Capacity Development within the Think Tank Initiative

A Review with Strategic Recommendations

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List of Acronyms

ACBF   African Capacity Building Foundation
ACET   African Center for Economic Transformation
CD   Capacity Development
CPCE   Centro de Políticas Comparadas de Educación
CSO   Civil Society Organisation
IDRC   International Development Research Centre
IDS   Institute of Development Studies
ILAIPP   Latin American Initiative for Public Policy Research
INASP   International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications
KSI   Knowledge Sector Indonesia
M&E   Monitoring and Evaluation
OCB   Organisational Capacity Building
PEC   Policy Engagement and Communications
PO   Program Officer
R4D   Research for Development
RPO   Regional Program Officer
TTF   Think Tank Fund
TTI   Think Tank Initiative

Institutions Supported by the Think Tank Initiative in Phase 1

Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE) - Uganda

African Heritage Institution (AfriHeritage) - Nigeria

Asociación de Investigación y Estudios Sociales (ASIES) - Guatemala

Center for Study of Science, Technology and Policy (CSTEP) - India

Center for the Study of the Economies of Africa (CSEA) - Nigeria

Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA) - India

Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) - Bangladesh

Centre for Policy Research (CPR) - India

Centre for Population and Environmental Development (CPED) - Nigeria

Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) - Sri Lanka

Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) - India

Centre d'Etudes, de Documentation et de Recherche Economiques et Sociales (CEDRES) – Burkina Faso

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

Centro Ecuatoriano de Derecho Ambiental (CEDA) - Ecuador

Consortium pour la recherche économique et sociale (CRES) - Senegal

Economic and Social Research Foundation (ESRF) -Tanzania

Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC) - Uganda

Ethiopian Development Research Institute (EDRI) - Ethiopia

Ethiopian Economic Association / Ethiopian Economic Policy Research Institute (EEA/EEPRI) - Ethiopia

Foro Social de Deuda Externa y Desarrollo de Honduras (FOSDEH) - Honduras

Fundación ARU (ARU) -Bolivia

Fundación Dr. Guillermo Manuel Ungo (FUNDAUNGO) - El Salvador

Fundación para el Avance de las Reformas y las Oportunidades (Grupo FARO) -Ecuador

Fundación Salvadoreña para el Desarrollo Económico y Social / Departamento de Estudios Económicos y Sociales (FUSADES/DEES) - El Salvador

Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo (GRADE) – Peru

Institute for Economic Growth (IEG) - India

Indian Institute of Dalit Studies (IIDS) - India

Initiative prospective agricole et rurale (IPAR) - Senegal

Institut de Recherche Empirique en Economie Politique (IREEP) - Benin

Institute for Social and Environmental Transition – Nepal (ISET-N) - Nepal

Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA-Kenya) - Kenya

Institute of Economic Affairs (Ghana) (IEA-Ghana) - Ghana

Institute of Governance Studies (IGS) -Bangladesh

Institute of Policy Analysis and Research – Rwanda (IPAR-Rwanda) - Rwanda

Institute of Rural Management – India

Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS) -Sri Lanka

Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) - Ghana

Instituto de Estudios Avanzados en Desarrollo (INESAD) - Bolivia

Instituto de Estudios Peruanos (IEP) -Peru

Instituto Desarrollo (ID) - Paraguay

Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA) - Kenya

Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR) -Uganda

National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) - India

Public Affairs Centre (PAC) - India

Research on Poverty Alleviation (REPOA) - Tanzania

Science, Technology and Innovation Policy Research Organization (STIPRO) -Tanzania

Social Policy and Development Centre (SPDC) - Pakistan

Introduction

The Think Tank Initiative

The Think Tank Initiative (TTI) is dedicated to strengthening the capacity of independent policy research institutions in the Global South. Launched in 2008 and managed by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), TTI is a partnership between six donors that together have committed over $200 million to the program.

TTI provides think tanks in 20 countries with core, non-earmarked funding. This support, which comprises up to 30 percent of their operating budgets, allows the institutions to attract, retain, and build local talent, develop an independent research program, and invest in public outreach to ensure that research results inform and influence national and regional policy debates.

TTI was designed to roll out over two phases. With Phase 1 coming to an end in 2014, a rigorous assessment process was undertaken, and funding was extended for a second phase to 43 of TTI's original grantees. Phase 2 will run from October 2014 to March 2019.

This Report: Capacity Development in Phase 2

TTI seeks to nurture the long-term sustainability of the think tanks it funds. As such, core funding is combined with dedicated capacity development (CD) support in three broad areas: research methods and skills, policy engagement and communication, and general organizational effectiveness. TTI also supports peer-to-peer review, learning and exchange.

At the end of TTI's first phase, the TTI team decided to take a step back and commissioned this report to assist in developing a vision for Phase 2 CD programming. In Phase 1, TTI experimented with different modalities in a variety of CD areas, and programming was often rolled out in a responsive, ad hoc way. For the design and implementation of Phase 2 CD programming, TTI wishes to proceed in a more strategic manner, focused around a clear vision.

The commissioned report had two main goals. First, it would include a "light touch review" of Phase 1 CD programming and a scan of the support available to policy research institutions outside of TTI and its grantees, in order to identify new approaches, modalities, or programming areas. Second, the consultant would be tasked with developing concrete recommendations for a CD approach that is integrated and holistic, while also providing tailored support to grantees based on their expressed needs.

The first section of this report presents the main findings from the review of Phase 1 and the scan of external CD programming, and the second, a set of strategic recommendations for Phase 2 based on this review and scan.

Description of Key Phase 1 CD Activities

The following key CD activities were conducted in Phase 1, and are reviewed in the first part of this report:

- **Policy Engagement and Communications (PEC) program**: PEC aimed to support think tanks to promote their research in ways most likely to have policy impact. The program provided think tanks with customized capacity development through the support and ongoing input of a mentor. It also gave think tanks the opportunity

to join in a community of practice where they could share experiences, learn together, and ultimately improve how they communicated their research.

