where their salaries are currently dependent on TTI funding. • Risks are prevalent due to the intense, polarized politicization, which constitutes an obstacle to high quality policy research in a significant number of cases. The Evaluation Team stresses the importance of 'keeping political risk on the radar screen' in planning efforts even if TTI has little leverage to influence these contextual factors. • The Evaluation Team judges that, after earlier support from TTI, grantees are now engaged in their own diverse processes to ensure quality in their research. Further support from TTI is not a priority. An exception is the role of research directors noted above. • The outcomes of TTI in terms of enhanced grantee abilities to continue to develop capacities in the future will only become apparent after TTI ends. There are both promising and worrisome signals. Therefore, the Evaluation Team suggests commissioning a 'light touch' ex post review of how grantees have continued on their capacity development paths approximately two years after the end of the TTI program. • The Evaluation Team judges that the current supportive role in relation to gender research by TTI is appropriate and that there are likely to be other

	<p>larger opportunities elsewhere for pursuing in-depth gender-related research for those grantees who are ready to do so.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This may be complemented by very specific training or other capacity development support, such as that planned with regards to gender budgeting.
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3.6 POLICY INFLUENCE

This chapter presents findings relating to how TTI support contributes to grantees' policy influence. The evaluation looks at the following dimensions of policy influence:

- Positioning for policy influence, including efforts to maintain (varying forms of) independence and how financial pressures may be influencing capacity to maintain independence. This is partially related to the various factors that grantees judge as influencing their reputations and status in their national policy discourses.
- Capacities for communication and policy influence, including what capacities that have focused on developing so as to ensure that they can engage actively in policy debates and be perceived as having sufficient human resources (HR) and intellectual rigor to be seen as public policy 'actors'.

MAINTAINING INDEPENDENCE AMID FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS

The findings of the First Interim Report strongly emphasized the general importance of independence in ensuring policy influence. However, the report also found that the key elements of independence were extremely diverse across the grantees. Some emphasized independence from the government. For others, it involved an impartial stance in political debates. For others it was avoiding being seen as 'under the thumb' of foreign donors. For some independence simply meant being able to speak based on evidence, regardless of whether the conclusions confirmed or contested prevailing political narratives.

The general conclusions from the First Interim Report were that the grantees felt that they had made major progress in positioning themselves to be independent, with the notable exception of those for which independence was uncontested even before the start of TTI support. However, it was also recognized that independence is never a stable proposition, as think tanks are always buffeted by political winds. TTI's multi-year core support was seen as providing enough assurance of financial stability to let them stake out and strengthen their positioning for the future. As noted in section 3.4 above, grantees' resource mobilization strategies sometimes specifically exclude types of funding that would be seen to impinge on independence. When discussing the end of TTI support, many are uneasy about how the changing financial landscape may affect independence in the near future.

Baseline	Significant Phase One progress in stemming financial pressures to assume roles that lead to grantees being <i>perceived as 'just consultants' or being tainted by Northern donor agendas.</i>
Twelve: Independence	
Measurement	Positive and negative changes to be traced through interviews with the SC and

(from First Interim Report)	RPOs with attention to possible dangers with the impending decline of core funding. The variety of perspectives on these issues among the different grantees suggests that these findings will provide an enhanced understanding of the role of core funding in promoting independence and the risks in relation to sustainability, but these findings will not be quantifiable.
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FC interviews indicate that grantees view their reputations as improving since the start of Phase Two (figure 30). Due to consistency of responses the confidence levels for this finding are high.

Figure 30 Improvements in overall reputations, full cohort

Do you judge that your think tank's reputation has improved since January 2015? FC				
	No		Yes	
2nd interim report findings	0	4	9	11

Data source: FC interviews 2016-2017

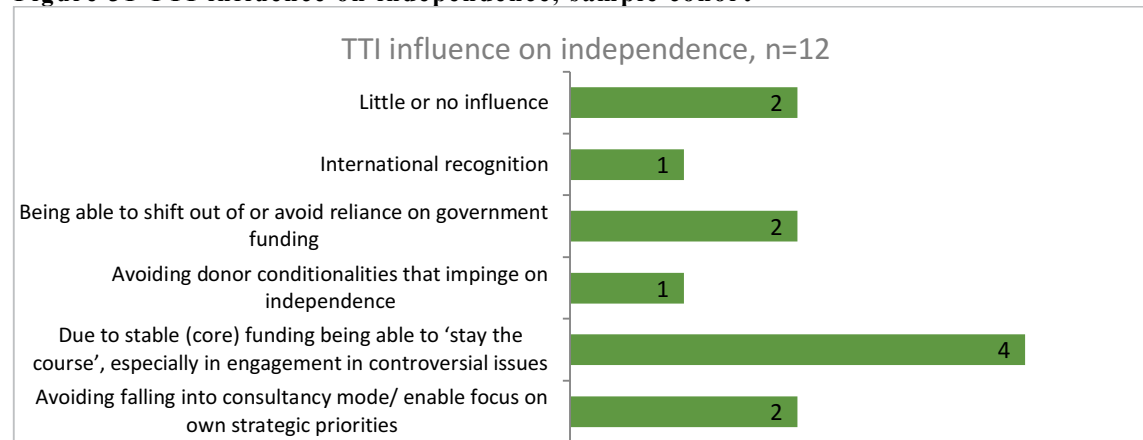
Comments strongly highlight factors related to independence and rigour, sometimes as ‘two sides of the same coin’. Rigour provides the credibility that underpins being respected as independent and independence creates the space required to ensure rigorous (i.e., impartial) research. Particularly in Latin America and South Asia, political pressures have been seen to generate challenges, but responses generally indicate that reputations have grown as a result of integrity and courage in addressing controversial policy issues.

Several examples of reputational factors described by grantees indicate that they measure enhancements to their reputation by the demands for future research initiatives. This demand is sometimes reflected in the interest of potential donors, and potential research partners, and sometimes in terms of attracting young researchers and civil society organizations to engage. In a few cases it is reflected in an ability to convene high-level government actors. Here again, politics plays a major role and some interviewees note the need to delicately balance engagements to ensure that the desire to enhance reputations through close partnerships with users does not lead to co-optation and compromising independence.

RPO interview findings indicate that 20 of the grantees are seen by them to be able to maintain a higher level of independence due to TTI support, whereas for 14 this is not the case. Most of the latter are seen as being able to maintain independence due to past history and internal commitments to independence. Five are explicitly described as being able to maintain a greater independence from donor priorities.

SC findings corroborate these findings and figure 31 indicates the variety of areas where TTI has contributed to independence. As elsewhere, the Evaluation Team judges the confidence level of findings regarding the different categories of influence to be high, but cannot confirm if the proportion of these categories of influence is fully representative.

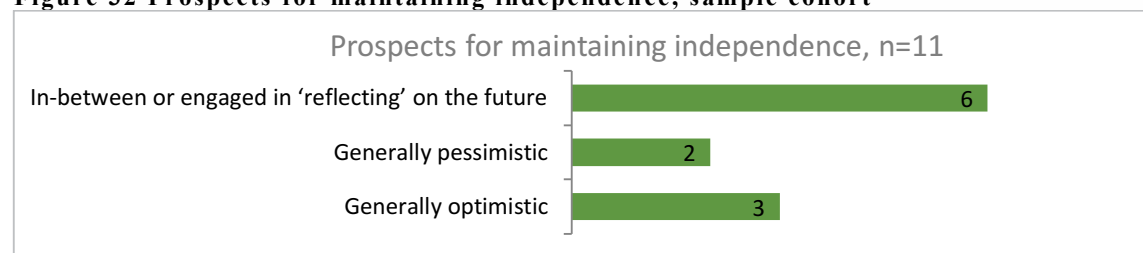
Figure 31 TTI influence on independence, sample cohort



Source: SC interviews 2016-2017

SC judgements in relation to their prospects for maintaining independence after the end of TTI support can be characterized as generally mixed and uncertain:

Figure 32 Prospects for maintaining independence, sample cohort



Source: SC interviews 2016-2017

When asked about whether improvements in reputations are leading to greater or more diversified financial support, anecdotal responses are mixed but generally positive, with frequent mentions of new projects and partners. Some refer to leveraging reputational gains for financial sustainability in the future tense, i.e., as representing a potential (rather than actual) trajectory. TTI contributions to this are seen to largely be 'indirect', as one contribution to a larger process that is dominated by internal efforts.

PATHS TO POLICY INFLUENCE

Baseline Thirteen: Positioning for policy influence	Due to their in-depth knowledge of how to manoeuvre amid politically sensitivities, and drawing on their credibility and foundational strengths, grantees have found ways to achieve their aims despite limits to freedom of expression and varying levels of demand for evidence in policy formation.
Measurement (from First Interim Report)	The Evaluation Team will look for opportunities to use SC case studies of the policy influence of research programs to explore how grantees manage the constraints and opportunities for policy influence amid limits to freedom of expression and varying levels of demand for evidence. Where evidence exists, the Evaluation will assess the ways that TTI support may have influenced grantee capacities to manage within these limits. It is recognized that publishing such analyses

	could be sensitive for the grantees, so caution will be exercised and a categorization, although perhaps feasible, is best avoided. Learning about the ways that grantees manage to influence policy and promote a more open and evidence-based policy discourse amid limits to freedom of expression will be particularly important.
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Outside observers interviewed highlight the following factors as being success factors behind grantees' abilities to influence policy:

- Finding ways to balance a critical, independent stance with strong direct engagement with government
- Solid technical competence leading to strong arguments (sometimes framed as being better than 'the competition')
- Clear and respected governance that signals independence and commitment to research quality
- Targeted research that enables both influence and assures quality (budget analysis sometimes mentioned)
- Developing capacities (though PhD training) for broader future engagements when these young researchers continue their careers and join other institutions engaged in policy influence
- Humility leading to more reflective stances (i.e., acknowledging research limits)
- Strong communications capacities

These observers also note the following challenges to effective policy influence:

- Uncertainty among key stakeholders about the role of the grantee (and in some cases, think tanks in general) in relation to the broader array of actors aiming to influence policies
- Lack of interest in evidence within the government, sometimes due to political polarisation and paralysis; with a caveat that one interviewee stated that due to being positioned 'out of the loop' of the mainstream political discourse, "think tanks have a space and opportunity to make policy proposals that are technically sound and audacious; there is a need for new ideas..."
- Short-term funding (and with that short-term staff), that leads to lack of perceived continuity, and a sense of ongoing financial 'crisis'
- Inability to engage with the private sector
- Pursuance of populist agendas
- Entry points for policy influence may dissolve suddenly when there are changes of government
- Lack of recognition among funders of the importance of building policy research capacities

Interviews did not yield clear and comparable data tracing changes over time. The points above are largely anecdotal, reflecting the contextual diversity of these processes. This, combined with the Evaluation Team's insufficient time (and contacts) when visiting the grantees

to meet a ‘representative’ sample of outside observers across the cohort, suggests that it will be important to triangulate these findings with the next PCS for the Final Evaluation Report.

