**Think**Tank
Initiative

# FINAL REPORT

of the External Evaluation
of the Think Tank Initiative

**September 2013**

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# Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| AIAE[1] | African Institute for Applied Economics |
| AusAID | Australian Aid |
| BMGF | Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation |
| CADEP | Centro de Análisis Y Difusión de la Economia Paraguay |
| CIPPEC | Centro de Implementación de Políticas Públicas para la Equidad y el Crecimiento |
| DFID | UK Department for International Development |
| DGIS | Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs |
| EC | Executive Committee (TTI) |
| ECDPM | European Centre for Development Policy Management |
| EPRC | Economic Policy Research Centre (Uganda) |
| GRADE | Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo |
| GTTE | Global Think Tank Exchange (TTI Exchange 2012, Cape Town) |
| HF | William and Flora Hewlett Foundation |
| IAG | International Advisory Group (TTI) |
| ID | Instituto Desarrollo (Paraguay) |
| IDRC | International Development Research Centre |
| IGS | Institute of Governance Studies (Bangladesh) |
| IIDS | Indian Institute of Dalit Studies |
| IPAR | Initiative Prospective Agricole et Rurale (Senegal) |
| M&E | Monitoring and evaluation |
| MAAIF | Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries |
| MDG | Millennium Development Goal |
| MSP | Managing Successful Programmes |
| NCAER | National council of Applied Economic Research |
| NISER | Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research |
| ODI | Overseas Development Institute |
| PRINCE2 | Projects in a Controlled Environment |
| SISERA | Secretariat for Institutional Support for Economic Research |
| TTI | Think Tank Initiative |
| UGS | University Grants Committee (Bangladesh) |
| WOTRO | Science for Global Development Programme (Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research) |

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[1]  Effective April 2013 the AIAE was renamed African Heritage Institution (AfriHeritage in short). As the country visits for this evaluation took place before this date the abbreviation AIAE is used throughout the document.

# Executive Summary

## Introduction[2]

This evaluation of the Think Tank Initiative (TTI) had four primary objectives: (i) to evaluate the programme concept and design, (ii) to assess the implementation of the programme, (iii) to determine the intermediate outcomes and impact, and (iv) to provide suggestions for improving the design of Phase 2. Desk-based research included a review of key project documentation, interviews with stakeholders, a literature review of comparable programmes, an analysis of the TTI monitoring and evaluation (M&E) database, and collection of 65 Stories of Change from project stakeholders. The Stories of Change, and results of the other desk-based research were triangulated through meetings, interviews, and workshops with 17 TTI grantees and a range of other stakeholders during visits to eight countries in Latin America, East and West Africa, and South Asia. The emerging findings were then validated via an online follow-up survey of informants and at meetings with the TTI Executive Committee (EC) and International Advisory Group (IAG). The current report provides an overview of the main findings. It draws on a review of the TTI theory of change, a project management review, a review of the M&E database, and an analysis of the Stories of Change. It also draws on a range of working documents that the evaluation team compiled in the course of the evaluation, encompassing narrative reports of the field visits and synthesized lessons learned papers.

## Key findings

### Programme concept and design

TTI addresses an issue of growing importance, as knowledge rather than financial resources is increasingly acknowledged to be the fundamental driver of development. Recent thinking has re-emphasized the importance of providing research-based evidence for policymakers, as exemplified in the 2005 Millennium Development Goal (MDG) task force report 'Innovation: Applying Knowledge in Development'. The central role that national think tanks can play in that process was underscored by the UK Government Science and Technology Committee in its 2012 report on building scientific capacity for development.

The TTI programme has three principal objectives:

- Objective 1. Select a group of promising independent policy research organizations and assist them in assessing critical areas of strength and weakness and identifying opportunities for improved organizational performance.

- Objective 2. Provide a combination of general support funding and access to training and technical assistance to permit the organizations to achieve improvements in research quality, organizational performance, and policy linkages.

- Objective 3. Capture and share project learning about strategies for supporting and managing policy research organizations, in order to influence the future activities of the funding partners, participating think tanks, and other development actors.

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[2] The TOR requested the evaluation team to assess the concept and implementation of the TTI programme and not the performance of individual grantees. But it asked the evaluation team to illustrate findings with cases that show how grantees have used TTI's support. Cases that we refer to in this report were selected randomly and do not imply that the experiences of other grantees would be less relevant.

From TTI documentation, the evaluation team sketched the programme's theory of change as having two parallel and interlinked pathways. The first pathway, corresponding to TTI objectives 1 (selection) and 2 (support to grantees), leads to improved performance and policy impact of independent policy research organizations in developing countries. The second pathway corresponds to Objective 3 (synthesis of and learning about support strategies to influence other donors). The destination of this path is a strengthened market for independent policy research in developing countries. Ultimately, this should boost the market for independent policy research, which is essential for think tanks to become sustainable.

The evaluation team found the TTI theory of change to be robust and well rooted in scientific and practical knowledge about the role of think tanks and initiatives designed to strengthen their capacity. TTI's overall aim and programme design are clear and well understood by stakeholders. Furthermore, the combination of core funding and technical assistance to funded think tanks, alongside the programme's Matching Funds mechanism to support collaborative initiatives, is widely regarded as an effective formula.

The criteria for selecting countries and think tanks within them are sound while still leaving room for experimentation with support to different forms and numbers of organizations in different locations (Objective 1). TTI's core grants and capacity-building work have resulted in measurable improvements in the capacity and impact of the supported think tanks (Objective 2). The diversity of the grantee organizations and TTI's open learning approach have provided rich opportunities for the programme to raise understanding about what works. This has informed its broader aim to promote an enabling environment for think tanks in the South (Objective 3).

## TTI impact on individual think tanks and at the national and global level

Complementary evidence from the M&E database, the Stories of Change, and field visits enables the evaluation team to say with some confidence that TTI is already making progress towards its intermediate objectives, and even some of its ultimate aims.

There is substantial evidence of impact at the level of the individual think tanks visited during the evaluation, especially in their organizational capacity, in investments in the quality of research (but not yet in measurable improvements), in communications and policy engagement, and in the quantity of outputs. Without the intention of giving undue prominence to some among the many promising grantee developments under the programme, the following examples briefly tell the story of success:

- The African Institute for Applied Economics (AIAE) developed and implemented a research enhancement plan and obtained training for its finance and administrative managers, while also procuring better accounting software and establishing an internal audit procedure.
- The Indian Institute of Dalit Studies (IIDS) almost doubled its full-time research staff, from 15 to 29, and established standard terms and conditions enabling it to attract highly-qualified researchers who might otherwise have gone into university careers.
- Across all of the think tanks, staff numbers grew from an average of 31 to 35 (13%). Most of the rise was in research staff, which increased from 17 to 23 on average (35%). Personnel growth was most marked in Latin America (31%), and least evident in West Africa, where think tank research staff actually declined by 8%.
- More than 70% of the Stories of Change collected during the evaluation from 31 supported think tanks (63% of all funded think tanks) describe early impact towards improved organizational performance. These stories illustrate a range of impacts, including strengthened research capacity, improved communications, intensified policy engagement, and improved organizational procedures.

It is difficult to attribute changes in think tank performance during the course of the programme solely to TTI's contributions. Nonetheless, there is satisfactory evidence that improvements such as those documented above have started to influence wider changes in policy and practice:

- The Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC) in Uganda contributed to discussions within the Parliamentary Session Committee on Agricultural and Presidential Economic Council (PEC) that made the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) to move forward in development of fertilizer policy, regulations and strategy with an aim of increasing fertiliser use to reverse the rather low use of agricultural inputs and boost productivity levels in Uganda.

- The Instituto Desarrollo (ID) in Paraguay won a bid to develop a national and regional development master plan – the first of its kind in Paraguay.

- About half of the 65 Stories of Change collected describe changes in policy. Of these, 3% pertain to the local level, 73% to the national level, 17% to the regional level, and 7% to both the national and the international level. Many of the changes cited refer to new or revised policies, legislation, and operational processes. Some 45% of the Stories of Change describe contributions to policy debates. Raised awareness of issues is documented in 31% of the stories; 28% of the stories mention influencing the nature of a debate; 27% note changes in policymakers' views; and 14% of the stories tell of think tanks being on track to change policies.

- A Redstone Strategy Group study estimated that a 15-person-year input (US $250,000) by IIDS staff to shape university anti-discrimination regulations in 2012 could collectively yield US $2.3 billion more lifetime income for Dalit graduates. This translates to a benefit-to-cost ratio of $9,000:$1 or 9,000%. Similar studies in Peru, Bolivia, and Sri Lanka estimate benefit-to-cost ratios of 1,500%, 650%, and 201%, respectively.

While some may be sceptical of the absolute numbers mentioned above, even if actual benefit-to-cost ratios are only a fraction of these, they are still an order of magnitude greater than current World Bank norms of between 20% and 100%.[3] Furthermore, the evaluators were convinced by the Stories of Change, many of which we verified during the field visits. The evidence thus indicates that the TTI-funded think tanks are achieving significant impact on policy and practice. In terms of development outcomes, this is an extremely worthwhile investment.

Emerging evidence points to some national-level impacts of the TTI programme, especially in countries where multiple think tanks are supported. For example, by funding a critical mass of think tanks in Delhi, TTI has helped to advance thinking about more sustainable models for independent policy research in India. Two of the Delhi-based TTI-supported think tanks, the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) and IIDS, are exploring possibilities for obtaining funding from private-sector contributors.

TTI encourages the funded think tanks to share experiences at regional and global meetings. This has contributed to productive cooperation among the programme participants. For example, an unexpected outcome of the TTI-convened global meeting in Cape Town in 2012 was a decision by a number of the funded think tanks to collaborate in the 'Southern Voice on Post-MDGs' project, which has attracted considerable global attention.

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3    Independent Evaluation Group (2010), *Cost-Benefit Analysis in World Bank Projects*, Washington, DC: World Bank.

## Implementation

TTI has gone through four stages of implementation. In the incubation period, from 2006 to early 2008, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (HF) developed the first programme concepts. In late 2007, HF and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) jointly formulated an implementation plan. The start-up period lasted roughly from early 2008 to mid-2010 and involved selection and initiation of funding to think tanks. Funding was first released to East and West African participants in 2009, with South Asian and Latin American grantees following in 2010. The third stage, from mid-2009 to mid-2012, focused on support for capacity-development activities within the funded think tanks, alongside design and initiation of the TTI M&E database and commissioning of a number of baseline studies. The current stage, which started in late 2011, targets learning. Full M&E and capacity development strategies have been developed, and the much-lauded global learning event was held in Cape Town in June 2012. The external evaluation also began in this fourth stage, and several additional studies were commissioned to better understand grantee's performance and their use of TTI funding.

Implementation is running one to two years behind the original schedule drawn up in 2007. In particular, the learning elements necessary for Objective 3 are running behind. The evaluation team recognizes that the timetable in the initial plan was far too ambitious, and progress so far has in fact been very good. However, the programme has had some difficult moments due to staffing shortfalls, delayed priority setting for programme learning, and overly-complex governance and management arrangements.

While not entirely clear and transparent, the evaluators perceive the process of selection of countries and grantees to have been sensible and pragmatic. Few have dropped out, and all of the think tanks visited are serious and professional organizations. It also became clear during the visits that while all have a strong track record in research, some had relatively little experience with policy engagement. The selection's apparent emphasis on research capacity seems somewhat out of line with the programme's professed equally strong interest in policy advocacy capacity. Some think tanks with a strong record in policy advocacy, operating fully in line with TTI's theory of change and apparently meeting all of the TTI criteria, were not selected for funding.

Most grantees receive four-year funding, with that period extended to five years for African grantees. The level of core funding varies from 10% to more than 80% of the respective institutes' annual budgets. Amounts provided range from Can. $133,000 to Can. $800,000 per annum per institute. Over the whole programme the average core grant is approximately 25% of each grantee's annual operational budget. This seems in line with comparable programmes.

The majority of grantees consider the financial support to be the most valuable element of the TTI programme. They have allocated 41% to 50% of the funds for research, 22% to 30% to organizational development, and 18% to 27% to communications and outreach. All grantees indicate highly valuing the organizational development support as well, especially the three programme launch events, the regional workshops, and the global event in Cape Town at which they could exchange experiences with peers. The five resource mobilization workshops and two M&E workshops were also often mentioned as highly useful.

The Matching Funds mechanism provides amounts ranging from Can. $20,000 to $50,000, which are then matched by a 25% contribution by the grantee to overall project costs. The fund is aimed at promoting peer learning and collaboration among the TTI-funded think tanks and between these grantees and other stakeholders. It has been widely taken up, except in Africa. Some of the global initiatives funded through this mechanism, for example, the Southern Voice collaboration mentioned earlier, have boosted the programme's impact on the international stage.

TTI and its funders have invested considerable time and energy in compiling a variety of studies, such as scoping studies to determine the availability of development support expertise in the four regions and research to shape the programme's M&E framework. TTI, furthermore, has begun to build a body of learning about the work and approaches of individual grantees and how they engage in their respective policy environments. It has, nonetheless, not yet fully capitalized on these products towards achieving Objective 3 of the programme.

TTI has invested considerable resources in M&E. Its excellent 2010 M&E strategy outlines a comprehensive methodology with a sensible range of approaches. By far TTI's largest M&E investment of both time and money has been to administer the annual M&E questionnaires and M&E database. While useful for providing descriptive statistics of changes in capacity and policy outreach, these tools cannot be used to assess 'impact'. Because they only include data on the funded think tanks, no counterfactual scenario can be constructed.

The overall governance and management of the TTI programme, split into an advisory IAG, the EC, and the TTI management team, was considered adequate by most interviewees. Questions were raised about the IAG's advisory role and how the IAG could be made more relevant to the programme. Furthermore, the very frequent meetings of the EC and EC involvement in many operational decisions absorbs a great deal of management time. A better balance should be found for Phase 2, providing for a primarily strategic role for the EC and leaving executive decision-making to the TTI management team.

IDRC was instrumental in setting up TTI, and there is broad consensus among interviewees that "the programme would not be where it is today without IDRC". TTI management and reporting systems are flexible and effective compared to those of other donors, and most participants have welcomed TTI's light-touch support for grantees to develop their own strategies and plans. However, the programme does not fit neatly within IDRC's existing systems, and establishing more appropriate systems has taken time. Furthermore, the frequent changes in TTI leadership have not been helpful. The balance between staff at headquarters and those at regional offices is also suboptimal, with more resources needed in the regions. Both overall staffing levels and the budget for learning (7.5% over the entire programme period) seem low for a complex programme of this scale with an explicit learning objective. Conversely, the administrative services expenses, at 9.6% of the total programme budget, seem a bit high in relation to the 7% considered reasonable for European Commission-funded programmes.

## Recommendations for Phase 2

This is a very good programme, and much has been achieved. TTI is addressing a significant development challenge, and the programme should carry on broadly as initially planned. The evaluation team, however, has formulated a number of recommendations for improvements.

1.  The theory of change and overall programme design are sound, but could be further strengthened:
    *   A re-emphasis is needed on the multiple dimensions of the programme, especially the blend of support to individual think tanks with learning and promoting lessons and good practices among donors and other stakeholders.
    *   Efforts across the three objectives should be re-balanced, with a substantial increase in work towards Objective 3.
    *   More flexibility is needed in the balance of support at the country level between funding and other types of assistance to individual think tanks. Greater use could be made of the Matching Funds

mechanism to support other think tanks and stakeholders and to extend support to policymakers to make better use of research-based evidence.

2.  If more funds become available and it is possible to expand into new countries and fund new grantees in Phase 2, the evaluation team recommends the following:
    *   A pragmatic approach to country selection should be maintained as long as the process and choices made are transparent.
    *   The criteria for grantee selection should be reviewed to ensure that equal weight is given to research and policy outreach capacity.

3.  The participating think tanks and most other stakeholders are very positive about the support provided by TTI, especially the combination of core funding and technical support. TTI's capacity-building work could, however, be further strengthened:
    *   TTI should commit to continue core grants and other support to existing grant-holders for the originally planned ten years unless they fail to deliver acceptable progress.
    *   The organizational development work, which is running well behind schedule and below expected allocations, should be reinforced, especially in Africa.
    *   Grantees' experiences with the Matching Funds mechanism should be reviewed, exploring avenues for further developing this instrument.
    *   An overall 'learning review' should be undertaken of TTI's support to organizational development, perhaps combined with the review of the use of the Matching Funds.

4.  A major emphasis is needed on work towards Objective 3. TTI should itself operate more like a think tank:
    *   TTI should synthesize, publish, and otherwise make more proactive use of its existing studies and emerging experiences and lessons.
    *   Internal learning and sharing systems should be strengthened alongside development of a proactive 'engagement strategy' for approaching other potential supporters of (international) policy research.
    *   Further meetings of possible donors should be organized, at least annually, focusing initially on encouraging them to set up and run their own programmes based on TTI lessons rather than on funding TTI.
    *   TTI could capitalize on and learn from its current donors' interest and involvement to develop strategies for influencing and engaging others.
    *   Grantees should be commissioned to undertake learning activities and promotion towards policymakers, donors, and other stakeholders.