- **Matching Funds**: The Matching Funds mechanism provided small but catalytic additional funding to think tanks. Recipients were selected through a competitive process, and these funds allowed them to achieve their long-term objectives through innovation and collaboration with other TTI-supported think tanks and with external actors.
- **Opportunity Funds**: The End of Phase 1 Opportunity Funds provided additional funding to grantees in the final year of Phase 1. The purpose of this funding was to support activities and efforts by grantees aimed at achieving their long-term objectives which could not otherwise be carried out through use of TTI core funding.
- **The Exchange**: The Think Tank Initiative (TII) and Think Tank Fund (TIF) partnered to support peer exchanges between think tanks in regions where TII and TIF are active (Africa, Latin America and South Asia; and Central and Eastern Europe/former Soviet Union, respectively). The purpose of this support was to reduce the barriers of cooperation amongst researchers and other think tank staff members in order to stimulate collaboration and learning.
- **Internships:** Through the Latin America menu of opt-in CD activities, TTI funded internships for young researchers to learn from researchers at other TTI-funded think tanks.
- **Peer review mechanism in Latin America**: This pilot project aimed to establish a formal peer-review process, enabling participating institutions to gain access to external reviewers.
- **Organisational Capacity Building project**: Five think tanks participated in this project, which aimed to understand how the participats were building their own capacity. It sought to achieve this goal through action research, a process whereby a group identifies a problem, decides how to address it, chooses a question to answer, and then addresses the problem whilst making sure to "think and do." The focal question for the organisational capacity building group was how to build capacity for quality research, and how to incentivize researchers to do quality work.
- **Various** TTI **events and workshops**: TTI organised a number of CD events and workshops in Phase 1, covering topics such as monitoring and evaluation (M&E), resource mobilisation, research quality, and impact evaluation.

Objectives

The general objective of this report is to establish a vision to inform Phase 2 CD programming based on a "light touch review" of Phase 1 programming and a scan of external CD programming. The specific objectives are the following:

1. Systematise lessons learned from the major Phase 1 CD activities
2. Uncover potential participants' primary needs and interests to inform future CD activities
3. Identify which CD modalities are the most promising for future activities
4. Build on the scan of external CD programming to enrich existing modalities or implement new ones
5. Develop a series of strategic recommendations for Phase 2 CD programming

Framework for Strategic Recommendations

In order to achieve the fifth specific objective above, that of crafting strategic recommendations for flexible and coherent Phase 2 CD programming, this report is guided by the following questions:

1. Which modalities used in Phase 1 will be most effective in building capacity in Phase 2?
2. What are external programs doing to build the capacity of policy research organisations? What should TTI adopt for its own programming in Phase 2?
3. Considering the objectives laid out in TTI's Phase 2 Results Framework, are there other innovative CD approaches that TTI should consider integrating into the mix for Phase 2?
4. What incentives motivate grantees to engage in TTI's CD activities?

Methodology

This report employs the following methods:

1. Review of documented grantee experiences with TTI Phase 1 CD activities, including:
   a. **PEC program:** mid-term and final reports, synthesis of diagnostic findings, and participant evaluations of the Anglophone Africa Workshop (April 2014)
   b. **Matching Funds:** 35 proposals, 37 abstracts, and eight final reports
   c. **Opportunity Funds:** nine proposals and 12 abstracts
   d. **The Exchange:** one mid-term report
   e. Grantee reports on the **peer review mechanism in Latin America**
   f. **Organisational Capacity Building group** (action research): book chapters
   g. **Various** TTI **events and workshops:** evaluations of TTI Exchange 2012; report form the Nairobi M&E workshop; four reports from the Resource Mobilisation workshops; report from the "Strengthening research quality for policy engagement in Africa" roundtable event; reports from the Think Tanks and Universities project; internships reports from ASIES and INESAD; report on the impact evaluation training sessions offered to GRADE and CEDLAS; and CIES' report on the research capacity workshop

2. Strategic analysis of key **general evaluation and planning documents**, such as the TTI Phase 1 external evaluation, Phase 2 grantee applications, and the Phase 2 Results Framework, to promote alignment and coherence within future CD planning

3. **In-depth interviews** conducted with the following 39 key informants:
   a. Eight TTI team leaders
   b. Eleven TTI grantees
   c. Nine PEC mentors and facilitators
   d. Ten external stakeholders with relevant experience in capacity building

4. **Interaction with key donors** to inform the design of the current review and to gather their insights for future action

Structure

The first section of this report centres on TTI's Phase 1 CD programming, with an emphasis on teasing out the modalities deemed likely to be most effective for Phase 2, given grantees' motivations and preferences. Section 2 begins with the results of the scan of CD activities conducted by external programs that are also working to

build the capacity of policy research organisations. This scan and the Phase 1 review form the foundation the strategic recommendations presented in section 2, designed to inform the Phase 2 CD strategy in a manner that is consistent with TTI's Phase 2 Results Framework.

Section 1: Main Findings from the Review

1.1 Design

Phase 1 CD Programming Review
• How relevant was programming to grantees' general interests and goals?
• Which activities were most effective, and why?
• How coherent were activities?

Overall, grantees agreed that Phase 1 CD activities were relevant to their general interests and goals: think tanks stated that they felt their priorities were taken into account and that the topics covered were meaningful to their work and organisational development agendas. However, there was also a feeling that with the larger, multi-grantee activities, the need to take into account goals from diverse institutions often hindered the ability to make the content relevant to all participants. One example cited was PEC, where multiple institutions were brought together in group activities or were asked to adopt common tools, such as a particular diagnostic method or a workplan format.

This contrasting feedback highlights a crucial dilemma behind the overall CD strategy: should initiatives like TTI favour a supply-driven approach, selecting topics, modalities, trainers, etc., and then invite institutions to partake in them? Or is a demand-driven approach preferable, wherein think tanks are responsible for assessing their own CD needs and then deciding how to utilise TTI's support to best respond to these needs? Would a combination of these two approaches be most effective? The consensus was that there is an advantage in using demand as the main driver of CD activities, as it ensures relevance and effectiveness; this finding will inform the specific recommendations that we provide on this issue in section 2.

There were several concrete design mechanisms and considerations that stood out as having produced activities that responded well to grantee needs and interests:

1. **Employing flexible diagnostic tools:** Self-assessments and diagnostics proved useful. They were most effective when they were adaptive, taking a lighter approach and not demanding too much time and energy from participants. It was best when the degree of investment in this area was directly related to the depth and duration of the consequent support.[1]

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[1] For more reflections on the use of this type of tool, see Annex 1.

2. **Tapping into experts who know the think tank game:** Mentors who already worked closely with policy institutions and had a good understanding of how they operate were more effective and efficient in helping grantees develop a workplan that responded to their priorities.