Nonetheless, the overall trajectories are positive. For example, the challenges of engaging with politicized bureaucracies and uninterested politicians was a feature of the context facing all four South Asia SC grantees, and changes in the political environment had strong effects on policy interest. All experience tense and complicated policy environments. Yet in diverse ways, particularly in Sri Lanka and India, the sample grantees were seen to punch above their weight in different ways and have established their particular niches. In the case of IPS they were admired because many thought they were a government institution, but yet were able to be strongly critical on the basis of sound technical analysis. Technical soundness was also a feature of Social Policy and Development Centre’s (SPDCs) work. In the case of the Centre for Policy Research (CPR) it was recognized that they had some of the best minds in the country, and a public presence and the diversity of views from within the organization made it difficult to pigeon-hole an organizational position. CBGA, on the other hand, with a singular focus on budgets and the social agenda combined rigorous analysis with a very subtle approach working through a more diffuse constituency. Yet to those in the know it has come to be seen as ‘one of the best kept secrets’.

Examples of policy influence cited by the grantees emphasize how their progress in influence has much to do with external political constraints and opportunities. The case studies below outline the varied paths that the grantees concerned are following towards policy influence. Overall trends that can be noted include the following characteristics of how grantees are positioning themselves in the policy discourse:

- Creative exploration of new areas of research beyond past ‘comfort zones’ to be positioned for the policy debates of the future: *Exemplified by CPR’s delving into Big Data; CSEA offering support to policymakers based on its ability to produce sound data; CRES in relation to opportunities to demonstrate their ‘large-scale project’ skills (case study 5 above).*
- Addressing issues that are of more direct interest to the private sector: *Exemplified by Ethiopian Development Research Institute’s (EDRI) research on industrial parks and IPAR’s coffee research*
- More direct and close partnership with local government and/or civil society in order to reposition policy research in the changing institutional landscape that is emerging with decentralization: *Exemplified by CBGA’s research on education and SPDC’s research on regional inequalities*
- The integration of highly diverse communications efforts: *Exemplified in different ways by all cases*

Case Study Ten: Positioning to engage with ‘Big Data’

Big data are essentially large data sets that may be analysed computationally to reveal patterns, trends

and associations, especially relating to human behaviour and interactions. There is no specific interest in Indian policy-making to which CPR's initiative in developing 'big data' capacity responds. Rather it speaks to CPR's positioning in wishing to contribute to the public debate and bringing a level of analysis into that debate that has not been present before. It also reflects CPR's strategic positioning in developing a skill-set and competence that is not present elsewhere in India's intellectual community.

Significantly, CPR has chosen to apply the big data analysis in the area of electoral politics. CPR used TTI funding to recruit a senior researcher in 2015 to kick-start the process. His work has focused on recent state level elections in India, combining analysis of data at polling-booth level, available from the Election Commission of India, and ethnographic field work with colleagues from CPR. While commentary on elections in a polarized context carries risks, writing based on data-driven analysis offers an opportunity to provide in-depth and informed comment, an approach on which CPR has established its reputation. Related research has been undertaken on the social connections between citizens in India and their local power-brokers and leaders, as well as how these local brokers and leaders, both rural and urban, make decisions.

Case Study Eleven: Lessons from EDRI's research on industrial parks and paths to policy influence

The environment for Ethiopian policy formation encourages an advisory role in relation to government and a nudging approach in relation to the private sector. Demand for EDRI's current research on industrial park development originated with the Prime Minister's office. At the same time, given that the industrial parks are entirely occupied by foreign firms, there is a demand from domestic firms for research, as they want to test the benefits of the parks in comparison to operating outside of the parks. EDRI has combined public discussions with private sector actors (organized in collaboration with the Addis Ababa Chamber of Commerce) with more low key advice to senior government officials. Through its research more generally, EDRI has learned that policy makers in Ethiopia prefer small group engagements. Large workshops are organized as well, but smaller, intimate discussions are seen as most effective for policy influence as discussions can be open and frank. Policy makers also like having a dialogue on a regular basis, rather than through any single, high profile event. This naturally has implications for the monitoring of the research process as findings may be confidential, particularly when authorities want an off-the-record discussion around emerging outcomes of new policies.

Case Study Twelve: Policy influence at a range of levels in IPAR's coffee research

Research on coffee is an example of how IPAR is positioning itself for influencing future policies. Two conferences have been organized. In the first conference the stakeholders requested help to assess the costs of production at household level so as to gain a better understanding of the factors affecting profitability. The private sector showed significant interest. IPAR worked with the National Agricultural Export Board (NAEB) on the analysis. As a result of the findings on actual production costs, the farm gate price will probably be increased (under negotiation at the time of this report), which is a change that can be attributed to the early findings of the research and the political willingness to rely on evidence. IPAR is actively trying to involve NAEB and different parts of government in dissemination, including through contacts with the leadership of NAEB and the Minister of Agriculture. IPAR is now being invited to coffee sector stakeholder meetings. IPAR intends to follow this process to judge whether the

information is reaching appropriate people to generate change, the private sector being recognized as the most important set of actors.

Case Study Thirteen: Implementing the New Education Policy in India

The Indian government's recent New Education Policy (NEP) has endorsed a target that education spending be increased, but a consistent decline in the national government's share in national budgetary spending on education has shifted the responsibility for funding education progressively towards the states. In 2015-16, fundamental policy measures changed the fiscal architecture of India. These included increased devolution of central taxes to the states and a reduction in the central government's Plan grants for the states. These changes will have a direct impact on the role of the states in ensuring public provisioning for education.

With funding from CRY¹⁴ (an Indian NGO), CBGA initiated a study in 2015 to investigate how states have designed their school education budgets. The study found that expenditure not only fell short of the recommended level, but that there was a shortage of funds for almost all areas of public provision for school education. These included teacher salaries, training for teachers, monitoring of schools, interventions for children from marginalized communities all the way to strengthening community engagement with schools. This was the first study of this nature at such a detailed level. The first draft of the findings was presented internally for discussion. Then the CBGA Team had a roundtable meeting to which they invited key academics, education financing specialists and budget group partners. A joint presentation was then made at the national level.

CBGA sees the need to shift engagements more to the state level. At the state level there are few reports on budget analysis and less discussion than with government at the central level. But at the state and district levels there is a wider audience and quite a bit of interest in this kind of information, mostly from small scale CSOs and block and district level functionaries.

The TTI funds for organizational development and funding the research team time allowed space for the thinking for this study and for dissemination, such as the release of the reports at the state level. The support also helped build the development of an alliance for CBGA with CRY. It is clear that the core funds contributed enormously to the study, but there is also strategic value in having an alliance with a national NGO.

CBGA intends to provide the data and analysis for vocal advocacy but want civil society to insert, as they call it, 'the adjectives' around the evidence. CBGA can provide the hard evidence but must not be too opinionated on budget levels. They can point out the inconsistencies, but see that in order to be able to supply data they have to survive and must be careful not to advocate but simply provide the data and analysis.

Case Study Fourteen: Assessing regional inequality in Pakistan

In 2014 the Planning Commission of the Pakistan Government published a report entitled Vision 2025

¹⁴ <http://www.cry.org/history/>

where it identified a set of development targets that it wished to achieve by the year 2025. This planning document was widely promoted, but it was a vision with no implementation plan. Potential links were recognized, however, with the need to follow up on the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as there are efforts to build an implementation plan around the SDGs.

In parallel, the government has gradually become more decentralized and the responsibility for social development has shifted to the provinces, which has led to competition for resources between the provinces and federal government. Assuming the responsibility for social development and the promoting of the SDGs by federal government has also led the provincial governments to become more interested in them and they have also signed MOUs with the UN. Each year SPDC has researched, developed and published its flagship Annual Review of Social Development (ARSD) on a key relevant thematic area. The last report titled ‘The State of Social Development in Urban Pakistan’ was published in 2016. The intention has been to focus the next (2017) report on regional inequalities using data collected by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics and other sources. SPDC started that work but in parallel they were also working on the SDGs. In part that came from work that had been commissioned by Southern Voice. Recognising the shift in the policy environment and the rising interest in government circles, both federal and provincial, it was decided to re-orientate the ARSD 2017 to present a regional inequality perspective on the SDGs.

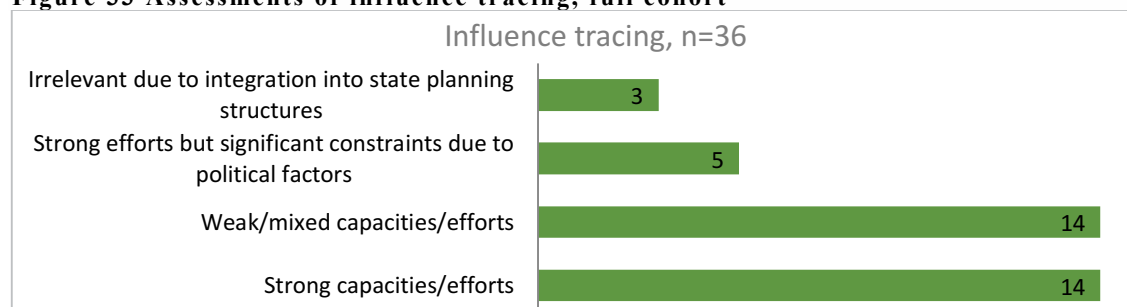
For this ARSD, in contrast with the past, there will be a focus on developing communication activities and more systematic engagement with stakeholders, meeting with Planning and Development partners in Government, and having roundtable meetings for each sector. Now SPDC has a communications person appointed, who will be involved in discussions and will develop a communication plan.