5.  Improvements to efficiency and sustainability:
    *   The roles of the IAG, EC, TTI management, and IDRC warrant review, as well as the linkages between governance and management so that TTI can operate with greater agility to meet the needs of the grantees.
    *   TTI's current management systems should be revised, to better meet the needs of the funders and to do so in a more timely way in terms of financial overviews, accounts, and budget analysis.
    *   The programme's current management and reporting systems should be rendered more transparent and accessible for recording grantees' progress as well as for documenting their use of TTI funding in terms of budget and expenses.
    *   TTI's human resources in the regions should be strengthened. This would enable a more strategic accompaniment of grantees in their development and engagement in national policy processes.
    *   Options should be explored for a longer-term organizational form, seeking a structure, management, and governance that can deliver the programme more cost-effectively into Phase 2 and beyond.

6. Recommendations to refresh and re-balance M&E efforts:
    • The M&E strategy should be implemented as planned with the originally intended emphasis on visits by programme staff, the policy community study, and rolling project completion reports.
    • The annual M&E questionnaire requires considerable simplification. The focus should be limited to a few key indicators for the three main dimensions of the results framework for Objective 2 (i.e., 'organizational capacity', 'research capacity and quality', and 'policy linkages').
    • Options should be explored for introducing a wider range of M&E approaches, including Stories of Change. These should be developed in collaboration with the think tanks themselves so as to focus on information that they would find useful.
    • All M&E and financial reporting requirements should be aligned with the grantees' own annual financial reporting and planning cycles.
    • In line with international standards, each grantee should publish an annual report that includes a financial statement on income and how funds have been used. Such reporting should be accompanied by an annual audit report.

7. The M&E database:
    • TTI should undertake a substantial review of the M&E database, frankly assessing its value and feasibility in collaboration with the grantees. Questions should be answered regarding its ability to generate useful reports and the possibility of providing access to different groups of stakeholders including the grantees.
    • TTI should develop an approach to evaluation in Phase 2 aligned to ongoing improvements of its M&E, enhancements of its learning, and emphasis on Objective 3. Where possible, the benefits of continuous learning should be combined with objective analysis.

# 1. Introduction

## Purpose

TTI issued a request for proposals identifying three key objectives for the current evaluation: (i) to evaluate the TTI programme concept and design, (ii) to assess the implementation of the programme, and (iii) to determine the intermediate outcomes and impact. Within each of these areas, a series of specific questions was listed. Based on the answers to these questions, the evaluation team was expected (i) to provide suggestions for improving the design of Phase 2 of the programme, (ii) to provide insights for strengthening the design of the Phase 2 evaluation, and (iii) to help TTI's Executive Committee (EC) to further refine what it means for a grantee to demonstrate a 'step change' in performance and to identify whether appropriate data are available to assess performance in this way.

This first chapter outlines the methodology used by the evaluation team to answer these questions. It then explains and justifies the further setup of this report. In brief, Chapter 2 presents the key findings and Chapter 3 summarizes the main evaluation recommendations in response to its three main objectives.

## Methodology

The evaluation team used an iterative, participatory utilization-focused approach designed to test the TTI theory of change, to assess programme inputs and processes, to review inputs and processes in the field, and to identify emerging outcomes. It then used the results to again validate the theory of change and assess overall programme effectiveness. Figure 1 illustrates the process.

**Figure 1: The evaluation approach**
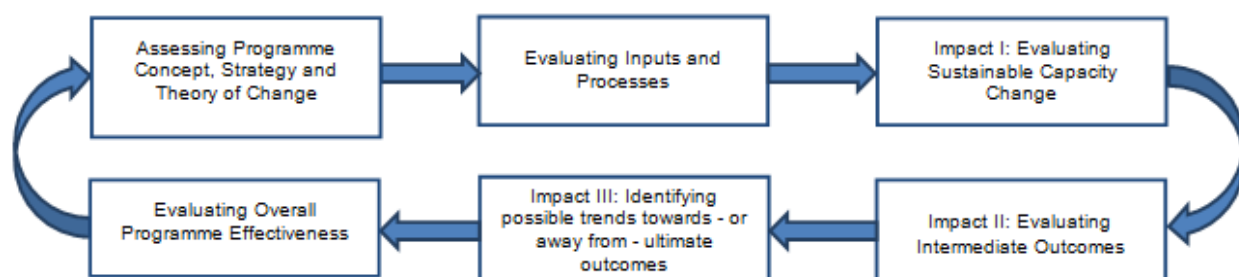


The approach included initial desk-based work, field visits to eight TTI countries and all regional offices, a verification follow-up survey of informants met during the field visits or contacted by telephone or email, and discussions with the TTI implementation team, the TTI EC, and the TTI International Advisory Group (IAG).

The evaluation team began by holding preparatory discussions with the EC, the IAG, and the TTI implementation team to finalize the methodology. Evaluation team members then attended the global TTI Exchange (GTTE) in Cape Town in June 2012. That event offered opportunities to observe sessions, to meet grantees and other stakeholders, and to attend an EC and IAG meeting. Also at this early stage, a review was conducted of the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) database to identify indicators for detailed analysis and to inform the design of further information-gathering during the field visits.

The initial desk-based work was multi-layered and included a range of elements:

- A comprehensive review of TTI programme and grantee documentation and reports to assess programme strategy, work plans, budgets, and reporting;
- A literature review of other think tank capacity-building programmes and approaches, including telephone interviews with key informants;
- An analysis of the TTI theory of change and assumptions underpinning the programme based on project documentation and interviews with representatives of the various stakeholder groups;
- Analysis of data available in the TTI M&E database;
- A political economy analysis of the knowledge-policy interface in the eight countries to be visited during the field missions based on the ODI Knowledge Politics and Power Framework[4] and information gathered from relevant global indexes;
- A detailed analysis of project documentation and interviews with key stakeholders to assess the implementation process.

In parallel with the desk-based research, 'Stories of Change' were collected from project stakeholders. First, the evaluation team sent out a request for simple stories illustrating what the grantees considered to be the 'most significant change' that TTI had made in the way that research-based evidence was generated or used within their organization. Then, from the 65 stories received, 24 were selected representing a range of think tanks and different countries. The stories chosen depicted a variety of sorts of change that could be followed up in more detail during the field visits. The authors were invited to expand on their narratives and, especially, to indicate what they considered to be the reasons underpinning the changes they described.

Based on the results of the initial desk-based work and the Stories of Change, eight countries were selected for field visits: Paraguay, El Salvador, Nigeria, Senegal, Uganda, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, and India. In total, 17 TTI-funded think tanks were visited in these countries. Visits were also made to the International Development Research Centre (IDRC)-TTI regional field offices in Montevideo, Nairobi, and Delhi. Each of the field visits was undertaken by one core evaluation team member and regionally-recruited experts. The visits all followed a similar itinerary:

- The regional expert reviewed and conducted further on-the-ground analysis of the political context for knowledge demand and use in the country.
- The evaluation team made one-day visits to two TTI-funded think tanks in each country, including interviews with the director and other senior staff, a meeting with board members, and mini-workshops with a representative selection of staff. Key tasks during these visits were to follow up the Stories of Change and to ground-truth some of the data from the TTI M&E database.
- Shorter visits and interviews were conducted with the directors and staff of think tanks that had applied to the programme but were not funded, as well as with think tanks that had not applied.
- In-country meetings were held with a wide range of TTI stakeholders, including policymakers, other knowledge producers, and intermediary groups such as civil society organizations and the media.
- Meetings and interviews were held with regional TTI staff.
- A final end-of-visit verification workshop was held with representatives of the funded think tanks and other stakeholders who had been interviewed during the visit.

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[4]   Jones, H. et al. (2012), Knowledge, policy and Power in International Development: A Practical Guide. Bristol: The Policy Press.

Upon completion of all of the visits, a synthesis workshop was organized for the field visit teams to draw together the overall results. At that workshop, a verification survey was formulated including 49 statements based on the emerging findings. Field visit findings were validated using that survey online, and emerging findings and final recommendations were discussed with the TTI EC and IAG.

Inevitably some elements of this methodology worked better than others. The preliminary political economy analysis provided a useful starting point for understanding the context in which the funded think tanks operate. But the detailed local knowledge of the regional experts was in fact much more useful. The M&E database did not provide as much useful information as had been hoped (as further explained below). It therefore could not provide a useful mechanism for extrapolating the more detailed information gathered during the field visits across the whole programme.

The Stories of Change worked extremely well. The 65 stories were submitted by 31 different grantees, comprising 63% of the 49 current grantees. They came from all regions: 18 from Asia, 20 from Africa, and 27 from Latin America. Most grantees submitted one or two stories, though one grantee in South Asia submitted eight. The stories were extremely diverse. They described examples of policy impact involving 15 different sectors, as well as changes in the way the think tanks operated. It is not known why the remaining 18 think tanks did not submit stories. The analysis of the stories was designed to identify and describe different types of change rather than to provide valid statistical analysis. The 24 stories selected for further development were deliberately chosen to cover a range of different types of change in countries that would be visited during the field trips. As such, the stories could be explored in more detail and also verified with stakeholders outside of the grantee.

The field visits are another element that worked extremely well. Staff of both funded and unfunded think tanks were extremely forthcoming, as were a range of other informants. The evidence they provided triangulated well with that provided by the Stories of Change and, at the individual organization level, with the M&E database. The workshops at the end of each visit and the follow-up validation survey provided further useful evidence to guide and support the emerging findings.

## Outline of the report

The current report has three main chapters. Chapter 1, this introduction, reviews the purpose of the evaluation, its methodology, and the further structure and content of the report. Chapter 2 presents the key findings in relation to the three objectives of the evaluation: to evaluate the programme concept and design, to assess the implementation of the programme, and to determine the intermediate outcomes and early impact. Chapter 3 presents the evaluation team's recommendations in three main areas: Phase 2 design, general programme implementation, and M&E.

This report provides a succinct summary of a huge amount of information that was collected and the analysis undertaken and written up during the evaluation, which started in 2012.

# 2.  Key Findings

This chapter presents the key findings of the evaluation in relation to its three main objectives: to evaluate the programme concept and design (section 2.1), to determine the intermediate outcomes and early impact of the programme (section 2.2), and to assess implementation (in section 2.3).

## 2.1.  Programme concept and design

The central role of knowledge in development policy and practice was first underscored by the World Bank in its 1998-99 World Development Report 'Knowledge for Development'. Since then, it has been frequently reiterated, as for example, in the 2005 Millennium Development Goal (MDG) task force report 'Innovation: Applying Knowledge in Development'. Thus, the fundamental importance of basing policies and programmes on research-derived evidence has been gaining ground in developed countries since the mid-1990s. The central role of national think tanks in that process in developing countries was underscored by the UK Government Science and Technology Committee in its 2012 report on building scientific capacity for development. Nonetheless, a critical lack of think tank capacity has remained in developing countries. The TTI programme addresses that gap.

### 2.1.1.  Theory of change, assumptions, and overall design

The first conceptual documents for the TTI programme were developed by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (HF) in 2006 and 2007.[5] Up to and since then the design of TTI has been informed by a very wide range of studies and documented in an array of plans and strategies including an implementation plan developed as of 2007, an M&E strategy and communications strategy which stem from 2010, and a more recent organizational development strategy formulated in 2012. TTI is thus a thoroughly researched and documented programme that has three principal objectives:

- Objective 1. Select a group of promising independent policy research organizations and assist them in assessing critical areas of strength and weakness and identifying opportunities for improved organizational performance.

- Objective 2. Provide a combination of general support funding and access to training and technical assistance to permit the organizations to achieve improvements in research quality, organizational performance, and policy linkages.

- Objective 3. Capture and share project learning about strategies for supporting and managing policy research organizations, in order to influence the future activities of the funding partners, participating think tanks, and other development actors.

From TTI documentation, the evaluation team sketched the programme's theory of change as having two parallel and interlinked pathways. The first pathway corresponds to TTI's overall objectives 1 and 2 (selection and support to grantees). It is directed toward interventions to improve the performance and policy impact of independent policy research organizations in developing countries. This pathway involves selection of promising grantees and providing them with a combination of core funding and practical support to strengthen their performance, credibility, and policy impact.

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[5]  HF (2007), Draft implementation plan for the Hewlett Foundation's think tank initiative. Internal draft. Menlo Park, CA: Hewlett Foundation.

The second pathway corresponds to TTI's Objective 3 (synthesis of and learning about support strategies to influence other donors). Its destination is a strengthened market for independent policy research in developing countries. Along this route, TTI aims to capitalize on lessons learned, not only to improve the TTI programme itself, but also to share this knowledge with other supporters and funders so as to develop a better understanding of how independent policy research organizations can be effectively financed. Ultimately, this should lead to reinforcement of the market for independent policy research in developing countries.

The evaluation team reviewed programme documents and conducted interviews with knowledgeable stakeholders, especially the 'owners' of the programme (i.e., its primary donors), to elaborate this implicit theory of change. The resulting theory of change is diagrammed in Figure 2. Its underpinning assumptions, which are listed below, were tested throughout the evaluation process.

**Figure 2: The TTI theory of change**
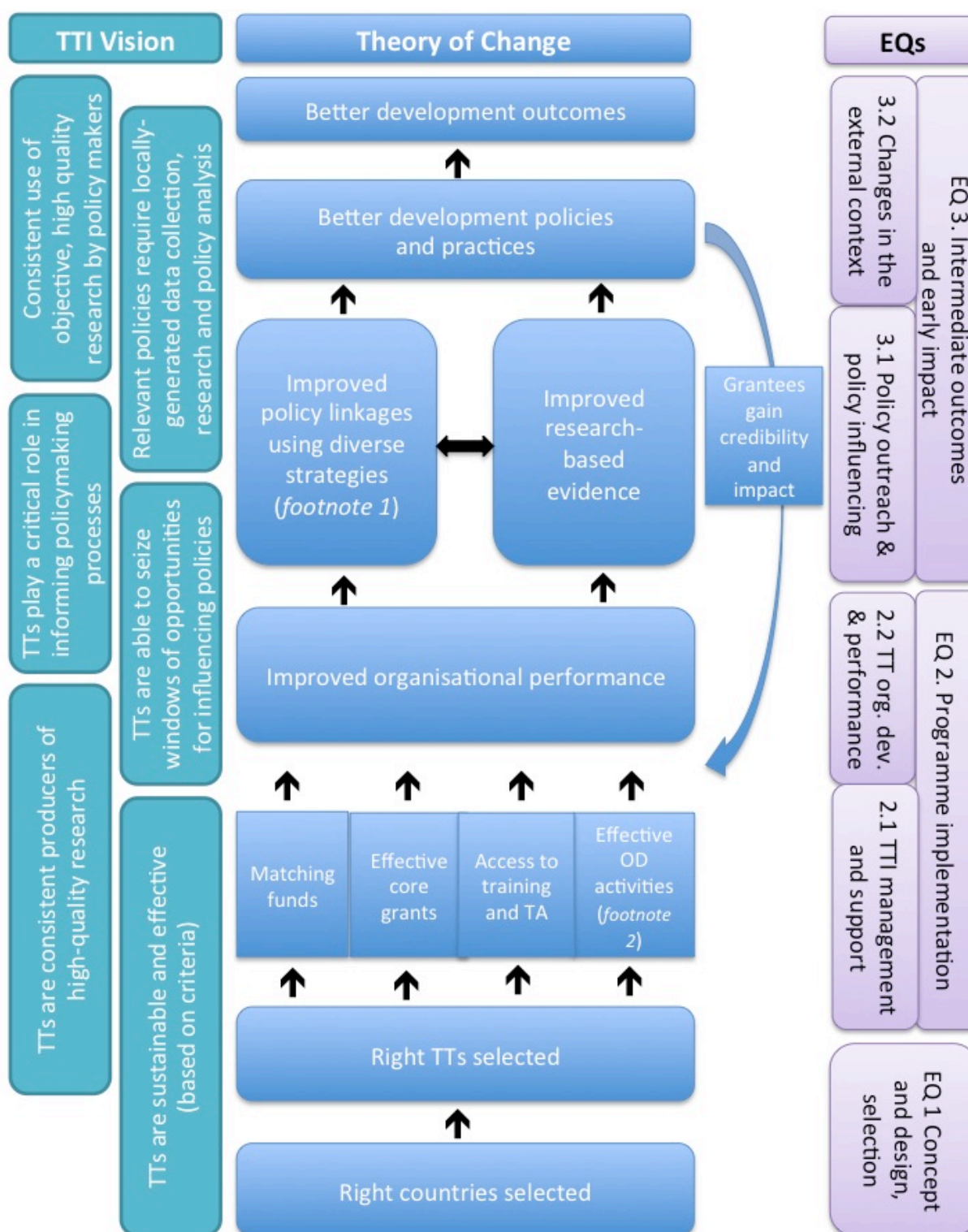


Footnote 1: Strategies: effective research communication; organize/inform policy events; supporting CS/advocacy; contribute to policy coalitions; effective research communication.
Footnote 2: Grantee strengths/weaknesses and opportunities are properly defined.