3. **Recognising the importance of timing:** Grantee needs and their interest in receiving support might be high, but CD programming must take into account the timing of other change processes and activity schedules within think tanks. For example, the M&E workshop in Nairobi fit smoothly into grantees' activity timelines, especially those preparing to work on their strategic plans.

4. **Using institution-tailored approaches to respond to divergent demands:** The customisation of support to individual grantees was especially appreciated given the group's heterogeneity in terms of starting points and expectations about what could be achieved from CD programming. Activities tailored to individual grantees included the Matching Funds program, internships, and the customised workplans developed under the PEC Program in Latin America and South Asia. The more thorough the assessment and planning process for think tanks, the better they were able to determine which approaches were most meaningful for them.

5. **Employing consultation mechanisms for supply-driven activities:** Consulting grantees, for example through e-forums, enabled participants to directly express expectations of CD activities proposed by TTI, ensuring relevance. Consultations also allowed the TTI team to gauge grantees' readiness to develop and implement the activities and strategies they were proposing, increasing the likelihood of buy-in from the think tanks. However, it is worth noting that a very proactive approach to facilitation was necessary for online mechanisms such as e-forums to succeed.

6. **Offering think tanks a menu of activities and modalities:** Several think tanks mentioned that they valued the "structured flexibility" of approaches such as the one the Latin American office took, offering a range of CD activities that responded to explicit and implicit demands from that region's grantees. Offering a menu of activities also brought about a good balance between supply- and demand-driven approaches: grantees were able to select options that were most relevant to them while also being exposed to a wide horizon of ideas.

7. **Using ad hoc workshops and learning events as starting points to get think tanks out of their comfort zones:** Well-designed supply-driven activities sometimes functioned as strategic devices to generate awareness about CD needs or weaknesses that might not have been on grantees' radar.

8. **Offering seed funding or other types of financial support:** After an ad hoc CD activity or an organised event, support was often used to spur individual initiatives coming out of these activities and events. For example, the Opportunity Funds and the Matching Funds proved effective channels for grantees with needs identified during other CD activities, such as implementing communications plans devised in the PEC program or strategies presented in resource mobilisation workshops.

9. **Promoting ownership with diverse mechanisms that foster buy-in:** Even for supply-driven activities, a variety of approaches fostered agency and eagerness for change from grantees: they were asked to recommend experts, select partners, choose topics for action research, or develop a book to share their experiences on a particular CD challenge. Another powerful example comes from a workshop organised by CIES in which participants were asked to share tools and examples of what they were already doing

in the particular area of CD, ensuring that the workshop directly addressed grantees' real challenges and/or helped them refine existing products.

At the same time, several factors were identified that acted as obstacles to the relevance of CD programming for think tanks:

1. **Designing a program or activity without consulting think tanks or understanding their specific needs:** In these cases, it was crucial that project design be flexible to enable organisers to learn and understand grantee needs and then to provide content and delivery mechanisms that best fit those needs.

2. **Failing to capture the diverse needs of individuals with different roles within their institutions:** Some activities did not take into account that different roles within an institution entail different CD demands for a given topic, such as communications. In some cases, there was even inconsistency among those consulted in the design stage of some activities in terms of their understanding of what elements were important regarding communications and why.

3. **Using expert organisations or individuals unfamiliar with the world of think tanks**: In some cases, activities were led by facilitators or organisations with strong technical knowledge but without a specific understanding of the needs of policy research institutions. In these instances, CD activities were driven by tools and training materials, and not by a real sense of grantees' needs, capabilities, and constraints.

4. **Selecting facilitators without the necessary expertise:** Problems emerged when facilitators were selected during the proposal stage who did not have the skills required to address the particular needs of think tanks, even once they began to understand what those were.

With regards to the coherence of modalities employed in Phase 1, it is important to highlight that TTI had decided to take a piloting approach to CD programming in this phase. This explains the diversity of programming and the occasional overlaps and lack of synergy between activities. Besides contributing to the long-term CD goals of the program, this allowed the team to experiment, so as to be bale to initiate Phase 2 CD programming based on the experience of which activities were most popular and appreciated by think tanks, and informed by the preliminary outcomes of these activities.

Finally, as the external evaluation of Phase 1 concluded, "the combination of core funding and technical assistance to funded think tanks, alongside the program's Matching Funds mechanism to support collaborative initiatives, is widely regarded as an effective formula." Generally, interviews revealed that grantees viewed the support as a whole as coherent and comprehensive, and responding to their needs.

1.2 Organisation

Phase 1 CD **Programing Review**
• Was programming well organised, and did this have an impact on results?

According to interviewees, most CD activities were organised adequately well, leading to a match between expected and achieved results. In general, the organisation of programming was flexible enough to accommodate the diversity in participants' availability and capacities. This participatory and mostly ad hoc approach allowed

players to effectively interact with each other and to find the experts, solutions, and activities to fill their capacity building needs.

The only initiative that was singled out as having faced significant organisational challenges was the PEC program. Most participants were not able to get off to a smooth start due to the large number of stakeholders – organisers such as IDS, PAC, Commsconsult, and R4D – all with diverse roles and responsibilities that were not made clear from the outset. For example, several PEC mentors pointed out that they had not received concrete instructions as to what was expected from them in terms of assisting think tanks. Moreover, grantees indicated that they were not aware of the full implications of engaging in PEC in terms of time, human resources, etc. For the facilitators, too, there was an underestimation of the time needed to develop relationships with think tank personnel and to uncover and adapt to the different needs and ways of engaging with the think tanks. Putting further pressure in terms of time involvement on both think tanks and mentors was the large number of processes and protocols involved in coordinating activities with the numerous players on the supply side, delaying decisions and activities.

Box 1: Points to keep in mind when organising CD **activities**

- Workshops and similar short-term activities were usually too short to fulfill the stated objectives. Participants need time to absorb new content, and they appreciate having space for discussion and networking. It is also important to connect these types of ad hoc events with previous activities.
- Who should attend? Grantees pointed to a need to think more thoroughly about choosing the right individuals from the think tanks to participate in each CD activity. As well, the inclusion of others, such as non-TTI think tanks and policymakers, was said to enrich the learning environment.
- Continuous assessments, exchanging feedback, and refocusing were perceived as effective strategies to ensure CD activities remained relevant and viable.
- Some grantees thought that requirement that Matching Funds projects involve collaboration with other TTI grantees should be opened up to include collaboration with any organization, whether fellow grantees or not.
- Language mattered when conducting joint projects in Latin America and Africa, especially for conferences or public events.