Contribution from TTI funding to this process is both direct funding of staff salaries, as well as indirect through support for some of the initial thinking around SDGs as an issue in Pakistan. However, the decision to reorient the ARSD to link regional inequalities with the SDGs is largely an internal decision that responds to a particular policy moment.

TRACING POLICY INFLUENCE

RPO interviews indicate that a significant proportion of grantees are developing capacities to trace policy influence.

Figure 33 Assessments of influence tracing, full cohort



Source: RPO interviews 2016-2017

STORIES OF INFLUENCE

TTI has on its website published 52 Stories of Influence (SoIs) which are seen to contribute to its aim ‘to capture and share program learning and to produce evidence about what think tanks need to succeed’¹⁵. One or more of these SoIs have been produced for each grantee, and cover Phase One and Two of the funding. These are essentially SoI briefs, 600 – 650 words in length and follow a common structure. This has three elements: setting the scene or defining the policy problem, what the grantee did, and what the outcome was. The policy issues are diverse as are the contexts within which they arise. Grantee actions and interventions range from organizing meetings and forums, undertaking relevant research, framing the debate and making policy recommendations, sitting on government committees to monitoring government delivery or program development. Most stop at the policy statement level and do not follow through to policy implementation. Given their brief format, and the fact these are self-reported stories encouraged by TTI, depth of analysis is inevitably limited.

It is also apparent from SC interviews that many grantees have reservations about the robustness of this as an approach to assessing influence, not least given the attribution issues that cannot be explored in this limited format. Some also have doubts about positioning themselves in such an instrumental way towards policy change. Moreover, a focus on a single story or policy issue underplays the ways in which reputational effects grown out of past institutional histories, actions and engagements carry weight and affect how think tanks are listened to or not.

The Evaluation Team recognizes that the SoIs have primarily been developed for donors and outside observers who may be more receptive to a less analytical ‘story’, but it is noted that some grantees have expressed discomfort about how this may distort the reality of how they engage in policy processes.

Two questions can be asked of these SoIs. First do they offer more than simply ‘an influence story’ and tell us something about what makes effective policy influence? Second do they help in providing learning and an appropriate tool for the grantees to use to increase their influence? The simple answer to both questions is that while it is possible (but not evident from the accounts) that the process of producing these stories might have had learning effects for the specific grantee in question, wider learning benefits cannot easily be extracted from this format. In order to draw such conclusions, it would be necessary to know who has actually read one or more of these stories.

The Evaluation Team judges that there is scope to offer a modest analytical narrative to go with these SoIs to help readers think beyond the specific stories and contribute to TTI’s objectives in relation to program learning. It is clear, for example, in reading through the stories

¹⁵ <http://www.thinktankinitiative.org/results> accessed 15/06/17

that the policy issues can be grouped in terms of the degree of resistance or barriers that exist between the grantee and their policy audience. In some cases there is apparently an open door when grantees are contracted directly by the policy audience to deliver advice on specific issues, contribute to policy development or even monitor policy delivery. The reasons for the open door are variable and not just due to reputation; policy audiences must be in need of advice and recognize where they can get it from. Sometimes there may be a door that is half open and possibly resistant to being opened further. In others, there is no door at all to push at and the policy environment is deeply hostile.

The Evaluation Team judges that there may be scope for using the SoIs to support grantees to reflect on how to respond to these different scales of receptivity to policy advice and the variable factors that influence receptivity to such advice. The issue would be to focus in commenting on the similarities and contrasts between the SoIs and how the grantees went about their business, rather than the specific policy influence effects, which are inevitably more context specific.

A second aspect that could be used is to more explicitly distinguish between those that seek a more instrumental use of research findings and those that have a more conceptual approach and seek to shape the overall debate¹⁶. The latter seek to influence how problems and potential solutions are thought about by policy makers, while the former seeks effects in terms of specific policy results. Many of the stories focus on the instrumental use of research findings and thereby face the challenges of attribution. In these cases, more of a contribution analysis approach might have been useful to assess what the grantee contributed to overall policy change (while acknowledging obvious limits due to brevity).

In a significant number of the SoIs there are strong elements of seeking to set the policy agenda and a focus more on the conceptual use or even getting the issue on the agenda in the first place. The Evaluation Team's SC interviews highlight how this strategic thinking is central to many grantees' institutional practices. This could suggest a point of departure for reflecting on a potential focus for SoIs in the future, e.g., to analyse the SoIs to examine how and to what degree they followed the six steps that Sarah Lucas raised in her recent blog¹⁷ about appreciating conceptual impacts. These can be framed as follows:

- How was the opportunity identified, when and what steps were taken to seize the opportunity?
- What was the understanding of the policy landscape and how did the TT seek to position

¹⁶ This distinction is central to the paper by Langer, L., J. Tripney and D Gough (2016) *The Science of Using Science: Researching the Use of Research Evidence in Decision-Making*. London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, UCL Institute of Education, University College London. P:11.

¹⁷, <http://www.hewlett.org/6-ways-think-tanks-can-overcome-angst-about-impact/>, accessed June 9th 2017. Sarah Lucas draws on the Langer et al (2016) paper and also Dfid, 2014 *What is the evidence on the impact of research on international development?* London, Department for International Development.

itself?

- How was the overall research agenda developed, balancing the more immediate established policy concerns with prospective ahead-of-the-agenda issues?¹⁸
- What partnerships or relationship were established and why?
- How was the work presented or branded in order to promote interest?
- What was learnt from the process, what worked and what did not and what changes were made along the way?

Key findings from second Interim data collection phase on policy influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No major changes from First Interim Report• General sense of recognition that this is the ‘calm before the storm’ and that ability to maintain independence and credibility vis-à-vis funders remains stable at present, but that there are risks on the horizon.• Grantees have found diverse and creative pathways to influence, with the common denominator being their ‘positioning’ in their respective national (and occasionally international) policy discourses.• Sols may constitute a potential source for learning about policy influence, but currently it is difficult to discern evidence of this occurring.
Related lessons and suggested course corrections	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Evaluation Team judges that TTI’s insights on think tank sustainability should take an explicit stance with regards to the importance of sustainably positioning for independence. This would need to acknowledge that the dimensions of independence must be identified and developed by the think tanks themselves, while highlighting that whatever dimensions are given priority, the ability to maintain independence is at the core of a think tank’s role and its sustainable policy influence.• TTI should give more attention to these positioning aspects in its insights on sustainability, with clearer acknowledgment that think tanks operate in a contested and politicized sphere, and that striving towards sustainability is not a ‘technocratic’ design issue or linear set of steps to be implemented.• Policy influence processes usually operate on long-range trajectories. The Evaluation Team notes that individual ‘success stories’ and obstacles are best understood by examining these within the contextual factors and underlying think tank capacities that have made successes possible or generated obstacles that block or reduce influence.• If lessons about what constitutes effective policy influence are to be derived from Sols (and it is recognized that this may not be an intention of these brief stories), adjustments would be needed to encourage a more analytical narrative.

3.7 BUILDING AND SUSTAINING COMMUNICATION CAPACITIES

¹⁸ This is what the UK government calls its **foresight projects** where it is seen that research evidence is likely to make a contribution, the topic is important for policy-making now or is likely to be in the future, one or more government department(s) will champion the project, the topic is relevant to the UK, there is a significant future element to the issue, either because it relates to long term trends like climate change or ageing, or because there is uncertainty to how an issue will develop in the future; <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/foresight-projects>

Policy influence is related to the ability to communicate either directly with policy makers, or to inform actors from the media, civil society, the private sector or the general public who in turn are expected, in a democratic society, to influence policy makers.

The case studies in this report illustrate how different grantees have pursued communications strategies and efforts that range from direct and informal advice to political leaders at one end of the spectrum, to longer-range efforts to stimulate an informed and evidence-based public debate, through engagement with the media and/or civil society. There are also examples of how research into factors influencing commercial markets can inform private sector investors or even help them to apply pressure on policy-makers.

Compared to the First Interim Report, evidence is growing of how grantees are strengthening their communications strategies as illustrated in figure 34. The Evaluation Team's concerns in the First Interim Report about weak commitments to communications have been partially mitigated. However, despite a generally positive trajectory on grantees' confidence about the future, there are some danger signs regarding the sustainability of these trends.