TTI's theory of change makes eleven basic assumptions:

1. Think tanks are in a unique position to effect change in their societies.
2. The market for independent policy research in developing countries is extremely weak.
3. Think tanks can contribute to and influence policy in their countries.
4. The right support can help think tanks become stronger, more effective, and more sustainable.
5. TTI support to grantees will improve their organizational performance, research quality, and policy linkages.
6. Think tanks become more sustainable and effective by improving their organizational performance.
7. Think tanks become more sustainable and effective by improving their research quality.
8. Think tanks become more sustainable and effective by improving their policy linkages.
9. Some non-earmarked core funding is key to building up effective and sustainable think tanks.
10. Some capacity development and technical support is vital to build up effective and sustainable think tanks.
11. TTI will learn by doing, synthesizing lessons and developing new programme elements along the way.

This theory of change and most of the underpinning assumptions are broadly supported by the results of a review of think tank capacity-building programmes undertaken as part of this evaluation. They are also widely understood and supported by most programme stakeholders in the countries. In response to the follow-up validation survey sent out after the field visits, all 43 respondents agreed with the statement, "*The overall aim and design of the TTI is clear and easy to communicate, and is generally well understood by all stakeholders*"; 82% strongly agreed. Most respondents (95%) agreed with the statement, "*The combination of core funding and technical assistance to funded think tanks and the Matching Funds mechanism to support the involvement of other organizations is a good formula.*" Some 75% indicated strong agreement.

The Stories of Change also support the programme's overall theory of change. Fifty-two stories (80%) describe contributions by think tanks to changes in policy, of which 30 (46%) through improved policy outreach. Of the 65 stories, 50 (77%) refer explicitly to the importance of TTI support. In 38 stories, the added value of core funding is mentioned as contributing to improved research capacity, and 20 stories (30%) refer to capacity-building support, especially support for strategy development.

One of the principles embedded in the early concept of the TTI programme is that think tanks need long-term, secure funding so that they can make the investments necessary for a more sustainable future. This notion is strongly supported by this evaluation's review of other think tank capacity-building programmes. However, there is an apparent contradiction between this understanding and the fact that TTI grants have been committed for only a four- to five-year period.[6] The fact that no clarity has (as yet) been provided about the possibility of an extension has caused concern among grantees. The need for long-term funding emerged strongly in all of the field visits – to funded institutes as well as the unfunded ones. Among respondents to the follow-up survey, 74% agreed with the statement, "*There is a widespread perception that the shift from the original ten-year commitment to a four-year Phase 1 is confusing and undermining participating think tanks' ability to plan effectively for long-term sustainability.*"

The programme owners expressed somewhat divergent views on two programme assumptions: "Think tanks become more sustainable and effective by improving their research quality" and "Think tanks become more sustainable and effective by improving their policy linkages." Some donors take the broader view that strengthening think tanks alone is enough. These stronger institutes will then undertake research on

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6    For grantees in Africa, funding started one year earlier than in South Asia and Latin America, and the funding period was extended for a fifth year (with one exception). This means that the Phase 1 funding period will end for grantees in all regions on the same date.

relevant policy issues and engage with policy processes as they see fit. Other donors have a more instrumental view. They would like to see the think tanks work more directly on specific policy issues that they perceive to be important. Tables 1 and 2 outline these different perspectives.

**Table 1: The bandwidth of the TTI debate on what 'quality' research-based evidence and advice means**

| Taking a long-term capacity-building view | Taking a medium-term instrumental view |
| --- | --- |
| Quality research-based evidence and advice... <br> • responds to local stakeholders' demands <br> • is produced by credible locally-based researchers and institutions <br> • emerges from long-term engagement with all relevant stakeholders, including policymakers <br> • caters to the diverse and varying interests of policymakers within the societies they are in <br> • augments the credibility of the locally-based policy research institutions over time. | Quality research-based evidence and advice... <br> • focuses on a particular strategic policy area or sector <br> • is produced by top-rated academics and institutions <br> • is widely communicated and picked up in the national and international press <br> • is regularly published in referenced international journals <br> • caters to the national and international development agenda <br> • can be shown to influence domestic social and economic (sector) policies. |

**Table 2: The range of the TTI debate on what it means to provide 'effective' policy linkages**

| Taking a longer-term, 'embedded' capacity-oriented approach | Taking a medium-term 'campaign for policy change' view |
| --- | --- |
| Effective policy linkages ... <br> • have multiple links with varied audiences of policymakers as well as practitioners <br> • have strong buy-in from local and national networks of actors engaged in relevant policy processes <br> • take a low-key stand on sensitive policy issues <br> • rest on a strong research base that includes alternative policy options <br> • have flexible, non-earmarked funding. | Effective policy linkages ... <br> • have strong links with high-level policymakers <br> • have high visibility in public debate in relevant thematic policy areas <br> • facilitate proactive advocacy for selected evidence-based policy options <br> • rest on a strong research base on the policies being advocated <br> • have funding aligned with advocacy objectives. |

These slightly different perspectives have implications for the future of the programme. Currently most of the emphasis is on strengthening the think tanks and allowing them to decide which issues to work on and how to do so. A different approach to funding and support will be necessary if they are to be encouraged to work on specific issues.

The evaluators consider the basic theory of change and assumptions underpinning the programme to be sound. Both are supported by the desk review of other think tank capacity-building programmes and endorsed by most of the stakeholders consulted during the evaluation. The tension regarding the duration of funding is, however, undermining some grantees' confidence and commitment to the programme. The slightly divergent views of some of the donors about whether to emphasize broad support for capacity building or more instrumental support for work on specific policy issues needs to be resolved or at least accommodated in the Phase 2 design.

### 2.1.2.  Selection of countries and grantees

TTI's initial selection of countries was based on a study carried out by McGann Associates in 2007, commissioned by the HF. This produced a framework including criteria related to country income, size, peacefulness and stability, and political and civil liberties. HF applied the framework using global data at that time resulted in a list of 31 countries for potential support. That list then formed the basis of discussions between HR and IDRC, resulting in a final list of 22 countries, including 16 of the original 31 and 6 additional countries. The precise factors leading to the changes are unclear, but they seem to have included IDRC priority countries and an IDRC risk analysis. Though the countries were selected before the other donors joined the programme, the relatively large number of grantees in India is ascribed to the specific interests of the UK Department for International Development (DFID).

While not entirely clear and transparent, conducting the selection based on formal criteria in combination with factors related to IDRC's ability to support the programme effectively seems to have been sensible and pragmatic. Recently, TTI took a decision to be more transparent about funders' interests in supporting think tanks in specific countries, and the evaluation team welcomes this shift.

The individual grantees were chosen using an indicator-based shortlist constructed around the key criteria of research quality, independence, and organizational capacity. This was then combined with detailed discussions within the TTI team about each shortlisted organization. In South Asia, the discussions lasted a full week and included all TTI staff in the region plus members of the Ottawa team. In some countries, many applicants met the initial criteria. This allowed for some 'experimentation' in the final shortlisting to include smaller and larger think tanks, those focusing more on academic research and those involved in more action-oriented research, and younger and older organizations. Shortlisted organizations were appraised through a process which included a self-assessment and a visit to the institution by a team including a TTI staff member and an external expert on organizational development.

Very few grantees have dropped out of the programme. This is to some extent evidence that TTI's approach to selection did at least identify think tanks that would be able to benefit from the support. Widespread support for the approach to selection was also expressed by stakeholders during the country visits. Moreover, 100% of respondents to the follow-up survey agreed with the statement, "*The criteria for selecting countries and for selecting think tanks are sound while still leaving room for experimentation with different forms and numbers of think tanks in different countries.*" But there is some evidence that the criteria and approach may have excluded applicants which should have been funded, though a statement to that effect in the follow-up survey was not strongly supported. We will return to this later.

### 2.1.3.   Support to grantees

The importance of core funding as one of the key elements of the programme's support to grantees has already been underscored. But the theory of change recognizes that core funding is not enough. The 2008 implementation plan states:

> [I]t is clear that in many cases general budget support on its own may not allow participating organizations to address key challenges in their organizational development…. [I]t is critical that the Program also be able to assist participating organizations by identifying and mobilizing appropriate sources of technical support (training, mentoring, advisory services to support organizational development), and by integrating elements of organizational development as part of the performance benchmarks for general support grants. The exact nature of such support will be determined by organizational assessments conducted at the outset, as well as ongoing monitoring by Program staff (p. 20).

The importance of capacity-building support is reinforced in several of the Stories of Change:

> Strengthening the capacity of the organizations shall make significant changes in the organizations and contribute to strengthening of evidence-based research work on influencing policies (Story of Change from South Asia).

The stories also emphasize the need for TTI's capacity-building support to take regional and country differences into consideration:

> [Taking variation into account] both between and within the different regions... allows translating evidence into more sound public policies. In the same sense, it should be imperative for TTI to examine the characteristics and dynamics of the regions in which it is active, as well as the diversity of grantee institutions, in order to come to a progressively more contextualized and differentiated support (Story of Change from Latin America).

The balance between core funding and technical support emerged as a key issue during the field trips to multiple grantees. The danger of inadequate technical support is illustrated by our review of the AIAE in Nigeria, which describes a dip in the think tank's production of publications and outreach activities after the end of the IDRC-funded support programme SISERA[7] in 2003. Its outreach and public engagement increased again as of the start of TTI funding.

Some 84% of respondents to the follow-up survey agreed with the statement, "*The balance between core funding and technical assistance may need to be different in different countries, at different times, and in different sectors.*" This confirms the evaluators' view that, in as far as possible, a tailored approach should be pursued in support to grantees.

### 2.1.4.   Learning and evolution of the programme design

Learning is a major element of the design of the programme. Objective 3 explicitly aims to 'capture and share project learning'. Indeed, the relative lack of knowledge about how to strengthen think tanks is underscored in this evaluation's review of other think tank capacity-building programmes. Learning has been embedded throughout the TTI programme's development and implementation, as evidenced by the large number of studies informing programme design, the emphasis on M&E, and its commitment to

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[7]    Secretariat for Institutional Support for Economic Research in Africa, (SISERA) 1997-2003 – www.gdnet.org

incorporating lessons from implementation into the programme as it proceeds. There is also strong evidence that lessons from the first-round selection process in Africa were incorporated into the second round of selection in Latin America and South Asia.[8]

The commitment to and practice of learning is strongly supported by stakeholders. All respondents to the follow-up questionnaire agreed with the statement, "*The programme is committed to learning and took account of early lessons for the types of support offered to think tanks and acted accordingly. One example would be the creation of the Matching Funds mechanism.*"

TTI has taken advantage of opportunities to work systematically across a wide range of country contexts and with a variety of grantees, some of which were selected for 'experimental' purposes, as described earlier. The programme is clearly very well positioned to contribute to knowledge about how to best strengthen the capacity of Southern think tanks and how they can most effectively contribute to better policies and programmes in developing countries. There are no other similar capacity development support programmes that have such a wide geographic spread, allowing lessons to be compiled from very different contexts.

## 2.2.   Intermediate outcomes and early impact

TTI has clearly made very good progress towards Objective 1 (selection of grantees) and substantial progress towards some aspects of Objective 2, particularly improving organizational performance. There is, moreover, evidence that the programme has started to influence the behaviour of other actors in the policy research space at the national and international levels.

### 2.2.1.   Selection of grantees

TTI launched its first call for 'expressions of interest' in June 2008, inviting applications from 11 countries in East and West Africa. From the 284 applications received, 24 institutes were selected. Their first tranche of funds was released in mid-2009. The second call, in July 2009, invited applications from 12 countries in Latin America and South Asia. This time, 323 applications were received, from which 12 institutes in Latin America and 16 in South Asia were finally selected. They received their first payments in mid-2010. All grantees have since produced annual plans, organizational development strategies, and annual technical progress reports. Only three grants were discontinued due to underperformance or internal governance problems.

The selection process was described earlier. Our visits to the grantees and interviews conducted with stakeholders during the field visits confirmed that all successful grantees are professionally sound and respected. Also, all grantees and most of the unsuccessful applicants that made it through to the organizational assessment stage of the selection process considered the process to have been fair and transparent. Among respondents to the follow-up survey, 94% agreed with the statement, "*The selection process for think tanks in each country was thorough and systematic, and the selected think tanks visited by the evaluation team are clearly professionally sound and respected.*" A rather surprising 100% agreed with the statement, "*Think tanks that got through the first round of the application process felt that the research review and institutional visits during the second round were beneficial even if they were not selected for funding.*"

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8   TTI (2008), The Think Tank Initiative Preliminary Diagnosis Phase: Implementation Strategy and Tools, final report (November) and TTI (2010), Diagnostic Guide for Institutional Visits: Selection and Assessment of Think Tank Initiative Grantees in Latin America and South Asia (January).

The grantees form a diverse group of organizations. There are think tanks of different ages, sizes, affiliations, and research-advocacy focus. EPRC, founded in 1993, is the oldest organization visited by the evaluation team, with AIAE, founded in 2000, representing a median age, and IPAR, founded in 2008, being the youngest organization. Size expressed in budgets ranged from Can. $200,000 per year (IPAR) to Can. $550,000 annually (AIAE). One of the think tanks studied has close ties with civil society (IPAR), while another grantee (EPRC) has close ties with and considerable funding from central government. AIAE, a well established and independent think tank, was previously funded by an international capacity development initiative for policy engagement. Another think tank (ID) has a strong academic background. IIDS is an independent think tank that works from a strong action orientation. Finally, the think tanks visited work on a wide range of policy issues, from macro-economics (e.g., AIAE), to agriculture (e.g., IPAR) and the social sector (e.g., IIDS).

While all have a strong track record in research, many had relatively little experience with policy engagement. The field visits left the impression of a degree of misalignment between the apparent emphasis on research capacity in selection and TTI's professed equally strong interest in policy advocacy capacity. Some think tanks with a strong record in policy advocacy, operating fully in line with TTI's theory of change and apparently meeting all of the TTI criteria, were not selected for funding.

An El Salvadorian representative of a non-funded think tank with a solid track record in research and policy influence suggested that, "the programme needs to better define what it means by policy influence". He felt that TTI had selected deserving think tanks from a research perspective, but was less clear about the policy-influence track record of those selected relative to others. Multiple voices from a range of interviews reiterated this view.

Participants at the end-of-country-visit workshops in Bangladesh also pointed to a relative lack of attention during selection to applicants' advocacy track record. Research-based evidence is generated by numerous types of organizations, they said. Many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Bangladesh are involved in action research and in learning lessons from the implementation of projects and programmes. Workshop participants viewed this as an effective way to inform and influence Bangladeshi policymakers. Advocacy groups, such as Transparency International Bangladesh and the Manusher Jonno Foundation, were also considered to be important policy players. But it was widely felt that they could be more effective if their research was better.

The evaluators suggest that in future selection rounds, grantees with a stronger track record in policy engagement than in research should be equally eligible for funding. This view was supported by 63% of the respondents to the follow-up survey. They agreed with the statement, "*The funded think tanks all have a strong research capacity, which is in line with the TTI design and selection criteria, but less attention was paid to a track record in policy engagement and influencing.*"

### 2.2.2. Think tank organizational development

There is substantial evidence in the annual technical progress reports (confirmed during the field visits) that TTI has contributed to organizational development within the grantee institutes. Without the intention of giving undue prominence to some among the many promising grantee developments under the programme, several examples briefly tell the story of success:

- AIAE in Nigeria obtained training for its finance and administrative managers, procured better accounting software, and established an internal audit unit. It invested in its management, team building, and leadership skills, as well as in staff motivation. An internal M&E system developed

during the programme has now been mainstreamed across all institute programmes and activities. The focus of the system is to enhance staff capacity and organizational development.

•       IIDS in India appointed a full-time administrator, regularized the finance coordinator post, set up a staff welfare fund and medical insurance scheme, and granted all core staff three-year contracts.

•       The Institute of Governance Studies (IGS) in Bangladesh described its transition from a higher education and academic research organization to a more policy-engaged think tank. At a mini-workshop during the field visit it traced 'the five eras of IGS': (i) teaching a master's course (2005); (ii) establishing the 'State of Governance' research programme and associated annual report (2006); (iii) providing policy advice, especially during the transition government (2007-2009); (iv) diversifying the research portfolio (2010-2011); and (v) providing technical assistance to government and private-sector actors on various governance functions, including procurement (2012-2013). Workshop participants sketched this progression on the white board pictured in Figure 3. The key factors contributing to IGS's transition over the five 'eras' are written in green and the influence of TTI is written in red.

**Figure 3: The 'five eras' of the Institute of Governance Studies (IGS) in Bangladesh**



The TTI M&E database also points to some organizational changes across all think tanks:

•       If staff size can be considered a proxy for organizational development, then this is confirmed by data from the M&E database. The figures show that the average number of full-time staff increased from 31 to 35 (13%) between 2009 and 2012. Most of the growth was due to a rise in full-time research staff from some 17 to 23 (35%), though there was also a slight increase in communications and public relations staff, from 3.1 to 3.7 (19%). Reductions were reported in administrative and technical staff, from 10.8 to 8.7 (20%) during the same period, possibly due to greater use of consultants. These changes in staff numbers are depicted in Figure 4.