Another organisational challenge with CD programming in Phase 1 was timing: there was a sense that a significant portion activities was concentrated in the final tranche of Phase 1. This affected some organisations' ability to take full advantage of the programming, and it caused some grantees to feel a certain pressure to deliver results quickly. Meanwhile, other organisations were not able to meet the deadlines during planning processes for activities, delaying the production of final outputs. The concentration of programing at the end of Phase 1 meant that several think tanks also found it difficult to link these activities with relevant CD processes or their work plans, sometimes deterring them from allocating enough time and funds to implement what was being learned. Finally, some interviewees felt that learning events should have been announced earlier than they were so as to allow grantees to get fully prepared and make the most of these opportunities.

In general, think tanks appreciated the role of the Regional Program Officers (RPOs) in Phase 1 CD programming. Grantees view TTI's staff as having been highly engaged and active in helping them make the most of CD support.

However, one critique was that the role of the RPOs was not always clear, or their contribution not always effective, because they were not equally engaged in different activities. This resulted in some missed opportunities for synergies, consultations, and cross-learning. To remedy this, RPOs could continuously share information amongst themselves and across regions on potential sources of expertise.[2] On the other hand, this type of deeper engagement in CD activities by RPOs might not be possible given time constraints. Some interviewees suggested addressing this by delegating some concrete CD tasks and functions to think tanks, when there is mutual agreement that this is the optimal way forward.

1.3 Modalities

Phase 1 CD Programming Review
• Which mechanisms were more effective from the participants' point of view, and why?

CD programming in Phase 1 involved a wide range of activities, some demand-driven, with grantees determining if and how to develop certain skills (e.g. through the Matching Funds and Opportunity Funds), and others supply-driven, initiated by TTI based on perceived common needs and demands (e.g. the resource mobilisation and M&E workshops and the PEC program). There is a wide consensus that TTI's approach of offering a wide variety of mechanisms was positive, as it succeeded in accommodating the heterogonous needs, preferences, and capacities of think tanks. Also well perceived was the above-mentioned "structured flexibility" brought to Phase 1 CD programming: a combination of activities organised and offered by TTI and the availability of open funds enabled grantees to set their own priorities, choosing what they deemed to be the best approaches to develop their own capacities.

Demand-driven programming: the Matching Funds and Opportunity Funds programs
Overall, interviewees indicated a wish to see demand-driven support deepened in the future, such as through the Matching Funds program,[3] which entailed bespoke tailoring of support, while at the same time promoting group interaction and collaboration. The Matching Funds program allowed organisations to decide which areas of CD to focus on, ensuring relevance to their specific needs. As well, the ability to choose the modalities for support created space for innovation and the development of new approaches. By placing think tanks in the driver's seat of their own CD, the Matching Funds program also strengthened buy-in and promoted agency, and the requirement that grantees co-invest at least 25% in these endeavours strengthened their ownership of the process.

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[2] Although the ideal scenario is that outside experts be geographically as close to grantees as possible, this is not always feasible for all topics.

[3] It is worth highlighting that Matching Funds projects were not required to explicitly target capacity building, though many did. Others still were collaborative projects for which CD was an unintended consequence of the implemented activities and of the exchanges among institutions.

Interviews and the documentation review revealed that the Matching Funds program also presented some disadvantages and risks. First, collaboration between grantees with different agendas and working cultures sometimes posed significant transactional costs, leading to a failure to achieve all the planned activities or outputs. Second, the availability of funds sometimes provided an incentive for think tanks to hire external experts to conduct work they could have carried out themselves. Although this might have been regarded as an opportunity for innovation, a lack of some experts' experience with think tanks' usual ways of working led to the development of systems, plans, and tools that were unsustainable once the expert had left. In other words, think tanks were enthusiastic about taking advantage of programs such as the Matching Funds to put in place new processes, but often faced problems in accurately assessing their capacity to sustain these organisational changes in the long term.

A third risk presented by the Matching Funds program was that proposals were sometimes too flexible and broad, with objectives that were unclear, too ambitious, or not connected to the proposed activities. This no doubt arose from the fact that proposals were often written by think tanks that were working together for the first time, exacerbated by a lack of capacity for project design in some individual organisations. The result was that it was not always clear which grantee was responsible for which deliverables. A follow-up plan led by a third party might have helped ensure commitment and consistency, and could have enabled learning from decisions made in response to any unexpected opportunities or risks that arose during the collaboration.

In sum, this report agrees with the external evaluation that a dedicated internal reflection on the Matching Funds scheme is needed; this would help to define concrete ways to address the weaknesses of this modality. Grantees also expressed a desire that some effort be put into assessing how this program could be applied more actively across all regions, since Latin America was far ahead in terms of the number of proposals and approved projects.

Before concluding this section, it is important to note that the Matching Funds program often served as seed funding for initiatives that grew out of the more structured, supply-driven activities, which shall be discussed below. For example, the M&E and resource mobilisation workshops revealed weaknesses and opportunities to grantees that they then sought to build upon with the help of Matching Funds. This also happened with the PEC Program, where some grantees used the Opportunity Funds to develop activities included in their new communications workplans.

Short-term supply-driven programming: workshops and learning events

As mentioned above, short-term or ad hoc supply-driven activities initiated by TTI often served as a starting point for further CD, including demand-driven activities. There is a significant level of agreement that structured activities such as workshops and learning events played an important role in enabling think tanks to assess their CD needs, especially in organisational development areas such as resource mobilisation, M&E, and policy engagement. Equally important is the fact that these events drove think tanks out of their comfort zones, exposing grantees to new ways of framing problems, to questions that they had never asked themselves, and to experts with experiences that may at first have seemed irrelevant but in the end were meaningful. In short, this type of approach amplified exposure to evidence and knowledge from diverse sources. Moreover, these types of activities generated space for strategic reflection, allowing busy managers and senior staff to take a step back from their day-to-day agendas and have fruitful discussions with peers on crucial topics.