Figure 34 Scope and nature of grantee communication strategies, sample cohort

TTs overall communication capacities	Non-existent/ rudimentary				Active/ output focused				Active/ policy outcome oriented			
Baseline findings*	1	0	2	2	2	2	1	2	1			0
2nd interim report findings**	0	1	0	0	2	1	2	5	0			2

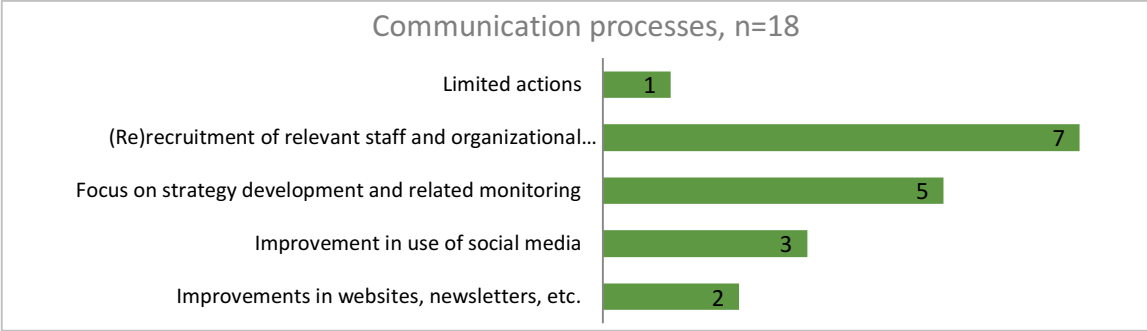
Data source: *SC interviews 2015-2016, ** SC interviews 2016-2017

Baseline Four-teen: Status of communication strategies	The baseline status of the SC grantees regarding communications is that of a range of progress in developing and using communications strategies. TTI support to date has been primarily used for employing staff, revamping websites and purchasing equipment, as well as through increased attention to communications stemming from learning in networks and 'nudging' by RPOs. For many (probably most, although quantifiable data is lacking), prior to Phase One there was a severe deficit of commitment to communications. Currently there are signs of stronger efforts to enhance communications, but the Evaluation Team judges that the depth of these commitments may in some cases be weak, which implies the need to assess plausible continued trajectories in the future.
Measurement (from First Interim Report)	The Evaluation will trace from this baseline in the following ways. First, the <i>extent and nature of implementation</i> of communication strategies will be monitored and analysed through SC interviews. Second, as TTI support draws to an end, the <i>plans for continued employment of communications staff will be assessed</i> through interviews in the SC and among RPOs. It is expected that these plans may be a proxy indicator of ownership, i.e., the extent to which strengthened communications has become a sufficiently integrated part of the 'DNA' of the grantees to warrant investment during a period when core resources are shrinking. Third, where possible (and it is acknowledged that the current baseline data is weak in this regard) the Evaluation will also assess changes during the course of Phase Two in <i>relations with the mass media</i> .

RPO interview findings indicate that 27 of the FC grantees are seen as having strong, proactive communications efforts and nine as having weak strategies and/or commitments to communications. In a couple of cases it is noted that public communications efforts are not given priority due to a desire to use more informal dialogue and related means for exerting policy influence.

SC findings show the following categories of processes underway:

Figure 35 Communication processes, sample cohort



Source: SC interviews, 2016-2017

The SC grantees generally report either stability or modest progress in their relations with mass media. Issues raised primarily related to how political situations may have affected engagement with the media. In some cases these effects include researcher fears that media distortion of research findings may be a threat to perceived impartiality. Case study fifteen describes how Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) Ghana has taken a structured and proactive approach to engaging with the mass media for policy influence.

Case Study Fifteen: Leveraging media engagement for electoral reform

IEA Ghana is involved with the Election Commission (EC) and in particular the Electoral Reform Committee (ERC) which were created in January 2015. IEA has been the lead organizer of the Presidential debates, which has provided it with a position to put forward reform proposals for the electoral process, including how to enhance a smooth transition from one government to the other.

IEA first conducted extensive research on all aspects of Ghana's electoral processes, which provided input for retreats attended by the political parties as well as other key stakeholders. The political parties agreed to a set of proposals that were submitted to the EC in November 2013. IEA sequenced its communications efforts, built partnerships with key media houses and serialized the proposals for electoral reform in their outlets. This took place on a weekly basis in order to keep issues of electoral reform in the public discourse and continue pressure on the EC to commence the process of implementing the reforms on time.

Despite these generally positive findings, the interviews show a degree of frustration at the limited capacity to analyse the influence of communications beyond the output level.

SC grantees are generally quite optimistic about the future sustainability of their communications efforts. The Evaluation Team notes some warning signs, however. A significant level of volatility in staffing can be noted, with four African SC grantees mentioning staff having left

during the first part of TTI Phase Two. The reasons for this are unclear, but it can be noted that with the end of TTI support looming there is uncertainty with some about whether these positions will be filled. Also, there is a high degree of dependence on TTI funding to cover communications staff more generally, which suggests cause for concern.

Key findings from second Interim data collection phase on communication capacities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is some volatility in staffing (reasons unclear). • There is strong evidence of learning underway. • There is general confidence among grantees that gains will be maintained (but some warning signs).
Related lessons and suggested course corrections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depending on the varying receptivity and pre-existing capacities (and related needs) of grantees, past TTI support had either strong or limited impact on communication capacities. Therefore it is recommended that TTI retain a readiness to respond to specific requests for support, but not give high priority to additional activities. • It is recommended that the regional program officers give priority to querying grantees with regard to their commitments to ensuring that communications departments remain staffed. • As part of the recommendation above concerning recognition of actual costs, special note should be given to encouraging funders to cover the costs of having communications units in place, i.e., not just budget lines for printing costs and other outputs, but also the organizational structures to ensure that these efforts are integrated from the start of any research initiative.

3.8 BASELINES AND PROGRESS ON PROGRAM-LEVEL LEARNING AND LESSON-SHARING

In the First Interim Evaluation Report it was judged to be too early to begin to address Question Three of the evaluation, *What lessons can be drawn from the TTI experience regarding effective support to think tanks?* Now, at this midway point, it is timely to review TTI's activities underway and planned to share this learning, preliminary findings that will be addressed in more detail in the final evaluation report. Initial progress on the performance in TTI's learning objectives is described: both ongoing, internal learning and adjustments in the Program; and the high-level learning from the Program targeted in its formal Objective 3: "To facilitate and share learning about strategies for defining, building, and managing successful, sustainable think tanks with a wide range of policy research organizations and interested stakeholders."

While the Evaluation work has shown that the internal and external learning efforts in TTI are necessarily intertwined in practice, they are assessed separately below to reflect their distinctive objectives.

ONGOING, MAINLY INTERNAL LEARNING AND ADJUSTMENT

The TTI Staff and Executive Committee have, since the start of Phase Two, scanned regularly for potential lessons and improvements, drawing on monitoring information and relatively close interaction with grantees. As planned, the First Interim Report of the Evaluation provided the first major structured opportunity for discussion and learning lessons from experience up to that point, indicating possible improvements and course-corrections for the remaining years of Phase Two. The TTI Staff and Executive Committee engaged extensively around the outline, draft and final versions of the First Interim Report and the process met its learning objectives. The Program Staff has documented that virtually all the conclusions and recommendations resonated with TTI's own concerns and/or helped point to directions for decisions on adaptive management that are now being pursued. Some key changes underway are noted in the next section. Through interactions by grantees with the Evaluation Team and program staff, the first report has also contributed to their understanding and effective use of the Program. The TTI blog on the external evaluation report was the most-viewed post since January 2016 (192 page-views) showing interest among wider audiences.

WIDER SHARING OF TTI LEARNING THROUGH COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT

The TTI Strategy for Program Communications and Engagement (C&E), revised in January 2016, provides the basic framework for assessing progress toward the Objective of Higher Level Learning. It is clear that high level learning will culminate in and after 2019, taking account of the full TTI experience. The Final Report of the Evaluation will feed into this objective.

Objectives and approach: The Strategy set out as its first priority to demonstrate how think tanks make a difference through their work and as a secondary, although important, priority to show how TTI makes a difference to think tanks. A focused approach was proposed, working to link these priorities with the program's support for capacity development and with emerging emphases such as collaboration and sustainability, and to broad themes such as climate change. Progress to date on the three planned sub-objectives is summarized below:

TTI objectives	Actions taken
Showcase Think Tanks' policy contributions and related efforts;	A TTI blog series, launched in early 2016, has been a major effort in this area in Phase Two, with 30 posts to date, together with thematic booklets on how policy research institutions are making a difference in public health and in environment and climate change, with a third planned on their work to improve gender outcomes. In terms of how TTI has influenced the grantees, an important vehicle has been the blog on the Interim Evaluation results. A planned set of case studies on business and funding models for policy research institutions will draw on TTI-supported activities underway in Africa and Latin America. TTI also plans a series of communications outputs identifying trends and lessons from its monitoring over ten years on how its support has contributed to institutional strengthening and positioning for sustainability, referring to case studies of grantees' policy successes.

Foster an enabling environment: Convene and support spaces that help to promote an enabling environment for think tanks' work; and	This sub-objective is served most directly by TTI hosting and participating in knowledge-sharing dialogues and events (e.g., Think Tank Exchanges, global and regional Evidence to Policy Dialogues). Especially now, an active presence on a range of digital media platforms (e.g., the TTI website, Twitter) also serves this purpose. It is also supported by work under the other two sub-objectives and by TTI's capacity development activities, especially in support of regional networks and experience-sharing.
Engage strategically: Build strategic relationships and partnerships with relevant stakeholders to facilitate and share strategies for defining, building, and managing successful, sustainable think tanks.	TTI has worked to expand the reach of its efforts by engaging with strategic individuals and organizations whose mandates align with those of the program (e.g., On Think Tanks, Politics and Ideas, donors that fund policy research institutions). There is evidence of significant activity on these fronts most recently highlighted in the Evidence to Policy Dialogue in London.

Audiences: Below are brief assessments of the progress to date in reaching the three key target audiences identified for tailored TTI messaging in Phase Two. Review of the information on TTI publications and website and social media analytics confirms that there are no precise ways to measure which audiences are being reached and to what extent. However, the analytics show moderate but significant and growing numbers accessing and continuing to use TTI sources. The Evidence to Policy Dialogue in April 2017 suggested a need to identify more pro-actively segments of these broad potential audiences that may not yet have been reached but appear especially important as recipients of key TTI messages. A user survey for the TTI website that had been anticipated in the Strategy could possibly be extended (at least on a sample basis) to test and improve the reach of TTI communications to priority audiences.