**Figure 4: Changes in full-time staff numbers across all TTI-funded think tanks**
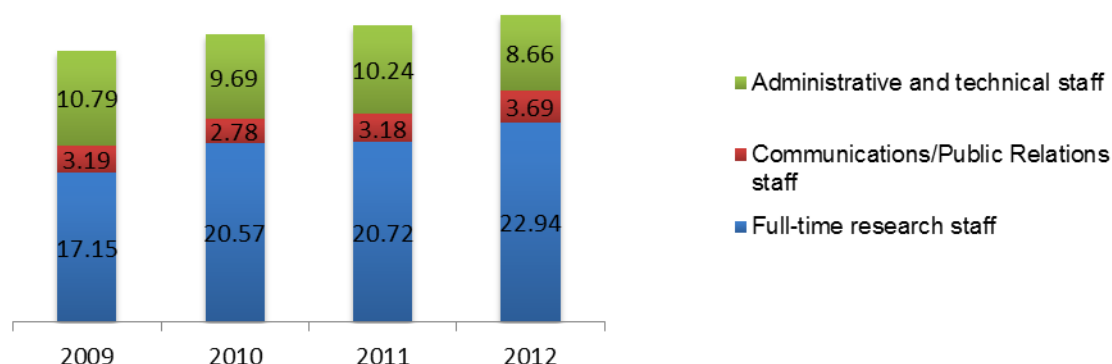


- Latin America is the region with the largest overall increase in staff size (31%), followed by South Asia without India (21%), India (10%), and East Africa (8%), whereas staff numbers fell by 8% in West Africa.
- There was an increase in grantees' autonomy to define the topics of their research projects, rising from 57% to 76% between 2009 and 2012. Yet it would be surprising if this were not the case, since the funded think tanks used a substantial but variable proportion of TTI funding for research projects. This overall increase in autonomy is shown in Figure 5.

**Figure 5: Overall increase in think tanks' autonomy in defining research topics**
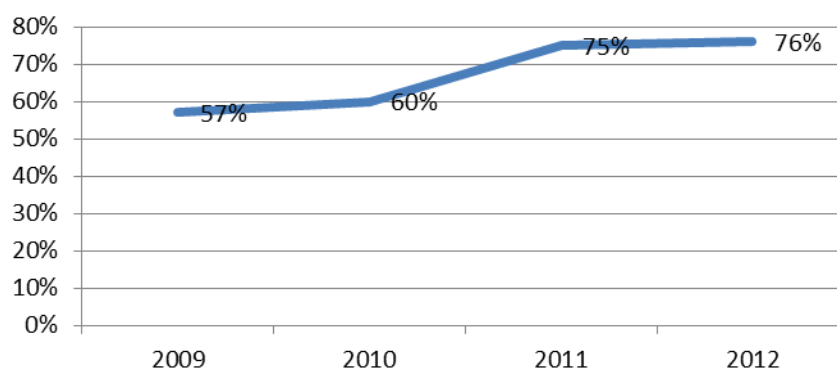


- The proportion of think tanks that routinely keeps records of M&E data rose from 50% to 75%, and fewer think tanks had to spend time re-assembling data for each of the varied information requests that came in from diverse sources (reduced from 44% to 21%).

More than 70% of the Stories of Change mention improved organizational performance, which aligns well with the evaluation team's findings during the field visits. Of these, 29 stories specifically mention changes related to the think tank's funding situation and changes in its internal systems. Most (18) describe improvements in institutional capacity, including better positioning of the think tank to respond to demands and to inform policy processes, improved strategic planning and research, and an overall strengthened position of the think tanks. Nine mention changes in staffing, ten mention changes in internal systems, and five refer to changes in the funding situation. Many of the stories include more than one of these types of change (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Number of Stories of Change by types of organizational performance changes mentioned**

| Category | Value |
|---|---|
| Change in institutional capacity | 18 |
| Change in staff | 9 |
| Change of internal systems | 10 |
| Change in funding situation | 5 |
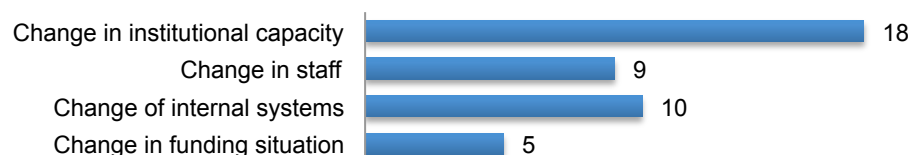
The trigger for internal change in more than half of the cases (27 Stories of Change) was an assessment undertaken by the think tank itself to respond to issues such as financial constraints, a perceived lack of institutional capacity, and inadequate capacity with regard to communications and outreach (Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Number of Stories of Change by types of triggers for internal change**

| Category | Value |
|---|---|
| Communication and outreach capacity | 9 |
| Institutional capacity | 7 |
| Financial constraints | 11 |
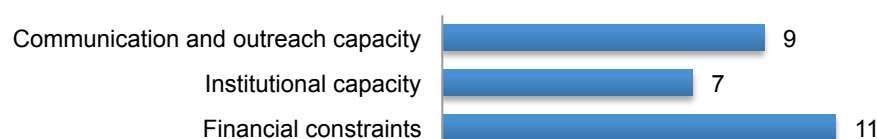
The Stories of Change demonstrate that think tanks are able to assess their own performance, to identify areas for improvements, and to improve their effectiveness. Moreover, they underscore the value that grantees place on TTI support. More than half mention the importance of the core funding provided by TTI to their research capacity. To a lesser degree, they refer to TTI capacity-building support, with most emphasis here on support for strategy development (Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Number of Stories of Change by types of TTI support cited as important**

| | Category | Value |
|---|---|---|
| TTI's capacity building support | Convening think tanks | 3 |
| | Research capacity support | 3 |
| | Funding proposals support | 3 |
| | Communications and outreach support | 4 |
| | Strategy development | 7 |
| TTI as a donor | Other purposes | 14 |
| | Investments in research capacity | 13 |
| | Core funding | 11 |
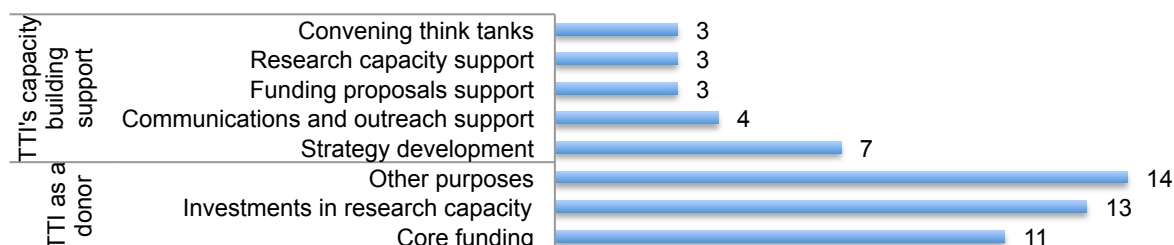
The finding that most grantee organizations value and have made good use of core funding and technical support to build capacity is in line with the experiences of other think tank capacity-building programmes that have included core funding and technical support. It is not, however, possible to assess whether TTI has been any more or less successful than other programmes in this regard.

The evaluation team's impression of the substantial impact of TTI on grantees' organizational development was confirmed during the field visits, by the M&E data, and by the Stories of Change. Moreover, in the follow-up questionnaire administered after the in-country visits, 97% of respondents agreed with the statement, "*The core funding has enabled funded think tanks to review and update their organizational strategies, including their governance, and research agendas and to strengthen human resources, including research, management, and communications staff (senior as well as junior).*"

But sustainable organizational development takes time. Some 91% of respondents to the follow-up survey agreed with the statement, "*Organizational capacity development processes take time.*" All think tanks stressed the need for funding beyond the current four-year grant period to allow them to complete these processes effectively. All survey respondents agreed with the statement, "*Even stakeholders that do not*

*belong to the funded think tanks feel that continuity for most funded think tanks is key for a Phase 2 so as not to waste the investment.*"
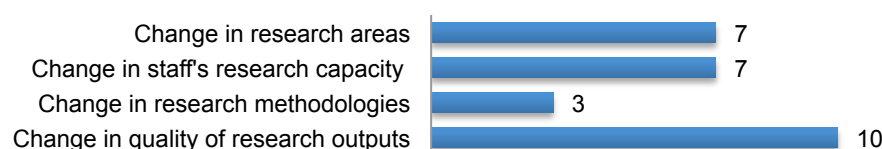
## 2.2.3.  Research quality

There is little empirical evidence of changes in research quality, though they may be revealed by the proposed follow-up peer-review exercise described in TTI's M&E strategy. However, there is ample evidence of efforts within the grantee institutions to enhance the quality of the research they undertake. Two examples are mentioned here:

- IIDS (India) established standardized University Grants Committee (UGS) terms and conditions enabling it to attract highly-qualified researchers who otherwise might have gone into university careers. It increased its research staff from 15 to 29 and its PhD-level staff from 5 to 11. It restructured its research units, appointed senior research staff, established a network of external researchers for collaborative projects, organized a series of guest lectures by high-level academicians from around the world, and introduced training on a wide range of research tools.

- AIAE (Nigeria) developed and implemented a research enhancement plan, elements of which are improvements in research team composition, peer review, and quality assurance measures. It is working to build research capacity and to establish in-house research committees. Training of research staff and a peer-learning seminar series have been intensified. The institute has further enhanced its scientific peer review procedures, organized methodology workshops, acquired research and data management software, purchased additional library collections and reading materials, and introduced new networking tools through e-library services.

Some 70% of the Stories of Change mention internal improvements, more than half of which involve enhanced research quality and research practices. These TTI-supported think tanks aim to produce improved research-based evidence and higher-quality research outputs through systematic and timely production and sharing of results, improved research methodologies, greater research capacity of staff, and work undertaken in new research areas or broadening existing ones (Figure 9). A Tanzanian think tank put in place quality control mechanisms for all of its research outputs, including both internal and external review (Story of Change from East Africa). One think tank conducted a research methodology training programme jointly with another institute, enabling researchers to develop new competencies (Story of Change from South Asia). In another case, implementation of a theory of change ensured that researchers could better define their objectives (Story of Change from Latin America).

**Figure 9: Number of Stories of Change by type of change in research practices**

| Type of change | Number |
|---|---|
| Change in research areas | 7 |
| Change in staff's research capacity | 7 |
| Change in research methodologies | 3 |
| Change in quality of research outputs | 10 |

The number of Stories of Change specifically mentioning changes in research quality was much lower than might have been expected from observations during the field visits. In fact, all of the grantees visited demonstrated substantial efforts to improve research quality, largely directly attributed to TTI inputs.

The stakeholders interviewed in-country agreed that the grantees had achieved improvements in research quality. All respondents to the follow-up survey indicated their agreement with the statement, "*Most think*

*tanks visited have invested in improved research capacity through staff training, investment in software, and improved internal peer review systems.*" Moreover, 88% agreed with the statement, "*There is strong evidence of increased research breadth and depth among the funded think tanks and more regular publications.*"

### 2.2.4. Communications and policy engagement

There is much evidence that grantees are improving their capacity and investment in communications and policy engagement:

- IPAR (Senegal) was founded by a coalition of organizations with a common concern and strong commitment to work on national policy issues. Its role is that of a neutral actor servicing associations and advocacy organizations for the rural sector with research-based evidence to enhance the quality of their advocacy. As part of strategy development, IPAR invested in a series of workshops with its partners to map its responsibilities and relationships with its environment (Figure 10).

**Figure 10: IPAR's relationships and roles**
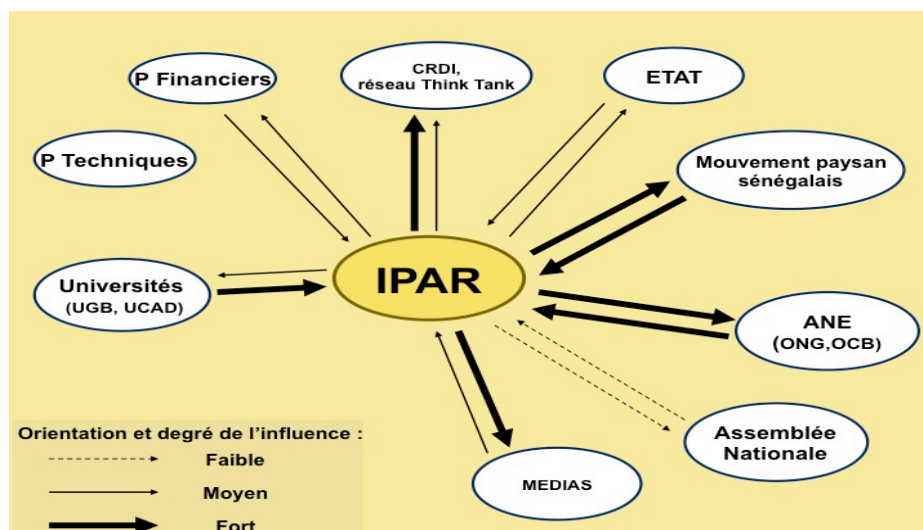


- IPAR has dramatically intensified its communications and outreach since 2010. It employed a communications expert and established a communications department in 2012. Its website displays a rich collection of scientific publications, campaign materials, policy briefs, newsletters, and information about various events that IPAR organized or participated in. An analysis of its research and policy outreach indicates rising performance, as well as increased engagement in public dialogue. Activities peaked in 2011, ahead of the elections that took place in the spring of 2012 (Figure 11).

**Figure 11: IPAR's media and publications outreach, 2007-2012**
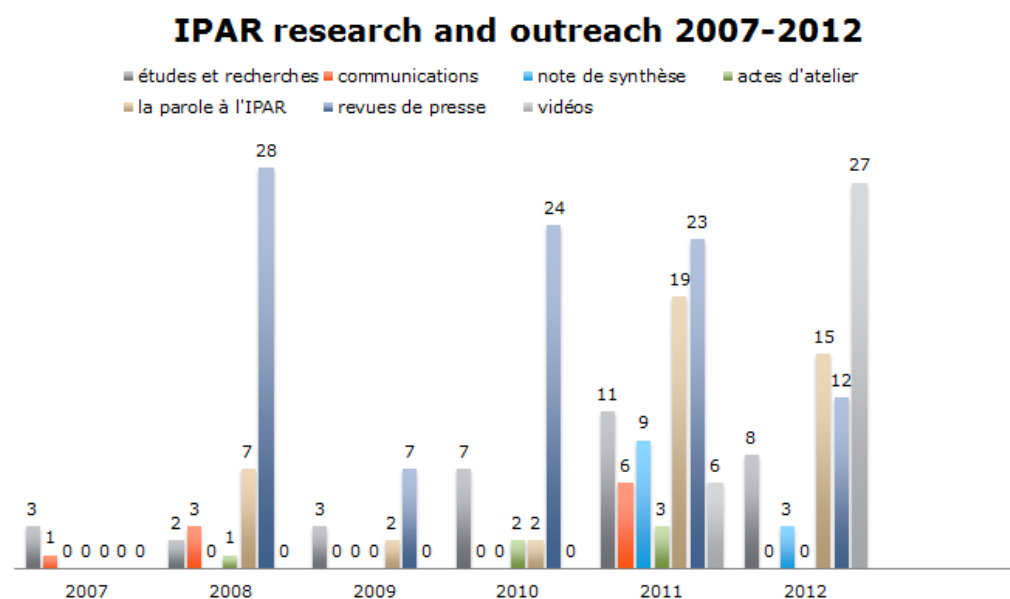


- IIDS (India) appointed a senior communications and outreach officer and established a research communications and policy engagement unit with a three-person staff. An analysis of project histories developed during the field visit indicated that this think tank has switched away "from a very research-driven approach before TTI, to an approach with much more involvement of policymakers throughout". It has also substantially increased its communications outputs (Table 3).

**Table 3: IIDS research outputs: Communication and Policy Engagement Activities**

| Outputs | Number per year before TTI grant (2003-2009) | Number per year during TTI grant (2010-2012) |
|---|---|---|
| Completed research projects | 48 | 40 |
| Working papers | 23 | 23 |
| Books (In English and Hindi) | 12 | 6 |
| Published papers in journals & edited books | 27 | 26 |
| Published articles in newspapers | 6 | 6 |
| Paper presentations in conferences/seminar | 25 | 86 |
| Events (conference / seminar / workshop) | 15 | 17 |
| Events (in-house lectures, including B.R. Ambedkar Memorial Lectures) | 11 | 23 |
| Policy briefs & Policy memos | 0 | 11 |
| Mentorship / Interns | 7 | 10 |

While 80% of the Stories of Change describe enhanced impact on policy and practice, very few attribute this to particular internal changes. However, 45% of the Stories of Change do mention specific changes in approaches to policy engagement. Most of these indicate that the think tank improved its linkages with policymakers, often with more precise targeting of its research-based evidence. For example, in Uganda one think tank strategically extended its policy engagement with various ministerial departments and agencies via various communications channels, including dissemination events and timely responses to media requests to provide opinions (Story of Change from East Africa). Other strategies mentioned are consulting and involving stakeholders and diversifying outreach and engagement practices. Figure 12 shows the main types of changes referred to and the percentage of Stories of Change mentioning each.