Grantees also appreciated the structure of short-term supply-driven activities. By tapping into the interrelated core functions of think tanks, this type of programming fostered a holistic approach to CD, for instance, by linking fundraising to strategic communications. Additionally, the use of a mixed set of methodologies in workshops and events, ranging from theoretical presentations to learning from peers through exercises and group discussions, allowed participants to reflect on their own organisations' specificities. However, with regards to group activities, in some cases, grantees noted that groups were too large for effective and inclusive discussions. Therefore, there is a need to consider how groups can be formed to better trigger debates and practical outcomes, for example, by grouping together smaller numbers of like-minded organisations with similar levels of capacity on the topic at hand. This shall be discussed further in the recommendations section.

Longer-term supply-driven programming: PEC

Broader supply-driven programming, such as the PEC program, not only minimised costs, but also generated opportunities for horizontal learning and exchange between grantees. However, without a sufficient and effective consultation process and a participatory approach that include think tanks in the design stage, this type of programming led to some very frustrating experiences for grantees and TTI alike. In fact, problems arose within PEC in some regions because there was not enough consultation with regional offices and grantees. Hence, participants who voluntarily opted to join did not have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities so that they could assess their degree of commitment early on. Merely deciding to participate in the program did not guarantee that grantees felt a sense of ownership over the agenda or that they had a full understanding of the time and resources implications. This also points to the delicate challenge of determining if grantees were volunteering to participate out of real interest, or merely to cater to TTI.

Another challenge with PEC arose from the fact that the program involved a diverse set of trainers, experts, and mentors, who, it was felt, were not given the necessary preparation to ensure that they completely understood how to respond to grantees' expectations and needs. This meant that grantees were not able to fully seize the opportunity to learn from working with such a diverse pool of experts; most were constrained by time and committed their full energy to help think tanks develop and implement their workplans. Furthermore, regional organisers were not able to facilitate cross-regional learning until the very end of the program. This might have been remedied by an increase in the duration of the program, by guaranteeing more face-to-face interaction, and by setting out a clear mandate and requirement to reflect and learn.

Finally, for longer-term programming, regional differences were not sufficiently taken into account. In some areas, such as Latin America, it was easier to find experts with the appropriate knowledge and familiarity with think tanks than in others, such as South Asia. Segmentation strategies should be refined in future for this sort of structured programming, so as to ensure that the right level of complexity is provided to those who have a higher starting level of capacity in certain areas. This will be covered in the recommendations section.

Peer learning

Think tanks, regional POs, and several experts agree on the potential of peer CD activities, whereby grantees work together to address their CD needs and to share knowledge. Activities such as those undertaken jointly by several think tanks under the Matching Funds and Opportunity Funds programs gave grantees the opportunity to network and learn from one another, exposing them to the diverse ways that peers address challenges similar to their own. In fact, many interviewees stated that there is even wider potential for peer learning within TTI.

Many also expressed the desire to bring in non-TTI think tanks, as was done in the PEC launch meeting as well as the workshop on policy influencing processes in Francophone Africa, which included a think tank from Burkina Faso, one from Cameroon, and one from Congo-Brazzaville.

Positive feedback about the internships program and the fact that several activities undertaken under the Matching Funds program included visits to other think tanks reveals that grantees were interested in promoting a new way of working and coming together to spread their work beyond the contexts in which they operated. However, these types of interactions were not systematised enough to track their net effects, especially in terms of efficiency and value for money.

Alternative approaches to CD: peer review processes and action research on organisational capacity building

In addition to the traditional modalities described above, TTI piloted new and interesting ways to foster CD. Two are worth highlighting: a peer review process and an organisational capacity building (OCB) action research project, which resulted in a book. The idea behind the peer review system was born at the first global meeting of the Initiative, with the intention of maximizing the value of being part of this community of institutions. An external consultant led the process, and it involved eleven think tanks in Latin America that submitted eighteen products to be reviewed. After a scoping study reviewing the grantees' current assessment procedures, their research products were reviewed, and feedback was systematised. An interesting feature of this process was the fact that researchers were invited to contribute their reflections on the experience to this feedback, generating new questions and identifying capacity gaps. It also meant the inclusion of the practitioners' views on how the process could be improved, especially in terms of helping think tanks increase policy impact through their work.

The second initiative, the OCB action research project, aimed to understand how OCB takes place in the day-to-day. TTI decided to approach this question by asking five grantees to explore and track over several years their processes aimed at strengthening the quality of their research and enhancing their organisational performance. For the participating organisations, this presented an opportunity to combine reflection and action within a process of organisational change. There were two main outcomes of this interesting pilot that hold the potential to benefit policy research organisations at large. First, the project output contains a wide array of mechanisms and methods used by the five participants that other think tanks can use to improve research quality and organisational performance in different contexts. Second, the wider community can learn from the thoroughly documented experiences and reflections about the CD process itself and its implications for the rest of the organisation. This turns the modality into a very effective and fruitful mechanism to combine technical knowledge with a sound understanding and awareness of the politics behind inserting these types of processes into the everyday routines and habits of think tanks.

In both of these pilot CD projects, think tanks conducted concrete activities in relevant areas of CD that meant potential gains for participating organisations. Both also promoted continuous learning and reflection, allowing participants to make the most of their experience and become real owners of it. Last, but not least, they fostered the production of lessons learned so that the project could become a source for similar initiatives in the future.

1.4 Content

Phase 1 CD **Programming Review**
• What type of content was most relevant and useful to grantees' organisation development?
• Were presentations, literature, and materials well suited for the purposes of CD?

Content was shared in Phase 1 CD activities through a variety of formats: presentations, papers, articles, videos, guidelines, empirical examples, etc. Overall, participants found the content shared during CD activities to be relevant and useful, but they particularly appreciated practical materials offering specific toolkits or proven solutions to address their challenges. These were preferred over more theoretical materials, with grantees holding an underlying assumption that concepts were already well understood. For example, in the PEC program, mentors noted that questions tended to centre on communications tools rather than on broader concepts such as strategic communications. Moreover, many grantees indicated that they appreciated content that derived from the concrete, day-to-day experiences of similar organisations. Although several grantees welcomed some degree of exposure to best international practices, most valued content that was based on what other Southern think tanks – or those who had worked with them – had learned about the specific topics. When practical and contextualized content was not available, the perception was that TTI and most experts could frame and contextualize presentations and activities, but that there was a need for think tanks to adapt materials to their own work and contexts.