Targeted audiences	Assessments of steps and progress
The southern think tank community, composed of both grantees and non-grantees;	Through grantee institutions' continuing direct engagement in TTI-supported activities, two-way information flows and interactions with the program staff, most are well reached. Most non-grantees appear to be reached more indirectly, through access to TTI's direct communications and its spillovers into other networks. To the extent that TTI has become a central reference point for the work of policy research organizations in developing countries, it can be assumed that alert organizations may follow major developments. <i>TTI experience has shown that the 'think tank community' is fragmented in many ways and the Evaluation Team notes that TTI's final lessons may need to be tailored and targeted to be relevant and useful to those who identify themselves as, for example, research institutes within a given sector rather than 'think tanks' per se.</i>
Like-minded organizations and stakeholders, including the global think tank community, communities	As with the southern think-tank community, TTI now has a relatively well-established reputation, platform, and channels to reach like-minded organizations and stakeholders, including the global think tank community and communities of practice.

of practice, and policy influencers who help to shape the development agenda	<i>The ‘policy influencers’ – policy makers and opinion leaders who will determine the future demand for policy research- are difficult to identify and reach, but critically important audiences for TTI’s messages. The periodic Policy Community Surveys have played some part in defining these audiences, but engaging policy communities may justify much greater effort in the remainder of Phase Two in order to realize TTI’s potential impact.</i>
The funding community, which comprises TTI’s Executive Committee of donors, bilateral and multi-lateral donors, philanthropic organizations, and both southern- and northern-led research funding councils.	<p>TTI is well-established as a central knowledge resource for funders with an established interest in supporting policy research in developing countries. A significant advance toward systematically identifying other potential funders– even in the face of inescapable data gaps – was the scan of ‘Think Tank Funding in Developing Countries: Status and Outlook’ carried out by Jenny Lah and presented at the April 2017 Dialogue.</p> <p><i>Following up this useful mapping with targeted communications and engagement should be a key priority for the remainder of Phase Two. Attention may need to be given to pivotal factors to identify areas where TTI can contribute to internal reflection among these actors, for example, how to encourage funders to promote (or at least, not obstruct) synergies between funding think tanks and universities, and ensure that the capacity development needs of think tanks are not overlooked. This could include a consultative process intended to lead to a set of principles for think tank funders in promoting sustainability , to be jointly launched by the grantees and donors at the end of the Program.</i></p>

Messages: Below is a broad assessment of the record to date in conveying TTI’s main messages set for Phase Two, which echoed the Initiative’s Theory of Change:

Main TTI Messages	Assessments of steps and progress
1. High-quality, well-communicated local knowledge, evidence, data, and analysis are fundamental to the development of sound policy.	<p>This message, closely linked to the first part of message 3 below, can be supported by the work underway in documenting credible examples of effective contributions by policy research institutions. The related attestation of policy-makers and evidence of policy impacts will be the most powerful validation of this message.</p> <p><i>A reinforced final round of the TTI Policy Community Survey can contribute, but further effort to secure this testimony from an appropriate range of stakeholders in the ‘policy community’, —government, civil society, private sector and the media, as well as from different sectors— would be a vital contribution.</i></p>
2. Think tanks are more effective when they have strong, sustainable business models and flexible, predictable funding.	<p>A major emphasis is now placed in Phase Two on supporting strong, sustainable business models and the results of this work will be among the main lessons from the TTI experience. Similarly, the benefits of flexible, predictable funding are being documented and the future possibilities for support that delivers similar advantages are also being explored.</p> <p><i>A notable challenge in communicating this message is to highlight the range of business models and options for flexible, predictable funding that can be used by think tanks of varying sizes, maturity and missions.</i></p>

3. Strong, credible, and transparent local think tanks can make important contributions to more informed policy debate and smart and effective policymaking; and collaboration among think tanks, guided by strong leadership, can enhance prospects for policy influence and promote sustainability of southern think tanks.	<p>With respect to think tanks' contributions, see the assessment under point 1 above which also applies here.</p> <p><i>Experiments in greater collaboration among think tanks have grown organically among grantees (and some others) with TTI encouragement and support, largely on a regional basis. These efforts, which are not without problems, are being followed and will inform final lessons to be drawn from the TTI experience.</i></p>
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Tactics and tools: The main sets of tactics or tools foreseen for the program's communications and engagement were web and social media, knowledge products, and events. In presenting them, the Strategy identified the audiences and objectives that each was particularly intended to serve. A Phase Two Engagement Strategy was subsequently developed to provide more specific guidance and monitoring.

The Table below follows the structure and key elements of the Communications and Engagement Strategy to review briefly the progress recorded to date and underway on each of the fifteen tactics or tools set out in the Strategy, while bearing in mind that they are of quite different orders of importance and difficulty.

WEB AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Tactic	Progress to date and underway
Website	Several website improvements have been made, others are underway or planned, and there is a projected user survey. The total number of visits to the TTI website has increased, more than doubling since monitoring began in March 2013. The total number of returning visitors has also nearly doubled. The analytics maintained cover the normal requirements to assess use of the website and TTI's individual tools. The data also show that significant numbers of visitors access grantees' websites from the TTI site.
Blogging	TTI and TTI-related posts on the external platforms targeted were numerous in 2015, drawing on the results of the TT Exchange and work on several major themes. Since January 2016 TTI's own blog has been quite active, with 30 posts to March 2017, tagged to these other platforms. A total of 2045 page-views have ranged from 2-8 minutes on the page. The summary of the First Interim Evaluation Report was the most viewed and several thematic series to date have focused on organizational capacity-building, think tanks and climate change, and gender. The coming survey of website users might serve to gauge further the relative interest between blogs on policy substance and think tank development.
Twitter	As of 8 March, TTI's Twitter account showed a total of 2,548 Tweets, and 394 Likes. A sense of trends is given by the rising numbers of Followers: from 681 in March 2015 to

	2003 in March 2017.
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KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS

Tactic	Progress to date and underway
Stories	These stories remain self-assessments by TTI grantees with support from TTI program staff. The list of stories from Phases One and Two now includes 55 stories, 49 from Phase One and in Phase Two one published and six in various stages of preparation. As a rule, the dates of publication and of the experiences covered by these stories need to be clarified, and in some cases there is potential to update on longer term impacts. In future stories TTI will encourage greater focus on effects of the program in contributing to policy influence.
Thematic Publications	Two short thematic publications have been produced on Environment and Climate Change and Public Health and a third is being prepared, focused around gender. Digital versions of these booklets include links to related Stories of Influence and videos.
Executive Summaries	This particular knowledge product will apparently not be pursued. It is replaced by an emphasis on using the blogs to disseminate key results from earlier publications. Examples are a five-part blog series in 2015 informed by the think tanks and universities publication, and a seven-part blog series stemming from the book “Action Research and Organizational Capacity Building: Journeys of change in southern think tanks” in early 2016.
Good Practice Guidelines/ Toolkits	Tools are being developed through the insights on sustainability exercise, drawing on TTI’s monitoring data and RPO knowledge on experience in strengthening capacity, the regional capacity development plans. In the final 2 years of Phase Two, other knowledge products will focus on sharing what TTI has learnt about strategies for supporting think tanks.
Infographics	TTI staff are currently working on insights on sustainability that will be developed over the coming 12-18 months in the lead up to the Think Tank Exchange.
Video	The YouTube library remains small, with four videos from the TTI Exchange in January 2015 and the remainder pre-dating that event.
TTI Brochure	This has been produced, and is available in three languages, in hard copy and online.
Press Releases & Speaking Points	Traditional media have been intentionally de-emphasized in Phase Two, in favour of the more targeted efforts directed at TTI’s priority audiences of stakeholders. More need and scope for this may open up as the Initiative moves toward its end. More generally, the Initiative may wish to draw on its experience to make its contribution to re-asserting the global case for evidence-based policy (TTI’s first basic message) which is being increasingly undermined in so many countries.

EVENTS

Tactic	Progress to date and underway
TTI Exchange	These are major and demanding events, intended to serve all target audiences and all Program objectives. As the last such opportunity planned, defining and achieving the objectives for the 2018 Exchange will be especially crucial for assimilating the results and legacy of the Initiative and its implications for future support of think tanks in developing

	and perhaps other countries.
Think Tank Funders' Forum	In 2017, the main focus is on organizing global and regional Evidence to Policy Dialogues, mainly directed to funders, and with an eye to the post- TTI situation.
Attendance at External Events	Understandably, TTI does not systematically track the participation of grantees in external events. TTI's own staff logs show a total of 14 external events and meetings of various types in 2015, 31 in 2016 and 3 so far projected in 2017, with a number of further engagements listed in each year. Current efforts are focused on engagement with donors that fund work relating to policy evidence in low- and middle-income countries and expanding beyond TTI's more traditional audiences.
Webinars	Since June 2016 TTI has begun to host quarterly webinars on different topics around the Business Models for Think Tank Sustainability in Africa such as Endowments (January 2017) and Private Sector Engagement (was planned for April 2017). In addition to this series of Business Model webinars in Africa, two of the ILAIPP led activities in Latin America are using webinars as a platform for peer learning, with modules on Sustainability (including innovative approaches to income generation) and a Quality Assurance module.

Data source: TTI Website and information provided by Program Staff as of April 2017

4. Conclusions and lessons on effective support to think tanks

4.1 CONCLUSIONS

OVERVIEW

The approaching end of TTI support is just one contributing factor amid a range of largely national contextual challenges facing grantees. Their strategies are generally framed around how to manage shifts (both positive and negative) around the demand and respect for evidence-based policy formation. They are also all operating in highly politicized environments, with both positive and negative implications for influence and ‘space’ for critical policy analysis. TTI has not isolated grantees from these factors, but it has given them increased opportunities and space to develop rigorous, credible and well-communicated independent research that responds to demands for evidence and navigates through political pressures.

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

During the period under review in this Second Interim Report the organizational situation for the large majority of grantees has been strikingly stable, despite what has been for some a period of financial uncertainty and the start of a reduction of TTI support. Minimal changes can be noted in staffing in numbers, levels, and gender balance. There are growing concerns among many (but far from all) grantees about future senior staff retention after TTI. This concern is not just TTI related, but also due to coinciding reductions in other core funding; some examples of reduced demand for policy evidence, more project-only, contract funding, and other factors (varying with individual country contexts).

With regard to capacity development efforts, in the past year grantees have joined vigorously in TTI-supported action research on business models and resource mobilization. Other support (e.g., for ILAIPP) has generated mixed levels of interest and engagement. It remains a fragile institution, and its capacity to develop rapidly into a member-owned vehicle for capacity development may have been over-estimated. This suggests lessons regarding the role of regional networks of diverse institutions that should be explored further in the Final Evaluation phase.