**Figure 12: Distribution of Stories of Change by type of change in engagement and outreach practices**



- Improve linkages with policymakers
- Consult or involve stakeholders
- Involvement in networks
- Diversify outreach practices
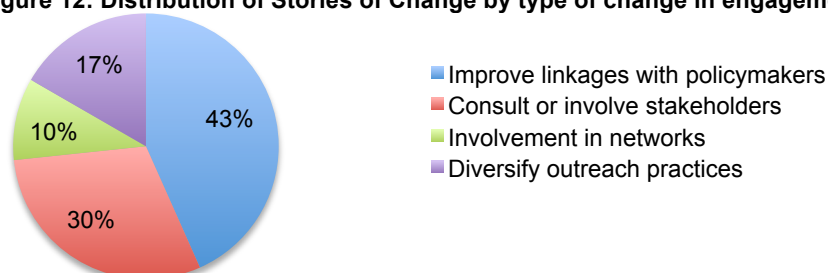
The M&E database presents a more mixed picture. A rise is measured in some types of communications – for example, the number of organizations producing an organizational brochure each year rose from 32 (61%) in 2009 to 35 (70%) in 2011. However, a slight reduction was registered in the number of organizations producing journal articles, from 80% in 2009 to 72% in 2012. There was also a slight fall in the number of organizations publishing books. Rather surprisingly, given TTI's emphasis on communications for policymakers, the data shows a slight reduction in the proportion of organizations producing policy briefs over the 2009-2011 period, from 39% to 36%, while the number produced by each organization remained static. However, a slight increase was recorded in the number of funded think tanks producing them, and higher absolute numbers produced were observed for 2012. More organizations are producing web-based publications (85% in 2012 compared to 66% in 2009). The increase in average number of web-based publications from 26 to 40 reflects a growing interest in web-based information over the past three years. Think tanks increasingly mention web-based publications as an important element of their communications strategy. Other approaches to communications and engagement that seem to be on the rise are roundtables (71% to 83%), conferences (79% to 96%), articles in newspapers (79% to 91%), contributions to reports with attribution (62% to 79%), radio appearances (73% to 81%), and special memos for policymakers (71% to 81%).

Based on information gathered during the field visits, the evaluation team assessed the degree to which the think tanks engaged with policymakers both directly and indirectly (via public dialogue and sensitization) before and after the TTI investment. As such, it was possible to 'map' think tanks' relative positions before and after initiation of TTI support. This was done for both the individual think tanks within their own regions and for regional averages to assess whether there had been any marked change. Figures 13 and 14, respectively, present the results for West African grantees and globally.

**Figure 13: West Africa mapping of think tank engagement before and after TTI support[9]**
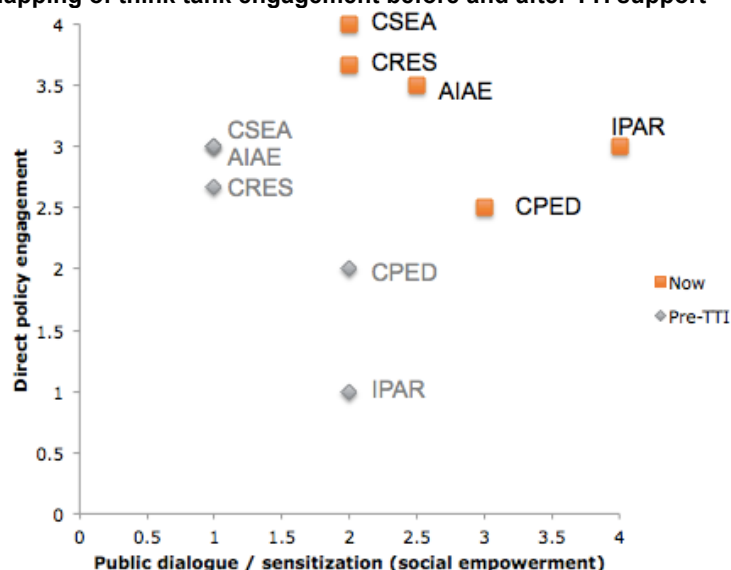


**Figure 14: Global mapping of think tank engagement before and after TTI support[10]**



Figures 13 and 14 show a significant shift in most think tanks towards more engagement with policymakers and the public, in line with the objectives of the TTI programme (see further the TTI programme management review in appendix 5).

Informants confirmed the evaluators' sense that the funded think tanks have considerably increased their investments in communications and outreach activities. A large majority of respondents to the follow-up survey (96%) agreed with the statement, "*Many of the funded think tanks have established communications units and strategies and refreshed their communications products.*" Some 95% agreed that, "*Funded think tanks are doing more communications and policy influence work than before they received funding.*" Similarly, 91% indicated agreement that, "*Funded think tanks have started to think and*

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9    The data presented here was generated by the evaluation team based on the wide range of data collected before and during the field trips. While the general direction of travel was confirmed by the results of the follow-up survey, the absolute and relative positions of individual TTs in West Africa (in Figure 13) and across all of the regions (in Figure 14), should be regarded as indicative only.

10   See footnote for Figure 13.

*act more strategically about alignment and networking with other organizations, many train knowledge intermediaries (especially journalists) and officials (civil servants and political parties, etc.) about policy content and policymaking processes.*"

## 2.2.5.   Changes in the external context

The increased emphasis on communications and policy engagement appears to be contributing to some changes in policy and practice at the national level. But this is difficult to attribute to changes in think tank performance during the life of the TTI programme so far. Many of the Stories of Change actually begin before the TTI programme started. Some of these examples of changes in the external context warrant mention here:

- Since 2010, the Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC) in Uganda has been involved in collaborative policy research on fertilizer use with the Crop Protection Department of the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF). Its aim is to help establish an institutional framework for promoting increased fertilizer use for higher agricultural productivity. While research findings have emerged, engagement with the ministry has been marked by lengthy bureaucratic procedures and delays, with policy work often being directly managed by the minister. To keep the process moving forward, EPRC has engaged with a number of other relevant stakeholder groups including the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development; relevant Parliamentary Committees, selected Local Governments, national research institutions, academia and the private sector at large. Much of its work consists of verification of findings to stimulate and strengthen the debate on fertilizer use to induce central authorities to take action. News media have picked up the issue and there is strong commitment from MAAIF to conclude all these processes and have the recommendations fed into the FY2014/15 budgeting process starting in late 2013.

- In Paraguay, the Instituto Desarrollo (ID) has acquired a key role in many policy processes. During the field visit, informants confirmed that ID is considered a, if not the, reference organization in territorial planning. The government's Secretariat of Technical Planning awarded it the contract to develop the National and Regional Development Master Plan, the first of its kind in Paraguay. A senior government representative shared the master plan with the evaluation team, underscoring the value he placed on ID's engaging his team in its development.

Eighty per cent of the Stories of Change describe changes in the external environment, including 30 stories involving changes in policies. Some 73% of these Stories of Change refer to changes at the national level, 17% at regional level, 7% at both the national and international level, and 3% at the local level (Figure 15).

**Figure 15: Distribution of Stories of Change by level of policy change**
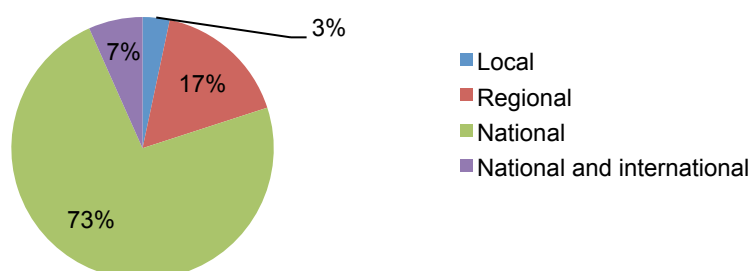


Among the changes described were new policies. In Nigeria, for example, a think tank contributed to a new education policy that led to substantial increases in enrolment. But most stories, 18, refer to modifications

in existing policies. In Peru, for example, a think tank contributed to improve social policies and to consolidate the new Social Development Ministry. In Senegal, a think tank helped agriculture departments to formulate an investment plan for the next five years, also contributing to development of the official agricultural policy (Story of Change from West Africa). Four Stories of Change describe new or enhanced methodologies in use by government, and two stories relate to enhanced electoral processes.

Another 29 stories describe contributions to changing the nature of the debate around a particular policy topic. Four stories tell of think tanks successfully influencing the views of policymakers, indicating that they have come very close to changing policy. In other stories, think tanks are said to have changed policymakers' views or contributed to widen debates within society. Figures 16 and 17 illustrate the distribution of these different types of change.

**Figure 16: Distribution of Stories of Change by type of policy change**



- New policies or legislation
- Change existing policies
- Change methodologies
- Change political party's positions
- Other changes
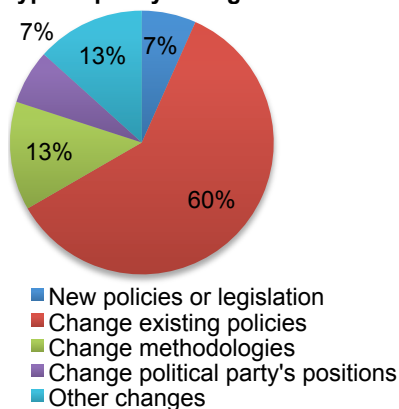
**Figure 17: Distribution of Stories of Change by type of change in debate**



- Change policymakers views, close to policy change
- Change policymakers views
- Change and promote debates
- Create awareness, influence society
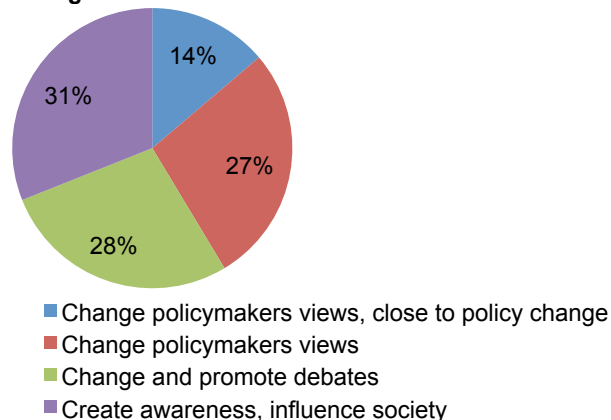
HF commissioned the Redstone Strategy Group to develop and test a methodology for assessing the impact of policies to which think tanks can claim some contribution. The idea is to calculate rates of return on investments in think tank capacity building. One such study estimated that an input of 15 person-years (costing approximately US $250,000) by IIDS staff to shape the 2012 UGC anti-discrimination regulations would yield a return of US $2.3 billion in increased lifetime income for low-caste Dalit graduates. This translates to a benefit-to-cost ratio of $9,000:$1 or 9,000%. Case studies in Peru, Bolivia, and Sri Lanka similarly estimate high benefit-to-cost ratios, at 1,500%, 650%, and 201%, respectively.

Some may be sceptical of these absolute numbers. Yet, even if the actual benefit-to-cost ratios are only a fraction of these, they are still substantially more than the current World Bank norms of 20% to 100%.[11] Furthermore, the evaluators are convinced by the evidence presented in the Stories of Change, much of which we verified during the field trips. TTI-funded think tanks are indeed achieving significant impact on policy and practice. In terms of developmental outcomes, this is an extremely worthwhile investment.

The evaluators' view that TTI-funded think tanks are contributing to policy processes is shared by many stakeholders. Some 94% of respondents to the follow-up survey agreed with the statement, "*The Stories of Change provide substantial evidence that the funded think tanks are contributing to policy processes, though several of the stories include periods that pre-date TTI funding.*"

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[11]   Independent Evaluation Group (2010), Cost-Benefit Analysis in World Bank Projects, Washington, DC: World Bank.

There is also evidence that TTI is achieving some policy impact beyond individual think tanks and beyond the immediate policy or programme level. Somewhat unexpectedly, the TTI-funded think tanks are starting to collaborate together with other think tanks to further increase their ability to shape regional and international policy:

- Centro de Análisis y Difusión de la Economía Paraguay (CADEP) and ID (the other Paraguayan think tank supported by TTI) joined forces with five other organizations to produce a common platform called 'Paraguay Debate' to challenge presidential candidates to respond to key policy issues (http://paraguaydebate.org.py). The Matching Funds mechanism was drawn on to support this activity, with inputs provided by a Peruvian think tank as well. Each organization contributes policy briefs based on their own research expertise. They brought their communication teams together and agreed on a common format. At the time of this writing, with the elections past, the participants indicated their commitment to keep the platform alive. They expressed a keen sense of having shaped the debate to some extent, though no attribution was possible.

- An unforeseen global policy impact emerged from the June 2012 GTTE conference in Cape Town. At that event, a subgroup of TTI-funded think tanks drew on matching funds to launch a collaborative project called the Southern Voice on Post-MDG International Development Goals (abbreviated as 'Southern Voice').[12] This network of 48 think tanks from South Asia, Africa, and Latin America aims to inform the international debate by providing data, evidence, and analyses derived from research in the countries of the Global South. The network is attracting global attention. In a March 2013 Center for Global Development (CGD) Policy Blog, Charles Kenney wrote of the network's potential:

> The Southern Voice exercise is hugely valuable. If we don't want to set up regions for failure, and if we do want to highlight particular development priorities, it would be best if the post-2015 goals broadly matched priorities and capacities in the developing world.

There is emerging evidence that TTI has had impact at the national level, especially in countries with a large number of grantees, such as India. By funding a critical mass of think tanks in Delhi, TTI has contributed to advance thinking about more sustainable models for independent policy research. For example, both the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) and IIDS are exploring the possibility of obtaining funding from the private sector. In countries where there are few other sources of credible research-based evidence, the TTI-funded think tanks are making a major contribution to the development policy debate.

The field visits to most countries revealed a growing interest in research-based evidence for development policy. In India, this was ascribed to several factors: decentralization, the reduced power of the planning commission, and an increasingly professional civil service. In Bangladesh, it was attributed to a growing and increasingly aware middle class and emergent investigative media. While clearly outside the influence of TTI, these changes nevertheless support the programme's rationale for investing in national think tanks.

These findings are broadly supported among TTI's wider stakeholder group. Some 95% of respondents to the follow-up survey agreed with the statement, "*Changes in demand for research-based evidence are happening in each country visited but very gradually.*" The question of TTI's own influence, however, remains, as 86% agreed with the statement, "*Changes in demand for research-based evidence are*

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12 Southern Voice was originally funded through the Matching Funds mechanism, but is now being funded from the TTI learning programme budget line.

*happening largely due to factors outside the influence of the TTI programme (increasing democracy, professionalization of the civil service, improving and more independent journalism, etc.).*" Some 98% agreed with the statement, "*TTI programme support in small countries is a significant contributor to the knowledge context, which is itself stimulating demand.*" All respondents agreed that, "*The clustering of TTI support to think tanks (e.g., around some capital cities, sub-regions of a country or sectors) provides a greater critical mass and new thinking about the relevance and value of think tanks that is showing signs of influencing the knowledge context as a whole.*"

## 2.3.  Programme implementation

### 2.3.1.  Programme establishment and overall implementation record

From a bird's eye perspective, four broad phases can be distinguished in the implementation of the TTI programme (Figure 18):[13]

- First, the *incubation period* extended from 2006 to approximately early 2008. HF developed the initial ideas for the programme, and entered into dialogue with IDRC to prepare the programme's conceptual underpinnings. They formulated a joint implementation plan in late 2007. Five scoping studies were commissioned starting in 2007 to assess organizational development support capacity in the four regions. IDRC began with one staff member in early 2008, who was joined by the first TTI programme leader in spring of that year.

- Second, the *start-up phase* lasted from early 2008 to mid-2010. During this period, the setup of the full programme was accomplished as originally envisioned, spread over four regions, starting with Africa and ending with the signing of memoranda of understanding and the first transfer of funding to the grantees in Latin America and South Asia in September 2010. The extension of the programme to support think tanks beyond Africa took longer than foreseen, as new funders joined later: the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) joined in January 2009; DFID and the development cooperation directorate of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGIS) came on board in January 2010. The programme was launched in the regions with events in May 2009 (Dakar) and in the autumn of 2010 (Buenos Aires and Delhi) after an intense grantee selection process lasting from mid-2008 to mid-2010. The majority of the programme's human resources was mobilized in the period from spring 2008 to summer 2009.