On the other hand, several interviewees who organised or delivered training sessions pointed out that strategic and conceptual content should not be underestimated. For grantees, it was in the context of longer-term interactions, such as action research projects or mentoring, that opportunities emerged to revisit long-held assumptions and theories. In some cases, reflecting on these theoretical questions even led to significant changes based on new conceptual and strategic thinking.

Finally, grantees signalled that they found the IDRC virtual library very useful.

1.5 Learners

Phase 1 CD **Programming Review**
• What were grantees' main incentives to participate?
• How did learners affect the implementation of programming?

In most cases, grantees stated that their participation in Phase 1 CD activities depended on two factors: the availability of financial support and their needs and interests. The overall impression from grantees was that the CD topics on which Phase 1 programming focused were relevant to their core functions and addressed their main challenges; indeed, most grantees approached CD opportunities with a genuine interest in learning. It is worth noting, however, that another clear incentive for the think tanks was often the desire to maintain a good relationship with TTI. This is a recurring challenge that TTI acknowledges: even if a CD activity is not mandatory, grantees might attend or respond because they want to continue securing core funding.

There were some supply-driven activities that generated a degree of resistance, discomfort, or confusion amongst some participants; one such example were the inception workshops for PEC. This occurred for a number of reasons: a lack of clarity about the main purposes of the activity, a lack of conviction about the urgency or relevance of selected topics, a lack of ownership over the process, or doubts about the appropriateness of the modalities of support, such as in the case of mentors selected by external players to help with communications and policy engagement. However, in many cases, initial doubts were mitigated as the activity evolved, and participants, sometimes in conjunction with organisers or trainers, jointly found ways of learning from others and of re-thinking their current practices and habits.

Think tanks enjoyed and highly valued learning from each other. This acted as a very clear incentive for them to invest time and energy in CD processes. Indeed, peer learning and knowledge sharing were identified early on as an opportunity in this type of activity, and institutions provided each other with responses to thought-provoking questions or shared self-assessments or findings from diagnostic reviews. Some even valued activities that provided an opportunity to see where they ranked in relation to their peers. We will come back to this issue in the section "Learning from others."

A very important aspect that was not always thought through thoroughly was determining which individuals from each organisation should participate, especially in activities that were offered by TTI or external actors. Although the appropriate profile for participants might vary by topic,[4] there was agreement on the need to widen participation to include a greater diversity of staff in CD opportunities. Several interviewees pointed out that executive directors benefited from a large portion of activities, and that other senior staff members, or staff with specific roles and responsibilities, should have taken a more active role in some CD projects. However, the lack of engagement of executive directors in some other activities was found to be a weakness, due to the resulting lack of overall institutional endorsement, buy-in, and support to participating staff members. A last point related to the profile of participants is that some considered it positive that the decision about who attended a certain activity be flexible and be made in conversations with a program officer.

Organisations saw a strong, tangible benefit in including more than one staff member in CD activities. This was first due to the fact that the inclusion of people with diverse roles, points of view, and skills enriched discussions and joint work. Second, including more than one staff member from a given think tank enhanced opportunities to embed what was learned in the institution by promoting joint work and learning with more than one individual. This is consistent with lessons from mentors: those who worked with more than merely a single communications staff member, for example, were able to tackle challenges and promote changes more comprehensively.

Another crucial aspect to ensure good learning opportunities for all was the way in which participants from different think tanks were segmented for group activities, including workshops, action research projects, larger programs, etc. One of the first findings in this area is that regional segmentation was not always effective. While

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[4] Though even this was not always obvious – in the case of PEC, for example, some think tanks had a very institutionalized and solid communications unit from whom participants could be selected, while others did not even have a staff member with overall communications responsibilities.

this might have presented advantages, such as lower costs due to geographical proximity or the ability to work in a shared language, the disadvantage was that it meant exposing similar materials, presentations, and processes to organisations in very different stages of evolution. Collective and group learning requires segmentation along such lines as think tanks' level of maturity regarding the issue at hand, their business model, and their preferred modalities for learning (some organisations really enjoyed working with mentors, where others leaned towards workshops or self-managed projects). In addition, and related to the previous point about the profile of attendants, segmentation should also take into account the profiles of individuals within think tanks, especially in terms of seniority. It is very difficult to expose the same type of content and methodologies to a mixed group of experienced, senior staff and less experienced, junior staff.

Face-to-face activities offered an additional benefit to grantees: they provided them with very appealing opportunities to establish links for future partnerships, such as jointly applying to a Matching Fund. For example, after the learning event in Cape Town in 2012, 63% of participants said they were interested in continuing conversations they had begun at the event. Nevertheless, only 15% expressed a willingness to lead such a collaboration; so the incentive was more clearly linked to getting to know potential partners than to initiating new joint endeavours.

Collaboration has already borne fruit. Activities like the OCB book and the research project on think tanks and universities were very positive experiences of think tanks combining efforts and co-producing new knowledge as they learn. Regarding the latter, participants in Latin America highlighted the importance of collaboration in the implementation of this project. Working in consortium with the Centro de Políticas Comparadas de Educación (CPCE) and involving experts from different parts of the region in the Advisory Committee enabled the think tanks to build excellent teams to conduct the case studies.

Finally, the degree of involvement and commitment to agreed-upon timetables and deadlines for work plans in mechanisms such as PEC were uneven, and this affected the outputs and outcomes of more structured programs and projects that assumed that different organisations would work at the same pace.

1.6 Trainers, Mentors, and Facilitators

Phase 1 CD **Programming Review**
• Were teachers and mentors well chosen? Why?   • How would grantees describe a good facilitator or mentor?

Overall, interviewees agreed that the selection of experts and trainers was well thought out. Nevertheless, in several CD activities, selecting appropriate trainers posed some challenges. Although interviewees were satisfied with the profiles of trainers, the prevailing perception was that there is a need to further consult and engage participants in the selection process in the case of supply-driven activities. However, several also acknowledged that they would have needed help from TTI to find suitable candidates to assist them in their CD processes.