The role of core funding role in capacity development is now in a consolidation phase; in that capacity ‘retention’ is a more pressing concern than capacity ‘development’. This is one area where some grantees describe a ‘calm before the storm’ situation due to uncertainty about how to cover the costs of some key staff in the future. Among those grantees that rely heavily on TTI support for (especially) senior staff salaries, this concern is seen as part of the overall resource challenge.

Opportunity Funds have in a good number of cases provided clear, relevant support to capacity development, mostly through development of networks. In others, they have functioned as

an additional window for funding research projects or community development activities. Although these projects contribute to capacities through ‘learning by doing’ they have not proven so far to be always well-tailored to capacity development goals.

A significant number of grantees are currently/recently developing new strategic plans, and TTI is important for providing them space to think strategically. However, local factors and informal dialogue dominate strategic planning in most cases. Grantees are generally positive about the progress they are making with M&E, though it is still often focused on outputs and reporting to donors. Nonetheless, some grantees report growing use of M&E to inform their strategic planning.

Resource mobilization plans are in several cases being integrated into strategic planning. There are trends towards a stronger focus on funding diversification, especially accessing private sector support (the latter with limited success, apart from private sector affiliated foundations). Endowment funds are comparatively well established in South Asia, and are viewed as an interesting possibility in Africa, spurred by discussions in the resource mobilization action research. Realistic costing is increasingly recognized as important, but the think tanks’ power to influence the levels of overheads that can be charged is uncertain. The outcomes of discussions of new approaches, such as endowments, including whether they will result in more comprehensive business plans, should become clear in the Final phase of the Evaluation.

RESEARCH QUALITY

Improving reputations are leading to significant growth in demand for research from many grantees. However, challenges with costing and fears in relation to the stability of long-term funding are leading to hesitance among some in employing the new staff that will be required to respond to this demand while maintaining quality. There are indications of a growing reliance on engagement of temporary ‘research associates’ to address these gaps. The Evaluation Team judges this to be a pragmatic approach depending on the extent to which it is applied. But it is a potentially problematic response if it leads grantees to assume that they can maintain quality without a critical mass of core staff. There are many positive examples of more cooperation with international research institutions, with related enhancement of research quality. Negative trends in some countries are generally due to government tensions and weak demands for research from governments and donors.

The evidence in the second phase has not indicated any substantial change in research quality assurance procedures *per se*. Quality assurance is often still informal and more related to *process* (engagement with policy stakeholders and peers), rather than formal review of *outputs*; a finding which is confirmed and emphasized by outside observers. The Evaluation Team can conclude that the generally strong ‘organizational culture’ of critical discussion on research quality is being sustained and further embedded among almost all grantees.

There are a number of cases of collaborative research leading to capacity development opportunities, but this is not consistently supported within prevailing funding modalities among

most policy research funders. The grantees reluctantly accept the reality that most funders focus on products, which limits their interest in investing in capacities for quality research. But they also highlight that strong think tanks are able to influence this in some instances.

Grantees generally perceive modest but positive trends towards more and, in some cases, deeper gender focus, but their ambition levels vary widely. TTI's past contributions have mostly been through training and experience-sharing. Some note that other donors are playing a larger role than TTI in support to a gender focus in research.

POLICY INFLUENCE

With regard to maintaining the independence required to ensure credibility and influence policies, this is another area where some grantees describe a 'calm before the storm' situation with the approaching end of TTI support. Their ability to maintain independence and credibility vis-à-vis funders is stable but that there are risks on the horizon if they will, as some expect, be forced to 'chase consultancies'.

Overall, grantees have found diverse and creative pathways to influence, with the common denominator being their 'positioning' in their respective national (and occasionally international) policy discourses. There are positive examples of how some grantees are actively (though often informally) tracking their influence and 'communications footprint', and using that to critically reflect on their priorities and strategies.

With regard to communications, the findings highlight a clearly positive trajectory. There is strong evidence of learning underway in these areas and general confidence among grantees that gains will be maintained. The Evaluation Team notes some warning signs, however, related to heavy reliance on TTI support for communications units, uncertainty about whether increasingly project-oriented funders will fund these units within project budgets.

There is evidence suggesting that there are synergies emerging where communicating research results to different audiences in different forms both informs these audiences and generates demand for further research. For example, CRES and IPAR have both increased and diversified their outputs and partnerships and IEA has invited journalists to briefings on research topics in order to improve the quality of their reporting. In other words, communication units are experimenting with different approaches, which has increased visibility and created new broader ranges of audiences.

HIGHER LEVEL LEARNING AND LESSON-SHARING

The Report reviews TTI's own activities, underway and planned, to meet its essential learning and lesson-sharing objectives. It examines both ongoing, internal learning and adjustments in the Program, and the high-level learning and lesson-sharing from the Program that is ranked as its third overall Objective. The First Interim Report of the Evaluation, supplementing internal learning based on monitoring and interaction with grantees, proved to be a learning landmark - virtually all the conclusions and recommendations helped point to course corrections

that are now being pursued. The TTI Strategy for Program Communications and Engagement, revised in January 2016, provides the basic framework and evaluation baselines for assessing progress toward the objectives of wide lesson-sharing.

4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COURSE ADJUSTMENTS

It is natural that in the ‘last lap’ of a long-term program the focus of attention shifts from internal dynamics to that of how to anchor lessons from TTI in efforts that will be undertaken within other future relationships and partnerships. This is healthy. The following recommendations emphasize steps that should be considered to ensure that the TTI legacy contributes to the wider realm of policy research and reflection in the respective regions and sectors within which the grantees operate.

OVERALL CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

1. The Evaluation Team endorses TTI’s decision not to continue with an additional round of the Opportunity Fund. Other current capacity development modalities remain appropriate, despite some risks facing ILAIPP, thus no major changes are recommended during the remainder of Phase Two. The positive experience of the resource mobilization action research can be reinforced through follow-up tailored combinations of training and accompaniment, most notably in relation to capacities for writing research proposals among interested African grantees (as planned). There may also be other areas where such targeted and tailored training support may be requested, arising out of current initiatives (e.g., skills such as gender budgeting analysis, how to manage endowment funds, etc.) and funds that had been previously earmarked for the Opportunity Fund should be reallocated accordingly.
2. Discussions in the Research to Policy Forum in London raised the issue of greater future sectoral focus after TTI. The Evaluation Team suggests considering reallocating Opportunity Fund resources for exploring further options for sectoral networks and support (perhaps in association with Southern Voice or other existing regional/thematic CSO or research networks. Possible approaches could include (a) mapping themes and sectors where current grantees have strong skills; (b) using snowball approaches to identify think tanks beyond the TTI cohort; and (d) mapping potential funders with relevant sectoral interests.
3. The evidence may be too anecdotal to draw firm recommendations. But the experience of the Opportunity Fund can be interpreted to suggest priorities for investing in capacities to operate ‘above and below’ the conventional research foci. These would include tailored engagements in national/regional/international networks (focused specifically on areas where a time bound input can contribute to sustainable change) and research and data collection methods and perhaps training support focused on sub-national governance.

4. The Evaluation Team judges that lessons have largely been learnt and wherever possible capacities to maintain a critical mass are being put into place among the large majority of grantees. This suggests that there is not much that TTI should/could do in addition to the efforts already underway during the remainder of the program. However, the outcomes of TTI in terms of enhanced grantee abilities to continue to develop capacities in the future will only become apparent after TTI ends. There are both promising and worrying signals. Therefore, the Evaluation Team suggests in the future commissioning a 'light touch' ex post review of how grantees have continued on their capacity development paths approximately two years after the end of the TTI program.

RESOURCE MOBILIZATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

5. The centrality of the challenge of staff retention is becoming (sometimes painfully) apparent to many grantees as the end of TTI support nears. However, there is a risk that *retention* may seem rather technical (compared with *growth*), which could lead to insufficient attention to its importance for sustainable organizational development. In recognition of this, TTI may want to develop a specific output as part of its work on the "TTI insights on think tank sustainability" to draw explicit attention to the factors that promote or obstruct staff retention. This could be a tool to highlight the importance of *stable* financing as a precondition for think tanks to be able to thrive over time. Contracted short-term 'research associates' can provide much needed flexibility, but if these come to dominate grantee research to an extent that even a minimal number of permanent senior researchers cannot be maintained, this may undermine grantee credibility and capacity to ensure continuity and strategic direction.
6. There are some issues where TTI 'encouragement' to focus more on business models may need to be balanced by somewhat more attention to 'critical reflection' around realistic paths forward. Costing is central to think tank sustainability, but is an area where think tanks sometimes feel rather powerless. TTI could consider developing a communications product as part of its work on sustainability insights to inform prospective donors of the importance of recognising actual costs.
7. More successful approaches to engaging with the private sector have emerged in attracting support from affiliated foundations (South Asia), whereas there is generally a lack of clear direction for what broader approaches to partnering with the private sector may imply. Resource mobilization from the private sector is an area where tightly tailored regional capacity development efforts may be appropriate.
8. Discussions at the Research to Policy Forum in London in April 2017 showed that TTI is actively working to bring together lessons and forward-looking ideas for what might constitute sufficiently and optimally flexible funding modalities that can cover essential functions and maintain a critical mass. Such modalities could ensure that the benefits of current core funding in enhancing research quality to continue, even if core funding is no longer available in the future. The Evaluation Team suggests that TTI's

work on the “TTI insights on think tank sustainability” ensure that reference is made to concrete minimum standards for maintaining core functions (and thereby providing a basis for sustainability). This could be done by complementing the ‘good practice’ standards with some ‘red flag’ warnings of what may indicate major risks to sustainably maintaining a ‘critical mass’.

9. Several of the recommendations above reflect the importance of TTI’s work on “TTI insights on think tank sustainability”, but also highlight that the ability of think tanks to influence sustainability is of course constrained or enabled by how they relate to their funders. TTI should send a clear message that sustainability is not just a matter for think tanks themselves, but also of the donors which support them. In light of this, the Evaluation Team recommends that during the remainder of Phase Two that TTI undertakes a process of also developing a communications output on how funders should act to promote think tank sustainability, to be jointly launched by the grantees and donors at the end of the Program. If appropriately communicated, this could constitute an important legacy of TTI.