- Third, the *implementation phase* started in mid-2009 with the first transfer of funding to grantees in Africa. From the timeline overview, 2011 appears to be a year with relatively few activities, despite the three resource mobilization workshops that were organized late that year. In January 2011, the design of the M&E database was completed. An M&E 'accompaniment model' that had been experimented with in early 2010 was discontinued. The Matching Funds mechanism was developed and introduced in late 2011. This was also the year that preparations began for the GTTE in Cape Town. The departure of the programme leader was announced per December 2011. Little attention to learning could be found for 2011. Organizational development support to grantees continued in 2012, though its intensity was limited due to the time and energy needed to prepare for the GTTE. An important step was introduction in December 2012 of a pilot programme to assist West African grantees to enhance their communications and policy engagement. That programme is currently under implementation.

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[13]  We have inserted dates in as far as we could reconstruct the process based on available information. The evaluation team does not claim completeness of the information provided.

- Fourth, the *learning and review phase* started in April 2012 and is still under way at present. The beginning of this phase was marked by recruitment of a senior programme specialist for strategic outreach and communicating programme lessons. Key moments in this phase have been the GTTE conference in the summer of 2012, the start of this external evaluation, and the commissioning of several studies to better understand grantees' performance and their use of TTI funding. With the exception of the Matching Funds mechanism, which was introduced after a review of early experiences in late 2011, the structural learning of the TTI programme started rather late in the process. Ideally, it should have been initiated one year earlier, when first results and insights from the implementation phase could have been compiled.
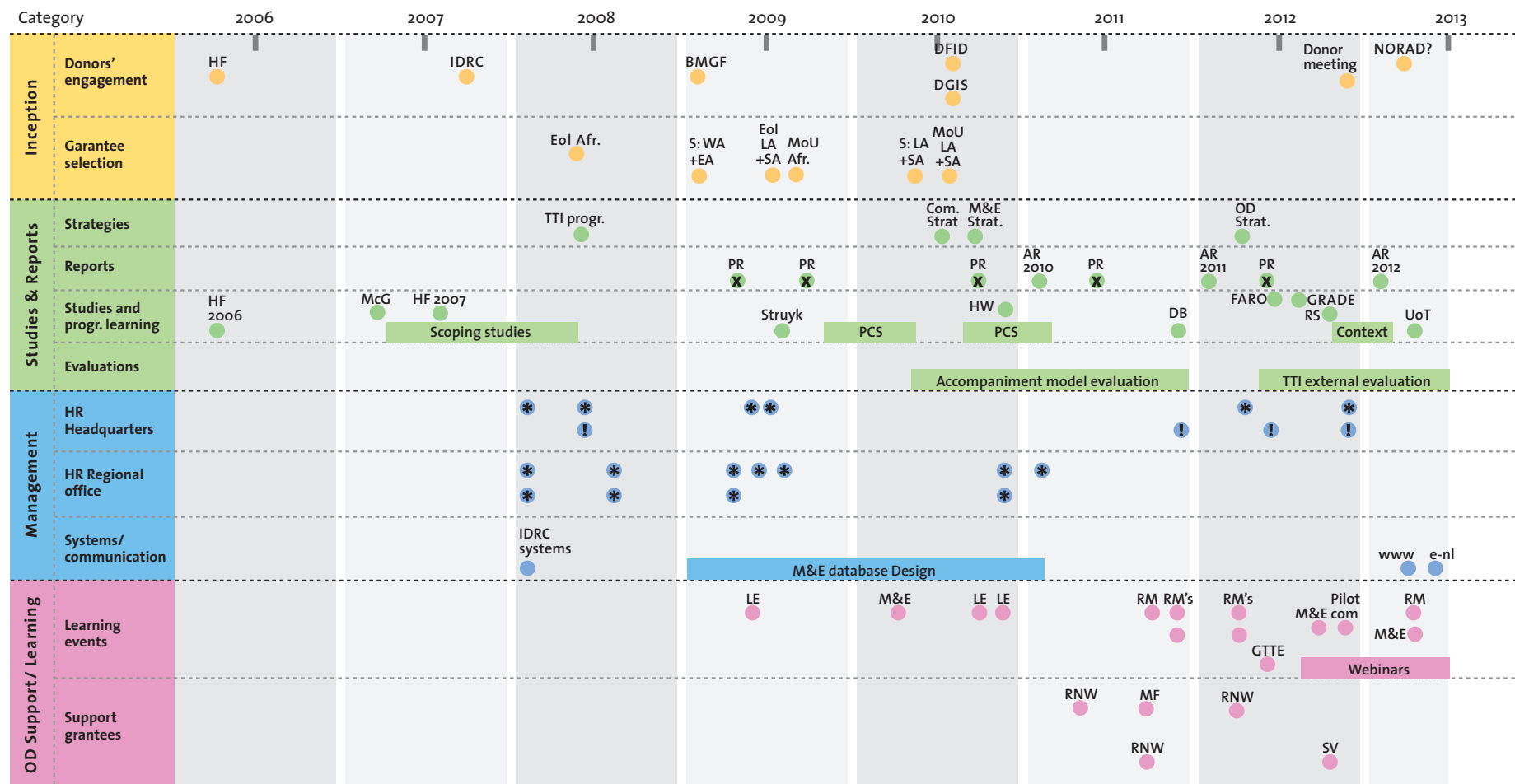
This timeline shows that various *studies were conducted over the entire implementation period* with a peak starting in the summer of 2012 and lasting until today. In each year, one or more studies was undertaken to prepare or support the programme or to provide complementary information that the funders felt necessary to allow them a good understanding of the work and issues at hand.

The TTI programme seems to have had the least momentum in 2011. The other years appear to have been better utilized to get the programme going and implemented. TTI's management should not be criticized for the programme's gradual start-up. First, the funders joined the programme step by step, which delayed processes. Second, time devoted to selecting the appropriate grantees was well spent to ensure proper results. As an open learning approach is central to the TTI programme design, the learning phase should certainly have been started earlier, in 2011. This delay was being forcefully remediated as of 2012 with a view to better informing existing and potential new donors about the benefits of this type of programme. TTI should now use this learning to also feed lessons back into its own activities to support the development of grantees.

Comparing TTI's actual implementation record with the original implementation plan formulated in 2007, our analysis is that the programme is running some two years behind, though we also recognize that the implementation plan's timeline was far too ambitious. Table 4 compares the 2007 implementation plan with actual performance. The implementation record as summarized above and depicted in Figure 18 is overall very positive, recognizing that the programme has had some difficult moments due to staffing shortfalls, innovations with mixed results (e.g., the M&E accompaniment model), delayed priority setting for programme learning, and the overly-complex governance and management arrangements which we will describe later.

**Figure 18: Timeline of TTI implementation, 2006-2013**

# Timeline TTI 2006-2013

## Legend

| | |
|---|---|
| HF | Hewlett Foundation |
| IDRC | International Development Research Centre |
| BMGF | Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation |
| DFID | Department for International Development |
| DGIS | Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs |
| Norad | Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation |
| EoI Afr. | Call for Expressions of Interest in Africa |
| S:EA&WA | Selection grantees East and West Africa |
| EoI LA+SA | Call for Expressions of Interest in Latin America and South Asia |
| S:LA+SA | IAG selection grantees Latin America and South Asia |
| MoU Afr. | Memoranda of Understanding for grant conditions signed in Africa |
| MoU LA+SA | Memoranda of Understanding for grant conditions signed in Latin America and South Asia |
| TTI progr. | The Think Tank Programme: Strengthening Policy Research for Development – revised June 2008 (plus Implementation Plan with Oct. 2010 addendum) |
| M&E Strat. | M&E Strategy |
| Com. Strat. | Communication Strategy |
| OD Strat. | Organisational Development Support document for discussion |
| HF 2006 | An initiative to strengthen policy analysis in developing countries. The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Feb. 2006 (rationale) and addendum October 21, 2010. |
| McG | McGann report to Hewlett Foundation – Best practices for funding and evaluating TTs |
| HF 2007 | Draft implementation plan for the Hewlett Foundation's Think Tank Initiative. Internal draft |
| Struyk | Raymond Struyk and Ann van Dusen. Think Tank Initiative Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy. Chicago: NORC (University of Chicago) |
| HW | Hattaway Communications Media Study – a quantitative assessment of the visibility of 67 TTs in national, regional and international news media as well as online |
| PCS | GlobeScan carried out the Policy Community Surveys for Africa (survey running from Nov. 2009 to April 2010) and South Asia and Latin America (survey running from Nov. 2010 to Feb. 2011) |
| DB | Dalberg Global Development Advisors contracted by BMGF to produce a study that will help inform the external evaluation |
| FARO | Grupo FARO – Influencing as a learning process: Think Tanks and the Challenge of Improving Policies and Promoting Social Change |
| GRADE | GRADE Study – Learning to monitor think tanks impact: Three experiences from Africa, Asia and Latin America |
| Redstone | Redstone Study commissioned – focus on: GRADE (Peru), ARU (Bolivia), IIDS (India), IPS (Sri Lanka), REPOA (Tanzania), IEA (Ghana) |
| UoT | University of Toronto. Study to secure clear and consistent information on donors' investments to support development research |
| Context | Context study: This project will focuses on understanding the interrelationships between developing country contexts and think tanks, as they seek to have an impact on policy that ultimately contributes to improvements in people's lives. |
| PR | Progress Report |
| ∗ | New TTI Staff |
| ! | New TTI Programme Leader |
| IDRC Systems | Introduction of IDRC Systems |
| www | TTI website up and running |
| e-nl | First TTI monthly newsletter launched |
| LE | Launch event |
| RM | Resource mobilisation workshops in Africa (Sept. - Nov. 2011: Dakar, Accra and Nairobi) in Asuncion (March 2012) in Sri Lanka (March 2013) |
| M&E | M&E workshop – Tanzania, June 2012, in Lima, April 2013 |
| GTTE | Global Think Tank Exchange, Cape Town |
| Pilot com. | Pilot programme to support communication/ policy engagement starts in West-Africa |
| MF | Introduction of the matching fund |
| RNW | Regional Networking / Peer Meeting |
| SV | "Southern Voice" to contribute to global post-2014 debate emerges out of Cape Town meeting |

**Table 4: Comparison of the 2007 implementation plan with actual performance**

| Year planned | Activity | Year achieved |
|---|---|---|
| 2008 (YR 1) | Application and selection process (East and West Africa) | 2008-2009 |
| | Pre-call for concept note (Latin America and South Asia) | 2009 |
| | First disbursement of funds for four years (East and West Africa) | 2009 |
| 2009 (YR 2) | Application and selection process (Latin America and South Asia) | 2009-2010 |
| | First disbursement of funds for four years (Latin America and South Asia) | 2010 |
| 2010 (YR 3) | First Learning Forum | 2012 |
| 2011 (YR 4) | Mid-term external evaluation; decision to continue programme | 2012-2013 |
| 2012 (YR 5) | Proposal to funders for renewal for years 6 to 10 | |
| | Second Learning Forum | |
| 2013-2014 (YR 6-7) | Second disbursement of funds for four years (all regions) | |
| 2015 (YR 8) | Third Learning Forum | |
| 2016 (YR 9) | External evaluation | |
| 2017 (YR 10) | Decisions by funders on possible extension of programme | |

## 2.3.2.　Selection of grantees

TTI put considerable energy into the selection of credible grantees that could make good use of TTI's support. Findings from the country visits, the review of the 17 grantees visited, and analysis of the Stories of Change indicate that this was time-consuming but a worthwhile investment. From the 607 applicants in the four regions, 52 grantees were selected. Most grantees appear to have used the funding well to enhance their research capacities, to increase their policy outreach, and to strengthen their overall organizations. Contracts with three grantees were terminated due to underperformance.

The selection was built on an initial indicator-based shortlist constructed around the key criteria of research quality, independence, and organizational capacity. This was then combined with detailed discussions among the TTI team about each shortlisted applicant. Shortlisted organizations were appraised through a process that included a self-assessment and a visit to the institution by a team including a TTI staff member and an external expert on organizational development. The process, particularly the organizational assessment, was welcomed by the future grantees and appreciated even by the non-selected think tanks. Representatives of many of these latter remarked that the process had constituted a good learning exercise for their organization.

While the same overall approach was applied in all regions and countries, some of the selection criteria were applied inconsistently, as indicated earlier. Some of the funded think tanks are fully independent. Others are governmental or university-owned. They also differ in size (in terms of budget and number of staff) as well as in sector focus, ranging from agricultural policy research institutes, to specialists in macro-economic modelling and social issues. Many grantees have an academic background, but there are also institutes with an action-research approach. Some have been established for decades, while others are recent start-ups. Some of the grantees do not seem to have been particularly in need of complementary support. Rather, they appear to have been selected according to other criteria that were not spelled out. We noted during at least two country visits critical remarks on the selection of some institutes, with surprise expressed and concern that such funding decisions would undermine TTI's credibility. The selection appears to have been partly a pragmatic response to the different country contexts and partly a deliberate attempt to experiment with support to a range of types of organizations. It remains, however, unclear to the evaluation team how these decisions were finally made. As far as TTI's own work processes are concerned, the lack of informative feedback to non-funded think tanks generated frustration, and in some

cases reflected badly on the initiative at the country level. We recorded remarks to this effect during country visits, but could not confirm the observation with our follow-up survey due to the few respondents from non-funded think tanks that the survey could include.

### 2.3.3.  Support to grantees

**Funding of grantees.** Grantees received four-year funding, though for African grantees the period was extended to five years. The African extension will allow TTI to start funding for all Phase 2 grantees at the same time (because the programme started one year later in South Asia and Latin America). The original funding model proposed for Africa included long-term core grants, two-year grants, and short-term capacity development grants. This setup was tested but eventually scrapped.

The level of core funding provided to grantees varies from about 10% to more than 80% of the respective institute's annual budget. Absolute amounts vary from Can. $133,000 to $800,000 per annum per institute. For large and well-funded institutes, like the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER) in Nigeria, the TTI funding is lower, only 8% of the total annual operating budget in this case. For young and small institutes, like the African Technology Policy Studies Network (ATPS[14]) in Tanzania, TTI's annual contribution constitutes up to 80% of the budget. The amount of funding allocated per grantee was determined by the TTI programme based on document studies, a review of the application, and field visits.

The evaluation team's information indicates that in East Africa TTI contributes 25.6% of the combined annual operational budgets of grantees. In West Africa, that figure is 22%. In Latin America it is 29.6%, in South Asia (without India) 24.6%, and in India 22.5%. Across all continents, TTI's funding per grantee accounts for approximately one-fourth of the annual operational budget of each. Obviously, the percentages received per grantee vary considerably. But as the figures for the four regions indicate, most grantees receive between 20% and 30% of their operational annual budget from TTI. This appears to be a reasonable proportion. From an overall programme perspective, the amount of core funding provided per institute reflects a well-chosen balance between the objective of providing space for grantees to develop and act more independently, and concern about creating dependence on TTI funding.

**Use of TTI funding and financial reporting.** The evaluation team compiled and analysed financial information from the 17 grantees visited during the field trips. These figures show that grantees in all regions have used TTI funding primarily to enhance the research capacities of their organization (Figure 19). Some regional differences were found in the use of TTI funding for institutional and organizational development. Grantees in Africa used 31% to 35% of the TTI funding to strengthen their organization, while counterparts in South Asia and Latin America used less, 22% to 25%, for that purpose. These figures come as no surprise, as they correspond with the level of development in the respective regions. Yet they remain estimates that should be read with caution, as the evaluation team had access only to budget planning figures and not to actual accounts of expenditures. Moreover, the financial information is incomplete, as it covers only the 17 institutes visited. A reliable analysis of the use of TTI funding across the programme will be possible only with complete annual financial reports and audit declarations.

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[14]  Recently the ATPS-Tanzania was renamed Science, Technology and Innovative Policy Research Organization (STIPRO). As the country visits for this evaluation took place before this change the abbreviation ATPS is used throughout the document.

It would be useful to review TTI's reporting processes, including the timing of its funding provision. For example, the format of the annual technical reports asks grantees to specify how they used TTI funding. But there is no request for them to report on expenses paid from TTI funding as part of their overall annual financial reports. Such figures might be difficult for grantees to provide if their financial administration is not sufficiently sophisticated to report on funding at different points in the financial year. Providing TTI grants aligned with the grantees' own financial years rather than TTI's own would be a way to strengthen the grantees' financial and administrative systems. Certainly, programme requirements should be harmonized with the grantees' own annual financial reporting and planning cycle where possible, to facilitate better M&E of expenses.