Some pointed out that facilitators could not always discern how their expertise and know-how fit with think tanks' needs and capacities. In this sense, there was a scarce supply of experts who bring conceptual and strategic

thinking that can guide deep discussions and decisions within think tanks. In some activities, such as PEC, identifying the right mentors at the local level was an impossible task, and so the original pool was expanded and organisers had to be more flexible with regards to the required profile. In other workshops, such as the one on resource mobilisation in Latin America, an organisation with excellent technical knowledge was engaged, but it had no experience tailoring its approaches and techniques to the reality of think tanks. However, the impression was that in most cases, the best people available were brought in, and there was room for think tanks to spend time sifting through content and adapting it to their own organisational realities and contexts. Flexibility on both sides was crucial to enable good joint work.

Another highlighted feature is that good trainers and mentors must be skilled at listening to and understanding what think tanks really need and what changes they are able to undertake. This is related to another valued virtue: the ability to work collaboratively, rather than from an expert mindset. This was especially relevant when assessing think tanks' current capacity: tools or methodologies that were very rigidly structured and were built on assumptions about how things should be done were not well received by grantees. The identification of needs seems to have worked much better when it took place through conversations and dialogue around how to improve, allowing each institution to define and frame its problems and challenges.

Contextual knowledge was also pivotal for experts and trainers brought in to help think tanks rethink their work and methods. When conducting any type of CD support, grantees stressed that experts should be familiar with the contexts in different countries, and that they should apply that knowledge in what they share and in how they promote interaction and practical application. A comparative knowledge of the situation across countries and regions was highly valued.

Therefore, selecting the right person or organisation to help a think tank improve or develop a certain capacity is not an easy task (for more reflections on Mentors and trainers, please see Annex 2). What TTI and others have learned on both the process of selection and the supply of experts is an asset to be further used in future. Additionally, some suggested thinking about establishing groups of mentors or trainers who can support each other and work in a more multidisciplinary way to address diverse challenges and to attend to several think tanks' needs at the same time. Indeed, there was wide appreciation of activities that brought together different competencies across different fields. When that did not happen, evaluations revealed that participants asked for more diversity in teachers' professional backgrounds and for more teachers with practical experience on the topic at hand.

In the case of PEC, some mentors expressed that they felt removed from TTI while working with intermediaries such as Commsconsult and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS). This left them with little chance to be truly strategic, integrating their support with other ongoing activities and enabling more synergies in the change processes.

A very important finding is that because CD processes usually take a long time, commitment and support from trainers and experts should be framed as a long-term relationship. In fact, the help of an external expert after an ad hoc activity was very effective in transitioning from learning conceptually about a tool or method to effectively deploying it and adapting it to the organisational context. On the contrary, for activities that did not offer follow-

up support, participants regretted not having had the opportunity to receive useful feedback and advice to implement certain changes, for example, to develop M&E systems.

Last but not least, many interviewees pointed out that more horizontal learning should take place, sometimes even replacing the traditional relationship between external experts and themselves. As one of them expressed: "We need learning by the experts as by the people."

1.7 Results

Phase 1 CD Programming Review
• What are the main results of CD programming in Phase 1? Why?
• Has M&E of CD programming been effective?

Since Phase 1 CD followed a very flexible and experimental approach, M&E efforts were focused on each activity and not developed into an overall framework to assess general achievements and results. However, in general, there have been several acknowledged overall results:

1. Think tanks have an increased awareness of the need to re-think and commit to changes on some critical organisational issues, such as quality of research, resources mobilisation, communications and policy engagement, M&E, and governance. They also have a deeper understanding of how these issues fit into and contribute to their overall organisational strategies, and there is an increased awareness about the need to further systematise how they make decisions and manage all these factors to enhance their work, reputation, and impact.

2. Several CD activities have enabled long-term thinking. This is not common in Southern policy research institutions, which are usually under a high level of pressure to secure funding. Grantees have increased their capacity to make more strategic decisions on diverse organisational issues and to think more holistically about how to take leadership and management of these issues to a higher level.

3. Think tanks are better able to identify capacity gaps and seek appropriate types of support to address these gaps, including diverse modalities and individuals and groups of organisations.

4. Grantees have become knowledgeable of and can use a wider and richer range of possible approaches, tools, lessons, and practical experiences to address a diverse set of organisational challenges.

5. Think tanks have deployed multiple CD activities and action learning projects that have yielded diverse outputs and outcomes, according to their statements and reports. Among these, we can highlight: increased research quality and productivity; new or better publications; new or improved communications strategies; enhanced communications tools (a friendlier website, a publications strategy, a social media strategy, etc.); stronger boards with eminent people; and overall, more well-developed strategic plans, which better reflect the thinking of the organisations.

6. There has been increased collaboration and networking among think tanks, in terms of jointly framing their challenges and problems and identifying ways to solve them and learn from the process. Furthermore, there have been some organic developments worth highlighting, namely, autonomous and spontaneous group initiatives that emerged as a consequence of TTI's supported activities, such as the

[Latin American Initiative for Public Policy Research (ILAIPP) network](#) and [Southern Voice](#). These initiatives could complement or eventually replace some of the work done by TTI's staff, as participants use these spaces to increase capacity around collectively-defined needs and priorities, determine strategies to address them, and share learning.

Regarding PEC, most respondents note a general improvement in how think tanks conceive of and implement their communications, especially in terms of policy engagement. In some cases, respondents state that this is related to an increased capacity to think strategically about the role and management of communications and how these contribute to the organisation's mission and general objectives. There has been some push from mentors and organisers to help the institutions think beyond their specific tools and operationalize more general communications strategies, as well as to promote their ongoing capacity to think about, develop, and adjust these strategies. In other cases, improvement is more closely linked with the fact that think tanks are mastering new tools or ways of managing existing tools, such as social networks or website redesigns.

In terms of effectiveness on M&E, even though several mid-term and final reports were very well structured and based on rigorous evaluation methodologies, such as surveys and written evaluation forms, there is clearly room for improvement in terms of putting in place more specific guidelines and reporting requirements. This applies especially to those that will involve a larger investment of resources across a broad range of activities, like the Matching Funds. A common reporting format would help track results more clearly and easily and would enable comparisons between projects. Gathering evidence in a systematic way would allow TTI to tell a credible and complete story of how the Initiative has contributed to strengthening TTs.

1.8 Learning for Others: Knowledge Systematisation

Phase 1 CD **Programming Review**
• Did non-participants, including external stakeholders, learn from the CD processes? How? Why?