MAINTAINING MOMENTUM FOR POLICY INFLUENCE

10. The Evaluation Team judges that TTI’s work on insights on think tank sustainability would benefit from an explicit stance with regards to the importance of sustainably positioning for independence. This would need to acknowledge that the dimensions of independence would need to be identified and developed by the think tanks themselves, while highlighting that whatever dimensions are given priority, the ability to maintain independence is at the core of sustainable policy influence. If these positioning aspects were given more attention in the insights, it would constitute an important acknowledgement that think tanks operate in a contested and politicized sphere, and that striving towards sustainability is not a ‘technocratic’ design issue or linear set of steps to be implemented. Given the long-range trajectories of policy influence processes the Evaluation Team notes that individual ‘success stories’ and obstacles are best understood within a recognition of the ‘positioning’ that has made successes possible and has perhaps generated conflicts that block influence.
11. Given that RPOs play such an important role in the support to grantees, they should naturally continue their current roles in addressing red flag issues. It is recommended that the RPOs give priority to querying grantees with regard to their commitments to ensuring that communications departments remain staffed.
12. As part of the recommendation above concerning recognition of actual costs, special note should be given to encouraging funders to cover the costs of having communications units in place, i.e., not just budget lines for printing costs and other outputs, but also the organizational structures to ensure that these efforts are integrated from the start of any research initiative.

13. If lessons about what constitutes effective policy influence are to be derived from SoIs, adjustments are needed to encourage a more analytical narrative, including a focus on describing the conceptual and strategic ‘positioning’ of the grantees, rather than just the instrumental dimensions of policy influence. It is recognized, however, that the SoIs should remain modest in ambition and not be made so elaborate as to discourage grantee interest in drafting them.
14. In the area of higher level learning and lesson-sharing, this Report has mainly focused on documenting steps underway and planned in relation to the TTI Communications and Engagement Strategy. That Strategy was approved only in January 2016, taking into account input from the Evaluation Team. It would be premature to venture any overall assessments at this time, but a number of specific suggestions for course correction are integrated in the analysis.

4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS ON NEXT STEPS IN THE EVALUATION

The baselines established in the First Interim Report have proven to be appropriate and the Evaluation Team recommends that these remain at the core of the evaluation process in moving into the Final Evaluation Phase. The Evaluation Team judges that the overall plans for the Final Evaluation Phase remain valid. Some efficiencies could be pursued, e.g., looking for ways to arrange in-person interviews with RPOs. Some of the interview questions will be streamlined and refined to ensure greater clarity while also collecting comparable data.

The Final Evaluation Phase will differ from the past two Interim Phases in the following respects:

1. Analyses will cover the full sweep of change processes throughout Phase Two and where possible (drawing on the Phase One evaluation) for the full length of TTI. This will involve addressing some of the issues highlighted in the Phase One Evaluation.
2. This broader sweep will provide a basis for deeper analysis of the ‘why questions’ including defining categories of major factors that impinge (positively or negatively) on think tank development, and with this also go further in developing taxonomies that can guide an understanding of how different types of think tanks evolve, become stronger and respond to various types of risks.
1. Changes will be assessed with closer reference to the grantees’ specific tailored objectives identified at the start of Phase Two. Methods will be developed that build on TTI monitoring data and grantee reporting on progress against these objectives (e.g., interview questions will be adjusted for further emphasis, targeted analysis of TTI monitoring data, and an e-survey may be considered).
2. Closer engagement will be made with TTI to find ways to better triangulate findings with TTI monitoring data, including a meeting between the Team Leader and the TTI Team in September and perhaps a final follow-up meeting in January 2019.

3. Closer coordination will be made with the PCS process both to better triangulate findings between the Evaluation and the PCS and also to use the PCS informant lists to identify outside stakeholders in SC countries for interviews (thereby overcoming the difficulties with this encountered during the Second Interim Evaluation Phase.
4. Dialogue with the EC will be important throughout the Final Evaluation Phase to ensure that the team focuses its evaluative judgements on relevant issues for informing the TTI legacy and more generally to respond to learning needs. The team will further engage an editor to work with the final report to bring out the findings in a clear manner

A detailed work plan, including the revised interview guide, for the Final Evaluation Phase should be discussed with TTI Ottawa and the Executive Committee in the Spring of 2018. It is expected that the main fieldwork and skype interviews will be undertaken during the period of August-October 2018, followed by extensive consultations at the TTI Exchange in November. Further discussions and drafting will be undertaken between November and February, with a draft report presented in March 2019.

There are certain additional issues that are emerging as highly salient for drawing conclusions that can inform the TTI legacy and, within prevailing resource constraints, the Evaluation Team recommends exploring how they can be pursued. This may relate more to support for learning among (and beyond) the ‘TTI family’, rather than being driven by the Evaluation Team itself. These include the following (all of which would require further dialogue before being confirmed):

1. An important aspect of the post-TTI discussions regarding effective support to think tanks is likely to be how narrower groups of think tanks can collaborate and develop together. This may be in regional or sectoral networks. It may be in groups of think tanks facing similar opportunities or challenges. The Evaluation Team judges that although it is producing valuable knowledge that can inform these discussions, this is probably not enough to put forth concrete and generalizable recommendations. It is therefore suggested that the Evaluation Team work with TTI to identify entry points to advise about regional and sectoral initiatives. One example of this could be to use the planned Evaluation blogs to present the Team’s reflections on the dynamics in the four regions and/or in different grantees strategies for ‘positioning’, over the course of the final phase of the evaluation. These blogs could be undertaken within the existing agreed deliverables for the Evaluation, as would some opportunities to act as a ‘sound-ing board’. Further engagement in this area to undertake deeper empirical analyses and/or engage with grantees and other think tanks to develop these ideas further would be beyond what is feasible with existing resources.
2. The Evaluation Team recommends that these discussions be pursued beyond the ‘TTI family’ to ensure that the discussion brings in other experiences, e.g., from ACBF. If there are opportunities for the Evaluation Team to support this broader reflection and

thereby inform the Evaluation with additional perspectives from ‘non-stakeholders’, this should be pursued. The Evaluation Team could bring in relevant emerging literature in Final Evaluation Phase, but here again, deeper empirical analyses and/or engage with grantees and other think tanks to develop these ideas would be beyond what is feasible with existing resources.

3. Separate from the networking discussions, another area where TTI can contribute to greater legacy is to build on the Evaluation findings to reflect more broadly on resource mobilization. As noted above, one aspect of this could be to include principles for donors in supporting sustainability in think tanks in its broader work on insights regarding sustainability. Another may be to commission a study (for which the Evaluation Team may be able to play an advisory role) to look at power and agency in negotiations between ‘partners’, and thereby address risks that sustainability is assumed to be a goal that is amenable to ‘technocratic’ solutions. This advisory role would be within the scope of the existing work of the Evaluation Team, but deeper empirical analyses and/or engage with grantees and other think tanks to develop these ideas would be beyond what is feasible with existing resources.

Annex 1 – Interim Report

Overview of baselines as defined in the First In-

Baseline	Measures	Data sources
Organizational development		
1. Recruitment and retention Staffing has been significantly strengthened. Retention has (at least temporarily) been improved due to the creation of more stimulating intellectual environments, better working conditions and also access to resources to pay competitive salaries and top-ups.	<i>How grantees are now working out ways to retain qualified staff, particularly those currently financed with core funding, and how they are preparing to maintain human resource development trajectories when core support ends. May include new strategies to compensate for increasing difficulties in paying strongly competitive salaries, top-ups, etc., or if necessary reducing the numbers of qualified staff. This will be analysed through tracing examples in the SC that provide an in-depth understanding of the internal and contextual factors around sustainable human resource and organizational development.</i>	SC interviews
2. Gender and organizational development Among senior fulltime staff there is a major predominance of male staff (197 full time senior male staff/102 full time senior female staff) even though there is better gender balance at mid (179 full time mid level male staff/154 full time mid level female staff) and even a slight predominance of women at junior levels (166 full time female staff/164 full time male staff).	<i>Changes in staffing patterns with particular attention given to senior fulltime staff. SC data will be used to triangulate monitoring data findings with qualitative data regarding the factors that may contribute to changes.</i>	Monitoring data and SC interviews
3. Capacity development modalities The Evaluation Team judges that, at the end of Phase One, capacity development modalities had been broadly targeted and therefore (with the exception of core funding) has not responded sufficiently to individual grantee needs and expectations.	<i>Tracing of TTI's process of adapting capacity development modalities over the coming years. Spontaneous and cue-response examples will be used to trace the steps being taken to apply emerging lessons on effective capacity development, some of which may be anchored more in regional initiatives.</i>	TTI reporting and SC interviews
4. Strategic thinking and M&E At the end of Phase One, grantees have strengthened their capacities and space for strategic thinking. Some were already strong in this respect at the outset, whereas others were weak. However, in many in-	<i>Whether and how changes are underway in the SC grantees' processes for developing their organizational capacities for formal and informal strategic planning, with particular attention to whether and how the currently relatively informal processes (a) move towards greater formality, (b) are being anchored in governance structures, (c) draw on strong leadership (including leadership succession processes), and (d) are informed by monitoring and evaluation systems.</i>	SC interviews, RPO interviews, FC interviews, case studies