**Figure 19: Use of TTI funding according to budget allocation per region (average %)**
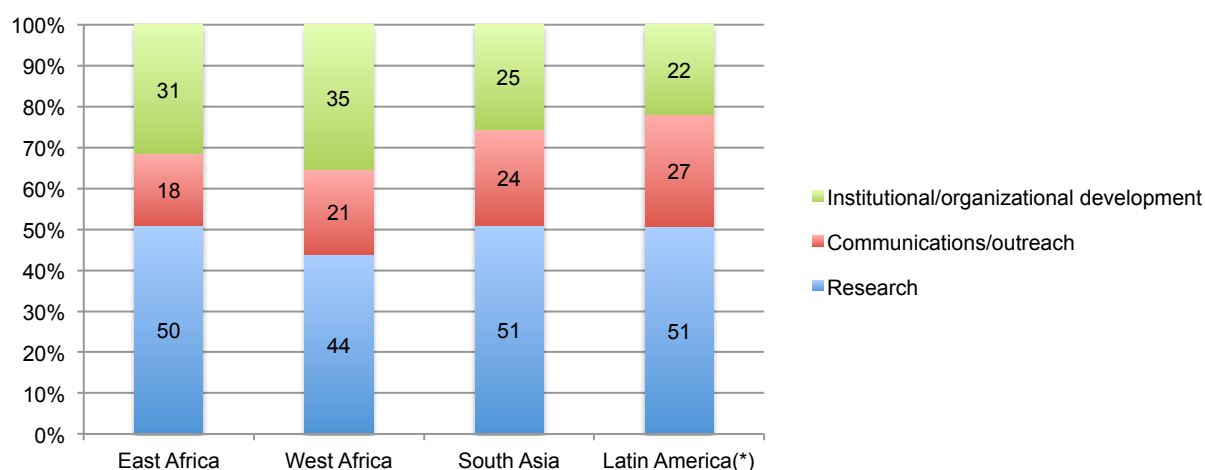


* Information available from two grantees only.

The majority of grantees consider the financial support to be the most important element of the TTI programme, though some grantees in Latin America mentioned the organizational development support as being of equal importance to their development. In addition to the three regional launch events which enabled grantees to meet and exchange experiences with peers, TTI organized five resource mobilization workshops and two M&E workshops. It also supported three regional peer-exchange meetings (two in South Asia and one in Latin America) and organized the GTTE in Cape Town. In late 2012, TTI introduced the West Africa pilot programme mentioned earlier, to strengthen grantees' policy engagement and outreach capacity. TTI hopes to replicate the accompaniment model used in that pilot in the other regions as well. Grantees were generally very positive about the workshops. But demand remains for more tailored organizational development support (in particular in Africa) as well as for support to initiatives that grantees themselves develop (mainly in Latin America and South Asia).

**TTI Matching Funds mechanism.** As of late 2011, TTI began to pay more attention to the potential of working through its grantees. It developed the Matching Funds mechanism to promote peer learning and collaboration both among grantees and between TTI-funded think tanks and other stakeholders in a policy process. The formula of TTI providing an amount between Can. $20,000 and $50,000, which is matched by a 25% contribution by the grantee to overall costs, is smart and ensures grantee ownership of proposed initiatives.

Use of the matching funds has been greatest in Latin America and South Asia, and there is further scope to increase deployment of this mechanism, especially in Africa (Table 5). Stakeholders in Latin America, in particular, are highly positive about the Matching Funds mechanism, as it provides a means for them to connect better with their policy environment via joint initiatives. Regional networking and peer events in Latin America and South Asia were supported with matching funds, as was 'Southern Voice', through which Southern think tanks are involved in the global post-MDG development goals debate.

**Table 5: Use of the TTI Matching Funds mechanism as of 1 May 2013**

|  | Latin America | South Asia | West Africa | East Africa |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of projects funded | 11 | 11 | 4 | 2 |
| Total amount funded (in Can. $) | 518,000 | 406,000 | 169,000 | 86,000 |
| Per cent of Matching Fund budget provided | 51 | 41 | 17 | 7 |
| TTI funds budgeted per region (Can. $) | +/- 1,000,000 (note: amounts were not fixed per region) | | | |

In all four regions, grantees highly valued the personal support provided by TTI's regional programme officers who form a crucial link between the grantees and TTI headquarters. The regional officers have been able to cater to many detailed management issues in support of the grantees and been instrumental in creating trust and understanding between the grantees and TTI. Nonetheless, their role merits review in light of the overall objectives of the programme and possible changes to be introduced in Phase 2. We will return to this later.

### 2.3.4. Mechanisms for learning

TTI and its funders have invested considerable time and energy in commissioning and compiling a variety of studies that have been important for the programme's initiation and implementation. Studies were conducted to support development of the programme's basic concepts and implementation plan, to inform the grantee selection process, to better understand the availability of organizational development expertise in the four regions, and to shape the M&E framework. TTI is also starting to build a body of learning about the work and approaches of individual grantees and how they engage in their respective policy environments.

Such investments are important for a programme operating in an area in which comparatively little knowledge is available. The evaluation team's own desk study on capacity development support to think tanks confirms that this is new terrain for international cooperation. But we do question whether all of the studies have been equally pertinent and sufficiently used to inform TTI's overall learning. For example, elaborate scoping studies were done to identify organizational development capacities in the respective regions. Yet, grantees have made relatively little use of structural organizational development support, and where such support was mobilized, it was done through tendering. Similarly, the Hattaway Communications Media Study appears to be primarily an investment to inform the funders about the relevance of think tanks in international media. We found no evidence that this study had been extensively used. A final example is the study carried out by Dalberg Global Development Advisors to inform this external evaluation. Our evaluation team reviewed the document but found it to be of limited utility.

In 2012, TTI began to invest systematically in activities to promote internal learning about the programme and to support its outreach to other international cooperation partners. This is a positive step, which in our view could have been taken much earlier. A financial analysis confirms that such outreach has received comparatively little attention. Up to March 2012, TTI had used only 5% of its total budget for learning, which in the evaluation team's view is insufficient for a programme of this type.

Results of the studies that have been commissioned (e.g., the Redstone Strategy Group study, the GRADE study, and the Grupo Faro study) can be fed back into the programme and into exchanges with grantees, to help build an international body of learning about capacity development support to think tanks. However, given the late start, no thorough synthesis of TTI's overall learning from its work in the four regions has yet been accomplished. To derive the full benefits of the programme's experiences and the studies it has done and will do in the future, a systematic effort is required to analyse and share programme experiences and to synthesize lessons learned. Products of these efforts should feed into discussions about Phase 2 design and also be used to create the outreach products necessary to inform new potential funders of think tank capacity building. As such, TTI would become a more instrumental actor in raising awareness and understanding of effective ways to support the work of think tanks in the Global South. This is in line with Objective 3 of the programme.

First steps have been taken to intensify learning through 'webinars', which were launched in the autumn of 2012. TTI organizes these one-hour sessions on a needs basis. They allow participants to engage with presenters – and with one another – on a range of topics. Participation is optional and targets in particular junior grantee staff who may have less opportunity to travel. As of this writing, 11 webinars had been held, but participation was low and no evaluation of the seminars had been done. This is a young initiative that merits further testing, as it appears to have the potential to grow in terms of both participation and relevance. The value of future sessions will depend on the presenters that TTI can mobilize from within its own ranks and externally and the amount of attention it puts into facilitating and moderating exchanges.

A final observation about TTI's learning is the limited availability of its learning products and studies on its new website. This and other outlets offer considerable scope to communicate the outcomes of TTI's studies and documents more widely, for example, through its recently created electronic newsletter.

## 2.3.5.  Monitoring and evaluation

TTI has invested considerable resources in M&E. Its 2010 M&E strategy outlines a comprehensive approach and underlying M&E rationale that includes accountability and decision making, support to organizational learning and performance, learning and adaptation within the programme, and learning for the wider policy-research community. The strategy also presents a set of principles: collaboration, triangulation, measuring impact, knowledge sharing, and attribution.

For each of these areas, the strategy describes intermediate outcomes, indicators, and ultimate outcomes. A range of tools are to be used to gather the necessary data: a monitoring questionnaire (to be administered in full before and at the end of the grant and a self-administered shortened form for annual updates), a diagnostic guide (for the selection process), an approach to peer review (to be used before and at the end of the grant), a policy community survey (to be undertaken in each country before and at the end of each funding period), project approval documents, annual grantee reports, visit reports, and annual project completion reports.

This is an excellent strategy. The results framework is closely aligned with the theory of change (described elsewhere in this report). The intermediate and ultimate outcome statements are sensible, as are the indicators. The rationale underpinning the framework fits well with the programme's ambition to learn, for itself as well as for others. Its principles too, overall, fit well with the programme's ambition to support grantees and to help them to achieve their own objectives.

In late 2011, BMGF commissioned Dalberg Global Development Advisors to produce a 'step-change' framework as a complimentary tool for assessing grantees' performance. The resulting framework aims to

identify grantees that demonstrate significant change across the three dimensions of Objective 2 of the results framework (i.e., organizational performance, research quality, and policy links). Based on the grantee's starting point, it stratifies grantees into 'game changers' (strong think tanks doing well), 'future leaders' (think tanks doing well but from a weaker starting point), 'solid performers' (strong grantees performing adequately), and 'long shots' (grantees not doing well from a weak starting point). The framework was tested at the Cape Town meeting, with TTI staff from each region applying it to two think tanks in their region. The conclusion at the time was that the results did not correlate very strongly with TTI programme staff's perception of progress.

The purpose of the Dalberg framework remains unclear to the evaluators. It seems overly complex and will be difficult to apply. However, the evaluators agree on the usefulness of a simple tool for assessing progress in the three dimensions of Objective 2. The evaluators tried out a simpler (though still further to be developed) tool to map changes in the way that grantees approach policy engagement – the 'mapping' of think tanks' direct and indirect engagement with policymakers before and after TTI support (see figures 13 and 14).

TTI has used most of the tools described in the M&E framework. Its initial assessments of potential grantees certainly contributed to the successful selection of candidates. Even those that were not funded found the process a useful way of taking stock and clarifying their thinking. – TTI initially conducted policy community surveys and compiled information about the knowledge context in each country where the programme is active. The evaluation team found these to be extremely useful, but there is little evidence that they have been used by TTI. The various project documents produced were similarly useful for the evaluation team. But again, while the results were provided to each grantee, there is little evidence that they were systematically synthesized and used at programme level by TTI.

By far, TTI's largest investment of resources, both time and money, has been to administer the M&E questionnaires and develop and enter the information into the M&E database. The database was originally intended to house much more than just the data from the M&E questionnaires. The 2010 M&E strategy describes its aim as follows:

> [To manage] all needed data sources including quantitative data (from the M&E questionnaires etc.), qualitative data (from Project Approval Documents, institutional monitoring visit reports, grantees' annual reports etc.) to enable the production of a standard set of reports on individual grantees or aggregated on selected groups and to construct 'institutional stories'. It would include information on perceptions of the demand for policy-relevant information by policy makers; general changes to the funding situation for independent policy research institutions, internationally or by region; changes in organizational management practices or institutionalization of desirable practices across the cohort of institutions, and to make this available to selected audiences.

Some information has been entered into the system beyond the quantitative and qualitative data solicited via the M&E questionnaires. Text snippets can be found from peer reviews, country visit reports, and the policy community surveys. However, very little use has been made of this data, other than to generate a series of 'data stories' for the EC in 2013.[15]

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15   The titles of these three reports are as follows: Organizational Performance: Global and Regional Trends in Funding and Expenditures; Policy Linkages: Raising Demand for Research in Paraguay; and Research Quality: Strengthening In-house Capacity in West Africa.

The evaluation team's conclusion, after exhaustive work on the M&E database, is that the dataset is appropriate for measuring the key dimensions of Objective 2; however, Objective 1 and Objective 3 are not well covered. The database did provide useful statistical information to support observations made during the field visits. It is also useful for tracking the progress of the funded think tanks on certain indicators over time, which may help to inform and justify funding decisions. However, using this data alone it is not possible to assess 'impact', as only the funded think tanks are included. The sample is, moreover, small and very heterogeneous, and there is no provision for constructing a counterfactual scenario. Furthermore, many of the variables of interest appear to have been collected only for the baseline year (2008-2009); and the evaluation team has some doubts about the accuracy and validity of these data as well as their completeness, precision, reliability, and timeliness.

The evaluation team identified 12 key indicators for which there are reasonably complete data in the database. These relate to two of the three dimensions of the step-change framework: 'operational capacity' and 'outreach to the public and to policymakers'. The team analysed those data across all grantees, and also extracted the data for the 17 funded think tanks visited during the field trips. Analysis of these 12 indicators for the overall data showed very few global trends. Those that emerged have been described in the relevant sections of this report.

The evaluation team considers the M&E strategy to be basically sound and found its principles to enjoy strong support among TTI's wider group of stakeholders. However, 95% of follow-up survey respondents agreed with the statement, "*The principles embedded in and the basic design of the M&E strategy are sound, and could provide useful qualitative and quantitative evidence to support programme implementation*" and "*The M&E strategy can support Objective 3 of the TTI Programme: to inform the behaviour of other think tanks and encourage donors to support Southern policy research.*" It is the view of the evaluation team that the M&E strategy has not been effectively implemented. Most resources for M&E have gone into the database from which TTI has derived very little benefit so far and the grantees virtually none.

### 2.3.6.   Governance and management

The overall governance and management of the TTI programme, split into an advisory IAG, an EC, and TTI leadership, is considered adequate by the most interviewees, though we recorded some concerns about the functioning of each.

**Governance.** Questions were raised about the IAG's advisory role and how it could be made more relevant to the programme. IAG meetings are short and take place only twice a year. Concrete suggestions were not made, however, for a different way of interacting with the IAG. The EC members are valued for their strong commitment, for the strategic guidance they provide, and for their accompaniment of the TTI leadership in managing the programme. Being active in the EC permits the donors to participate in and contribute to the learning curve of the programme. At the same time, the institutional setup of the EC, in which representatives of HF, BMGF, and IDRC have voting rights while the TTI programme leader has only ex officio status, creates situations in which management decisions, including decisions on how to run the programme, are taken at the level of the funders. This arrangement absorbs considerable resources, too, which then cannot be used for other programme activities. If the current governance structure is continued – which from a learning perspective is a good idea – the intensity of the support required should be recognized and monitored. Preparation and follow-up for meetings generates considerable overhead costs for the TTI management team. A critical look at the agendas of the EC meetings may help to strengthen its focus on strategic decision-making and learning items, excluding items on which the EC moves into operational decision-making that is better left to programme management. A balance needs to be found

between strategic guidance and proactive learning, on one hand, and where necessary, a more detailed involvement in steering the TTI programme on the other.

IDRC plays a particular role within TTI as a programme funded by multiple donors. It is one of the 'owners', with oversight duties and voting rights in the EC. But it is also the agency implementing the programme. The TTI programme, including its staff, is embedded within IDRC as an IDRC programme. TTI is supervised institutionally by one of IDRC's directors, who is also a member of the EC. IDRC's multiple roles may affect the independent oversight function of the EC. For example, during a seven-month period in 2011-2012 the director of IDRC's Social and Economic Policy Programme functioned as acting TTI programme manager while also being a full member of the EC (we found no decision in EC minutes suspending the full membership of the director during this period).

**Management.** IDRC has been instrumental in setting up TTI, and there is broad agreement among interviewees that "the programme would not be where it is today without IDRC", as one of them worded it. TTI has been built on IDRC's systems and procedures, used its institutional infrastructure in Ottawa and in the regions, and profited from the availability of experienced IDRC staff joining the TTI programme. Our visits to IDRC regional offices and our exchanges with regional staff confirmed this. The evaluation team did not identify any organization in the four regions visited that would have been an alternative to run the programme at such global scale. Compared to those of many other donors, TTI's management and reporting systems can be described as flexible and effective. Grantees, furthermore, welcome TTI's 'light-touch' support for them to develop their own strategies and plans.

The wider group of stakeholders confirmed this. All of the respondents to the follow-up survey agreed with the statement, "*TTI management systems are flexible and effective, and the light-touch and support for think tanks to develop their own strategies and plans are welcomed by grantees.*"

TTI constituted a new type of programme for IDRC, and it has not been easy for IDRC to integrate it into its other operations. For example, IDRC needed time to set up a funding and reporting mechanism serving multiple donor requirements. Donors' staged entrance into the project required several amendments to be made to the agreements between IDRC and the respective funders. This process was not foreseen, but it was necessary to comply with the requirements of the different funding partners. A trust-fund construction, similar to the World Bank basket funding mechanism was discussed but considered unsuitable by some of the donors.

In terms of human resources, the frequent changes in TTI leadership warrants mention. The programme has had four leaders over a period of six years, which is never good for an initiative of this size. It has also raised questions by outsiders. The evaluation team considers the appointment of the current acting programme leader as an appropriate choice, given his background. Nonetheless, it will not be easy to lead the programme in its entirety, including managerial tasks, while at the same time providing in-depth content inputs during a period in which the programme is under review and preparing for its next phase. Additional programme management staff is currently being mobilized for headquarters to cover some of this portfolio. But we question whether this will be enough to respond fully to the gap that this appointment leaves in the areas of organizational development support, learning, and M&E.

We also found an unbalance of staffing between TTI's headquarters and its regional offices. The 2007 implementation plan stipulates mobilization of three full-time staff for headquarters and one full-time programme officer and a 20% full-time equivalent (FTE) senior programme specialist per region. As of this writing, the staff at headquarters in Ottawa had grown to 5.6 FTE while the regional staff remained at the

level of operations foreseen in 2007. Several funders commented on the slow staffing up of the programme. The current 12% of the budget devoted to staffing seems overall reasonable compared to other major capacity development programmes. Our analysis, however, after reviewing the entire programme, indicates that this percentage is likely to be at the lower end. TTI has a strong operational component as well as a strong learning element that is costly in terms of human resources.

Concerning the regional staff, the role of the regional programme officers should be refined. Several interviewees referred to them as the cornerstones of the programme. They are charged with many varied tasks and pay, on average, one to two visits per year to each grantee. While this frequency is relatively low, they are in nearly daily contact with grantees via telephone, Skype, and email. A considerable part of their time appears to go into micro-management, which prevents them from providing higher-level strategic guidance and facilitation of the programme at the regional level. A clarification of their profile is needed in accordance the direction the programme is set to go.

### 2.3.7.  Finance

We were able to compare overall spending to overall approved budget for the period from January 2008 to March 2012. Examining the overall budget versus expense as per March 31, 2012, a considerable budget variance was evident between total expenses as per March 2012 (CAD $49.8 million) and the approved budget for January 2008 to May 2015 (CAD $113.2 million). As of March 31, 2013, however, total TTI spending increased to CAD $70.6 million, against a revised budget of December 2012 of CAD $102.3 million (reduced by CAD $10.9 million). This translates to a programme spending of 69% of the total budget, at a point when the programme implementation time had completed 72%. Against this increased spending by March 31, 2013, and revised budget, TTI expects to fully spend its revised budget and the savings by the end of the programme. The evaluation team notes that spending in Financial Year that last from 1 April 2012 through to 31 March 2013 has been according to expectations. However, care will be needed to ensure that spending does not slow down over the remainder of Phase 1 so as to avoid a possible further reduction of financial commitments by the TTI funders.

The administrative services expenses of the implementing agency, at approximately 9.6% of the total programme budget, seem to be at the high end. The European Commission, for example, allows programmes to charge 7% for this purpose. Our assessment of 9.6% being high seems particularly true as staff recruitment costs, office costs, logistical support, and communications are all budgeted separately as direct project costs under programme implementation.

Looking at the financial data in light of the other data collected during this evaluation, four main findings emerge:

- First, for a programme with an open learning approach, TTI spends little on specific capacity development and learning activities. The impression from the expense flows is that the TTI teams did most of the coaching and technical support themselves, which would explain the relatively high programme implementation costs (16% for staffing, travel, and logistics). But this would hold true only if TTI staff spent much of their time coaching and providing learning support rather than on administration and management. Our narrative on learning and organizational development support activities does not support this suggestion.

- Second, considerable under-spending on organizational development is evident up to March 2012. Only Can. $1.1 million was spent, which is 22% of the total budget approved until May 2015. Of this amount, only 30% was spent for organizational development activities in both African regions,

compared to the 42% spent on organizational development in Latin America and the 28% spent in South Asia. This variation is mainly caused by the regions' different use of the Matching Funds mechanism (see Table 5). This instrument has been taken up more slowly in the two African regions than in the two other regions due to capacity constraints. The trend in organizational development spending changed in Financial Year 2012-2013, when total organizational development spending jumped to CAD $2 million. There is concern that the overall low level of spending to date might lead to spending pressures later, including for organizational development. Pressures to quickly disburse funds should be avoided, and spending on activities kept in line with grantees' ability to absorb and to use investments effectively.

- Third, the distribution of staff remains uneven. TTI staff in Africa was at 1.2 FTE per region, which was equal to that in Latin America and less than in South Asia, where a staff of 2 FTE works in New Delhi. However, African think tanks operate in a relatively weaker development situation than their colleagues in the other regions. This raises the question of whether the current distribution of TTI's human resources among the regional offices reflects actual support needs. Only the South Asia regional office has two full-time staff, while African grantees are likely to need more time for support than those in the other regions. The most striking indicator of this need is the low use of the Matching Funds mechanism in both African regions. Latin American grantees made immediate use of this complementary funding opportunity. But African think tanks – as the evaluation team was told during country visits – needed more time to formulate proposals in line with the instrument's objectives. Hence, more accompaniment could be provided by the regional programme officers.

- Fourth, TTI's overall budget for learning is rather low for a programme that intends to pilot new approaches. TTI's spending on learning – including the TTI learning programme, use of consultants, advisory services, peer reviews, and M&E – is 7.5% of the budget over the entire programme period. This comes to CAD $8.5 million, of which only 23% had been spent by March 2012, though expenses did increase the following year due mainly to the GTTE in Cape Town in June. Small amounts were used to fund external consultants to support TTI (CAD $500,000, which is about 1% of total programme expenses up to March 2012). The relatively slight expenditures on advisors and consultants to support the grantees in their organizational development raises questions about the quality and continuity of the support provided by TTI – even if such support is effectively given by TTI staff as well. If more than simple interventions in organizations are intended, highly-qualified advisors will generally be required to guide institutes to successful completion of a change trajectory over a longer period of time. The fact that TTI primarily invested in consultants for the organizational development diagnostics during the initial part of the programme (until March 2010) with no major expenses thereafter indicates that organizational development support to follow up on these diagnostics has been weak.

# 3. Recommendations for Phase 2

TTI is a very good programme, and much has been achieved. The programme is addressing a significant development challenge, and should carry on broadly as initially planned.

## 3.1. Phase 2 design

### 3.1.1. Theory of change and overall design

The Theory of Change and overall programme design are sound, but Phase 2 could be strengthened in a number of ways:

1. A re-emphasis is needed on the multiple dimensions of the programme, especially support to individual think tanks to help them strengthen their organizational development, research, and policy engagement and communications. Renewed attention should also be given to support grantees' more proactive engagement in their own environments, and to learning and promoting good practice and lessons among donors and other stakeholders.

2. A conscious decision should made not to expand beyond the existing countries and grantees until the programme is making good progress towards all of its objectives. Support to the current grantees should continue for the initially planned ten years, unless they fail to deliver acceptable progress.

3. Effort across the three objectives should be re-balanced, with a substantial increase in work towards Objective 3. This should be accompanied by continued effort to help think tanks identify their strengths and weaknesses and take advantage of opportunities for improved organizational performance within Objective 1. Increased effort is also recommended towards the organizational development element of Objective 2.

4. More flexibility is needed in the balance of support at the country level between funding and other types of assistance to individual think tanks, alongside funding for other think tanks and support to other actors through the Matching Funds mechanism. Support should be considered for policymakers as well, to enable them to make better use of research-based evidence. This could result in considerable variation in the overall shape of the programme in different countries.

5. Space for experimentation should be maintained. However, improved criteria should be developed for country and grantee selection. Furthermore, exit strategies need to be formulated for existing grantees and countries, and transition arrangements developed for Phase 3. All of these must be transparent and clear to stakeholders outside TTI.

### 3.1.2. Country and grantee selection

New donors bring valuable knowledge about and networks in particular countries. Bearing this in mind, along with recommendation 2 above, once the programme is effectively delivering on all of its objectives in the current countries and with the current grantees, country and grantee selection could be improved in several ways if more funds become available and new donors express a preference for funding certain countries:

1. A pragmatic approach should be followed in country selection, making use of opportunities that additional donors may bring to the programme as long as the process and choices made are transparent.

2. The criteria for grantee selection should be reviewed to ensure that equal weight is given to research and policy outreach capacity.

3. A larger number of applicants should be shortlisted from which to select the final grantees through visits and the institutional assessment process.

### 3.1.3. Support to grantees and others at the country level

All think tanks and most other stakeholders were very positive about the support provided by TTI, especially the combination of core funding and technical support with encouragement for grantees to develop their own strategies and targets for organizational development. TTI's capacity-building work could, however, be further strengthened:

1.  TTI should commit to continue core grants and other support to the existing grantees for the originally planned ten years unless they fail to deliver acceptable progress, neglect correct procedures, or fail to submit acceptable progress reports. Each think tank should be required to produce a transition plan that assumes no further funding will be available from TTI after the ten-year mark. It is unrealistic, however, to expect think tanks to be sustainable thereafter unless more is done to create an enabling environment for them to operate in.

2.  The organizational development work should be reinforced. This is running well behind schedule and expected budget, especially in Africa. Only 30% of the organizational development support budget was spent for West Africa and East Africa combined. A review should be conducted with the grantees of the effectiveness of TTI's wide range of organizational development activities. The aim would be to identify those that are most cost-effective and to target any additional support that may be necessary to help grantees in Africa to make use of the Matching Funds mechanism.

3.  Grantees' experiences with the Matching Funds mechanism should be reviewed, exploring whether this instrument might be further developed to better meet grantees' needs in terms of amounts provided and duration of funding. The review should also examine whether this mechanism, or a similar one, could accommodate requests for support by stakeholders that are working with grantees but are currently not receiving TTI funding.

4.  TTI programme staff should play a more strategic facilitating role, helping think tanks to identify and then access organizational development support from sources other than TTI staff. This revised orientation should include using the regional resources identified in the scoping studies and involvement of grantees, as well as encouraging grantees to apply for matching funds for organizational development activities. Moreover, more regional peer learning and organizational development events should be organized with appropriate follow-up.

5.  The organizational development scoping studies that were conducted in 2007-2008 should be updated.

6.  The emphasis on resource mobilization through the regional resource mobilization workshops should be continued, with more active follow-up of participating grantees after the workshops.

7.  The pilot programme in West Africa through which grantees are assisted in enhancing their communications, outreach, and public engagement in policymaking should be reviewed. The aim would be to explore whether such tailored arrangements could be useful in other regions as well, and whether they are appropriate for other organizational development support, such as on financial planning, resource mobilization, and M&E.

8.  An overall 'learning review' should be undertaken of TTI's support to organizational development. The review should comprise an assessment of TTI's various workshops and peer-learning events, its webinars, support provided by the regional programme officers and consultants, and the pilot project in West Africa. It could be combined with the review of the use of the Matching Funds mechanism.

### 3.1.4. Programme learning and promotion of lessons

A major emphasis is needed on work towards Objective 3 – learning, communications, and policy engagement with other donors and stakeholders at the global, regional, and country level. TTI should itself operate more like a think tank:

1. TTI should synthesize, publish, and otherwise make more proactive use of its existing studies and emerging experiences and lessons. These could be disseminated through TTI's own websites and communications tools, as well as via those of grantees, donors, and cooperating initiatives such as the African Capacity Building Foundation's support programme for think tanks in Africa.

2. Internal learning should be enhanced and systems shared. This would include further development of the new website, enhancement of distance-learning systems, implementation of the communications strategy, and development of a proactive engagement strategy for approaching other potential supporters of international policy research.

3. Given the positive meeting with donors in December 2012, we recommend organizing similar meetings of potential donors at least annually. Bilateral and multilateral agencies should be approached, as well as philanthropists and private-sector organizations (including those from the Global South and emerging powers). These meetings should focus, at least initially, on encouraging them to set up and run their own programmes (an example is the AusAID Knowledge Sharing Initiative), rather than on attracting more funding for TTI itself (at least until it has capitalized on its own lessons).

4. TTI should make use of the unique opportunity it has to capitalize on its current donors' interest and involvement in the programme to develop strategies to influence and engage others.

5. Grantees should be commissioned to compile lessons and to make them available to policymakers, donors, and other stakeholders. This should include TTI assistance in dissemination and wider sharing of lessons learned to regional stakeholders as well as to donors working in the respective regions. Modern communication tools should be used for this purpose alongside workshops and conferences.

## 3.2. General programme implementation

### 3.2.1. Governance and management

Setting up a CAD $113 million programme supporting 52 (now 49) think tanks in 22 countries from scratch in just four years is an impressive achievement. The TTI programme has benefitted from its use of IDRC facilities and from the expertise of its EC and IAG. But there are a number of areas in which the efficiency and sustainability of the programme could be improved:

1. The roles of the IAG, EC, TTI management, and IDRC warrant review, as well as the linkages between governance and management so that TTI can operate with greater agility to meet the needs of the grantees. Models worth exploring include a more traditional think tank-like governance and management system, or the increasingly popular PRINCE2/MSP systems used by private and public-sector organizations to manage large projects and programmes. The management review should provide proposals on how the advisory work of the IAG could be made more beneficial to the TTI programme, and it should propose options for enabling programme leadership to direct TTI with more autonomy. Care should be taken, however, to maintain the commitment and engagement of the funders. Any revised structure should offer them ample opportunities to guide the programme on strategic issues. The benefits of working as a programme within IDRC should also be carefully retained.

2. TTI's current management systems should be revised, to better meet the needs of the funders and to do so in a more timely way in terms of financial overviews, accounts, and budget analysis. The review of the current management system should also be geared towards simplifying data collection, recording, and reporting and towards ensuring regular and accurate submission of information from grantees.

3. The programme's current management and reporting systems should be rendered more transparent and accessible for recording grantees' progress as well as for documenting their use of TTI funding in terms of budget and expenses. The current annual technical report format should be reviewed to adequately reflect changes in organizational performance and to allow space for stories highlighting grantees' engagement in policy change. Care should be taken that any changes to the reporting system do not place an excessive burden on grantees.

4. The programme's expected human resources needs over the next 1.5 years should be assessed in view of the appointment of TTI's senior programme specialist (OD and M&E) as acting programme leader until the summer of 2014. The attention that the programme will need for overall management and guidance of its transition into Phase 2 should not be to the detriment of organizational development support and M&E.

5. In order to shift more attention towards support to grantees and others at the country level, TTI's human resources in the regions should be strengthened. This would enable a more strategic accompaniment of grantees in their development and engagement in national policy processes. To begin, TTI should conduct a time management assessment among its headquarters and regional staff. Findings of that assessment should feed a more informed discussion about human resources use and new priorities. The rebalancing of human resources should be done taking regional capacity differences into account. In particular, support to African grantees is likely to require more staff time compared to the other regions.

6. TTI will need to ensure that depletion of TTI programme funds does not slow down over the remainder of Phase 1. Beware, however, of putting unreasonable pressures on grantees to absorb funding, including for support to organizational development and policy outreach activities. Conditions may not permit an influx of funds.

7. With a view to reducing administrative costs as well as other running costs, options should be explored for a longer-term organizational form, seeking a structure, management, and governance that can deliver the programme more cost-effectively into Phase 2 and beyond.

## 3.3.   Monitoring and evaluation

### 3.3.1.   The overall strategy

TTI has invested heavily in M&E and has a sound M&E strategy and results framework. But the largest investment of time and resources has been in designing and managing a complex M&E database, which the evaluation team has found to be of little use for assessing the programme's progress and impact. M&E is essential to track progress for internal management purposes, as well as to underpin TTI learning for Objective 3. The database could be substantially improved:

1. The M&E strategy should be implemented as planned, with the originally intended emphasis on visits by programme staff; peer review, not only of research papers, but also of communications, public engagement, and organizational development; the policy community study; and rolling project completion reports. The peer reviews and policy community studies slated for the end of Phase 2 should similarly be implemented as planned.

2.  The annual M&E questionnaire requires considerable simplification. The focus should be limited to a few key indicators for each of the three dimensions of the results framework for Objective 2 (i.e., 'organizational capacity', 'research capacity and quality', and 'policy linkages').

3.  Options should be explored for introducing a wider range of M&E approaches, including Stories of Change. These should be developed in collaboration with the think tanks themselves so as to focus on information that they would find useful. TTI should draw more on the experience of the IDRC evaluation department and others, and explore additional tools, including outcome mapping, episode studies, and micro-narratives.

4.  All M&E and financial reporting requirements should be aligned with the grantees' own annual financial reporting and planning cycles, extending the current M&E system to make more use of Stories of Change and impact stories (as in the Redstone Strategy Group report) and media uptake studies (as in the Hattaway Communications and Media Study).

5.  In line with international standards, each grantee should publish an annual report that includes a financial statement on income and how funds have been used. Such reporting should be accompanied by an annual audit report. TTI should assist grantees in compiling such reports in cases where these are not yet part of their institutional proceedings.

### 3.3.2.   The database

TTI should undertake a substantial review of the M&E database, frankly assessing its value and feasibility in collaboration with the grantees. The review should include a technical evaluation of progress in implementing the non-quantitative elements of the system, its ability to generate useful reports, and the feasibility of providing access to it to different groups of stakeholders including the grantees.

The quantitative elements of the database require simplification (in parallel with the simplification of the annual M&E questionnaire mentioned above). Reduction of the number of indicators for which data is being collected, stored, and analysed would hone the system and reduce the danger of data entry errors. The grantees should be able to enter, extract, and analyse their data themselves.

The above should be undertaken in collaboration with the grantees to ensure that the data is useful to them.

### 3.3.3.   Phase 2 evaluation

TTI should develop an approach to evaluation in Phase 2 aligned to ongoing improvements in its M&E, enhancements of its learning, and emphasis on Objective 3. Close linkages will need to be maintained between these three areas. It will be difficult to establish a true 'accompaniment model' under the present management and governance arrangements. But TTI should explore the possibility of a parallel evaluation approach that combines the advantages of continuous learning with objective analysis. An example of such a system is that currently in use by the Dutch National Scientific Organization's Science for Global Development Programme (WOTRO).