<p>stances the time and space for strategic thinking is reliant on temporary TTI core funding. As illustrated in figure eleven above, the range of formality of strategic planning is variable, as are the roles of leadership and governance. The extent to which M&E systems are informing strategic planning is generally low.</p>	<p>The Evaluation judges that the most important aspect of M&E systems (but also currently the weakest) should be that of tracing policy engagement and ultimate influence.</p>	
<p>5. Resource mobilization and business plans</p> <p>At the end of Phase One, financial sustainability appears to remain a somewhat distant objective for most (but not all) grantees. Most still lack clear resource mobilisation/business plans, and where these exist data shows that significant levels of implementation are low.</p> <p>Currently the focus of grantee efforts to achieve sustainability is often on individual components of a 'business model' rather than a broad strategic approach. The Evaluation has not yet seen significant evidence of comprehensive new business models emerging.</p>	<p><i>Changes to concretize and operationalize broader and more concerted resource mobilization efforts beyond the existing shared concern about the future and relatively piecemeal or informally planned efforts to achieve greater financial sustainability.</i> The Evaluation will recognize that some informal approaches among the best-established grantees remain quite effective. In this way the evaluation will document the manner and extent to which viable 'business models' emerge and are implemented. The Team will continue to monitor grantees' progress in establishing and implementing resource mobilization/business plans.</p>	<p>Case studies, SC interviews, RPO interviews, FC interviews</p>
<p>6. Major risks for financial sustainability</p> <p>There are considerable 'red flag' issues in several grantees due to reliance on TTI support for all or part of salaries of senior staff.</p>	<p><i>Steps being taken in the SC to build specific alternative funding models to cover key senior leadership posts that are currently financed through TTI core support.</i> Where additional income does not materialize, the Evaluation will document processes to respond, including possible preparations for reductions in staff and programming.</p>	<p>SC interviews, RPO interviews, FC interviews</p>
<p>7. Critical mass for sustainability</p> <p>Existing data does not provide a basis for quantifiable baseline findings regarding how a reputation for high quality research is being leveraged for greater financial sustainability, but SC interviewees present plausible arguments that this is the case and report various examples of expanding engagements with respected international research institutions and undertaking research programs more selectively.</p>	<p><i>Evidence of where strategic use of TTI support is generating credibility that is in turn contributing to greater financial sustainability.</i> It should be noted, however, that these examples are likely to be contextually dependent and case specific. Emphasis will be on the emergence of a 'middle ground' of less restrictive programmatic financing (sources, quantities, types, levels of relations to strategic plans), emphasizing how it began during Phase One and the extent to which it can compensate for the expected severe reduction of core funding at the end of Phase Two. The Evaluation will be attentive to regional trends and emerging categories of how different types of grantee are developing greater capacity to access this 'middle ground' of funding.</p> <p>The extent to which a critical mass could be sustained and leveraged to attract suitable forms of</p>	<p>Case studies, SC interviews, FC interviews</p>

	support - if not core funding, at least more appropriate programmatic and flexible support aligned with grantee strategies - would only be fully clear in an ex post evaluation. In lieu of this opportunity, at two further milestones the team will closely measure (both quantitatively and descriptively) the extent to which SC grantees perceive their organizations to have achieved -and expect to maintain- a critical mass over the course of Phase Two.	
Research quality		
8. Sustaining a critical mass of researchers Approximately two thirds of SC grantees can be judged to have established a critical mass of senior and rising junior researchers prior to or during the course of Phase One.	<i>Changes to the sustainability of Phase One achievements in attaining a critical mass of research staff and the steps being taken to ensure continued research capacity and future strengthening after the end of TTI support.</i> The focus will be on: (a) how the grantees are leveraging opportunities to develop staff research capacities in the course of undertaking major research programs – e.g., inclusion of doctoral fellowships, mentoring from senior international researchers, etc., (b) building partnerships with local and international research institutions so as to draw on outside capacities, and (c) encouraging a shift in thinking among donors and other key stakeholders away from instrumentalist perspectives regarding the ‘use’ of think tanks to a recognition of the importance of building national policy research capacities as a goal in itself.	Case studies, SC interviews, FC interviews, interviews with outside observers
9. Formal research quality assurance measures As described above, the actual implementation of formal research quality assurance measures is uncertain, whereas it is clear that an ‘organizational culture’ of critical discussion on research quality is firmly established.	<i>Actions by grantees that demonstrate what research quality means to them, what steps they are taking to assure the quality of their work, and if/how TTI is contributing to their internal efforts to ensure research quality.</i> This will be particularly important if growing financial pressures impinge on efforts to foster a critical organizational culture or if new forms of partnerships or other changing trends provide ways to reinforce this ‘culture’.	Case studies, SC interviews
10. Depth of focus on gender in research Broad variation in commitments to (and depth of) gender perspectives in research within grantees (see figure seventeen below). Some indications that TTI support during Phase One has encouraged and created space for enhancements.	<i>Impressions of gender officers and key researchers regarding integration of gender and feminist perspectives.</i> As some grantees clearly resist what they tend to see as donor-imposed emphasis on gender, interviews will be selective.	Targeted SC interviews
11. Overall improvements in research quality	<i>The extent to which the grantees assess that their quality has improved in relation to categories they themselves define, and identify whether and how</i>	Case studies

<p>The Evaluation Team judges that the determinants of research quality as perceived among the grantees fall into a range of categories (described above) and that there has also been a range of ways that TTI support during Phase One has contributed to enhancements.</p>	<p><i>TTI may have contributed to these advances.</i></p>	
Policy influence		
<p>12. Independence</p> <p>Significant Phase One progress in stemming financial pressures to assume roles that lead to grantees being perceived as ‘just consultants’ or being tainted by Northern donor agendas.</p>	<p><i>Positive and negative changes in relation to independence with attention to possible dangers with the impending decline of core funding.</i> The variety of perspectives on these issues among the different grantees suggests that these findings will provide an enhanced understanding of the role of core funding in promoting independence and the risks in relation to sustainability, but these findings will not be quantifiable.</p>	<p>SC interviews, RPO interviews</p>
<p>13. Positioning for policy influence</p> <p>Due to their in-depth knowledge of how to manoeuvre amid political sensitivities, and drawing on their credibility and foundational strengths, grantees have found ways to achieve their aims despite limits to freedom of expression and varying levels of demand for evidence in policy formation.</p>	<p><i>How grantees manage the constraints and opportunities for policy influence amid limits to freedom of expression and varying levels of demand for evidence.</i> Where evidence exists, the Evaluation will assess the ways that TTI support may have influenced grantee capacities to manage within these limits. It is recognized that publishing such analyses could be sensitive for the grantees, so caution will be exercised and a categorization, although perhaps feasible, is best avoided. Learning about the ways that grantees manage to influence policy and promote a more open and evidence-based policy discourse amid limits to freedom of expression will be particularly important.</p>	<p>Case studies</p>
<p>14. Status of communication strategies</p> <p>The baseline status of the SC grantees regarding communications is that of a range of progress in developing and using communications strategies. TTI support to date has been primarily used for employing staff, revamping websites and purchasing equipment, as well as through increased attention to communications stemming from learning in networks and ‘nudging’ by RPOs. For many (probably most, although quantifiable data is lacking), prior to Phase One there was a severe deficit of commitment to communications. Currently there are signs of stronger efforts to enhance communications, but the Evaluation Team judges that the depth of these commitments may in some</p>	<p><i>First, the extent and nature of implementation of communication strategies. Second, as TTI support draws to an end, the plans for continued employment of communications staff (It is expected that these plans may be a proxy indicator of ownership, i.e., the extent to which strengthened communications has become a sufficiently integrated part of the ‘DNA’ of the grantees to warrant investment during a period when core resources are shrinking). Third, where possible assessment of changes during the course of Phase Two in relations with the mass media.</i></p>	<p>SC interviews, RPO interviews</p>

cases be weak, which implies the need to assess plausible continued trajectories in the future.		
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Annex 2 – Persons interviewed

South Asia															
Interviewees and numbers	Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA)	Centre for Policy Research (CPR)	Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS)	Social Policy and Development Centre (SPDC)	Institute for Social and Environmental Transition – Nepal (ISET-N)	Centre for Policy Analysis (CEPA)	Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI)	Public Affairs Centre (PAC)	National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER)	Indian Institute of Dalit Studies (IIDS)	Centre for Study of Science, Technology and Policy (CSTEP)	Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS)	BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD)	Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)	Total
Senior management, incl Research Directors, Finance	2	2	2	3	2	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	22
Researchers	4	3	3	2											12
External observers															0
Total interviews															34
East Africa															
Interviewees and numbers	Ethiopian Development Research Institute (EDRI)	Institute of Policy Analysis and Research (IPAR Rwanda)	Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR)	Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC)	Economic and Social Research Foundation (ESRF)	Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE)	Ethiopian Economics Association (EEA)	Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA)	Science, Technology and Innovation Policy Research Organisation (STIPRO)	Research on Poverty Alleviation (REPOA)	Institute of Economic Affairs – Kenya (IEA-Kenya)	Total			
Senior management, incl Research Directors, Finance	2	3	2	2	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	18			
Researchers senior	2	1	2									5			
Other staff	1											1			
Communications / Publications staff	1	1										2			
External observers		1	2									3			
Total interviews												29			
West Africa															
Interviewees and numbers	Consortium pour la Recherche Economique et Sociale (CRES)	Center for the Studies of the Economies of Africa (CSEA)	Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA Ghana)	Initiative prospective agricole et rurale (IPAR-Senegal) Initiative prospective	Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER)	African Heritage Institution (AfriHeritage)	Centre for Population and Environment (CPED)	Total							
Senior management, incl Research Directors, Finance	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	8							
Researchers			2					2							
Communications / Publications staff		1				1	1	3							
External observers	1	1	3					5							
Total interviews								18							
Latin America															
Interviewees and numbers	Centro de Análisis y Difusión de la Economía Paraguaya (CADEP)	Fundación para el Avance de las Reformas y las Oportunidades (Grupo FARO)	Fundación Salvadoreña para el Desarrollo Económico y Social de El Salvador (FUSADES)	Foro Social de Deuda Externa y Desarrollo de Honduras (FOSDEH)	Instituto de Estudios Peruanos (IEP)	Instituto de Estudios Avanzados en Desarrollo (INESAD)	Fundacion ARU	Asociación de Investigación y Estudios Sociales (ASIES)	Grupo de Analisis para el Desarrollo (GRADE)	Fundacion Doctor Guillermo Manuel Ungo (FUNDAUNGO)	Instituto Desarrollo (ID)	Total			
Senior management, incl Research Directors, Finance	1	1	6	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	16			
Board members / Chair	1	1	1								4	7			
Researchers	3										1	4			
Other staff	2	2										4			
Communications / publications staff	1	1	1									3			
External observers		3	1									4			
Total interviews												38			

Note that interviews with TTI Regional Program Officers have been done for the full cohort