There is ample consensus on the potential of CD processes to generate useful and accessible knowledge for others, including TTI grantees that did not participate in a given CD activity or process, as well as think tanks, donors, and other relevant stakeholders in this field. The impression held by interviewees is that there has been a lot of information shared and produced, but that it is under-used. Interviewees agreed on the need to re-think and contribute to a process of knowledge systematisation and sharing, where horizontal learning is prioritised. This would help build an international body of learning about CD support to think tanks, as proposed in the external evaluation of Phase 1.

Besides internal knowledge sharing among TTI staff that enabled cross-regional learning opportunities, there were other specific initiatives that facilitated learning for others as well: online platforms such as the researchtoaction.org website for the PEC program, learning events, conferences held within the context of Matching Funds activities, and final products such [as the web site on think tanks and universities](#) and the organisational capacity building book. Some projects concluded with public products, like a guideline for the formation of a consortium in Paraguay and a methodological framework for organizing a consortium in small countries to influence electoral debate (organised by ID and CADEP), or materials to facilitate learning of other think tanks in

similar processes. However, in some cases, such as for Matching Funds projects that were very similar, cross-learning could have been further encouraged by TTI. There was a scarcity of proposals that considered partnerships with other organisations beyond think tanks, such as universities, public agencies, and civil society organisations, and only a few proposals considered partnerships with non-TTI think tanks.

Even though scaling up and replication are noted as desirable within the description of the Matching Funds program, these could be made required topics in applications, in order to force applicants to reflect on how proposed projects will contribute to the shared objectives of TTI. This would foster more thinking on how each project could add real value to other TTI organisations or to the applicant's community. In fact, some respondents recognised the benefits of being part of a network of organisations facing similar challenges in different countries. TTI has the enormous advantage that participants can openly share their experiences,[5] generating excellent information and knowledge that other think tanks can replicate without affecting the results of the organisation that had the original idea. Additionally, emphasis was placed on the fact that not only can TTI's grantees co-produce new knowledge of value for others, but that they should also reach out and engage with think tanks outside of TTI that can add value and relevant experiences to their own evolving body of knowledge.

Finally, and as the external evaluation has already affirmed, TTI "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 program." This review agrees with the evaluation's recommendation that "a major emphasis is needed on work towards Objective 3. TTI should itself operate more like a think tank, by synthesising, publishing, and otherwise making more proactive use of its existing studies and emerging experiences and lessons."

Section 2: Strategic Recommendations

This section provides a set of strategic recommendations aimed at informing Phase 2 CD programming. The recommendations are based on a visioning approach, which is built on the findings from the review shared in the previous section as well as a series of conversation with leaders of similar initiatives. We will first share some insights from these conversations and then present a set of recommendations based on these and the findings from the review.

2.1 Learning from Similar Initiatives

We had a series of conversations with individuals who have expertise in the field of capacity development for think tanks, or who have managed similar programs. They shared a set of reflections and experiences that confirms most of this review's findings, and that have also shed light on additional considerations and ideas. This section outlines the conclusions from these discussions that are most relevant for the purpose of this review and for subsequent recommendations.

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[5] Some interviewees mentioned that for genuine and open exchange to happen, TTI staff should not be present in some activities. The drive to make a good impression on the donor deterred some think tanks from being completely sincere and frank about their challenges and weaknesses.

Designing a relevant approach

There is no cookie cutter approach for addressing the CD issues that think tanks identify as relevant. Most experts acknowledge the challenge of diversity when trying to support these organisations in a collective manner: tailor-made approaches seem to be more effective than blanket approaches. Many experts also favour demand-driven approaches, though this demand sometimes arises from exposure to how similar challenges are dealt with by other organisations, whether they be in similar or very different situations in terms of resource availability, country context, etc. However, exposure has its limitations, and many agree that think tanks have enough opportunities to learn from others as participants in workshops or as observers.

Activities targeted at raising awareness about capacity gaps work well at the beginning of the CD process. However, some experts like Raymond Struyk from R4D (Research for Development) and Fred Carden from KSI (Knowledge Sector Indonesia) highlight the fact that these institutions have a limited absorptive capacity, and so there must be a balance between providing them with tools, knowledge, and assistance, and allowing them space to develop their own processes and respecting their timing and pace. It is very important that institutions be provided with enough time to digest the information they receive and to use their experiences to assess the costs of intended changes in order to devise their own plans.

Responding to demand

There are different views on how best to respond to demand. Some experts, like Enrique Mendizabal from on-thinktanks, believe that when it comes to developing organisations' CD plans and finding mentors or experts to support them, think tank directors and leaders can and should do this themselves. Ownership and its consequent responsibilities should be delegated to think tanks. However, some experts are doubtful about how ready some think tanks are to be alone in the driver's seat. As Fred Carden points out, several think tanks, especially those with ample funding and that are not in highly competitive environments, don't have the organisational strategies or effective boards necessary to ensure the development of an integral and sound CD plan.

Others, like Goran Buldioski from TTF (the Think Tank Fund), warn about the risks of this type of "voucher system," by which think tanks receive financial support and select how to invest it themselves. This approach assumes that think tanks are adequately prepared to identify all of their problems, informed enough to find and select their trainers, and able design a strategy that is fair for all the staff involved; this is frequently not the case. Also, there is the question of whether institutions, when working on their own, will move out of their comfort zones and select mentors and trainers that will help them ask critical questions and become more strategic.

KSI follows a balanced approach, responding to demand while also bringing in the funders' expertise and views to build a joint agenda: there is consultation and discussion about what is needed, who should provide it, and the quality of resources necessary. Finally, Bakary Kone from ACBF (The African Capacity Building Foundation) describes his organisation's transition from the demand-driven approach they had followed for the past 20 years toward taking a more proactive role: they now conduct a capacity needs assessment that helps to identify gaps, and then involve actors interested in those issues.

Using diverse methodologies

Besides peer-to-peer activities among TTI's grantees and with other Southern non-TTI institutions, discussions with external experts reveal opportunities where grantees have been supported to reach out to their peers in

better-resourced think tank communities. For example, a partnership between Brookings AGI and six Sub-Saharan African think tanks involved study tours, during which the African think tanks got to learn from Brookings' model and see it in action. Subsequently, they identified specific areas for support where they thought they could apply similar methods or tools, such as policy briefs and blogs. Another example are the successful peer-to-peer events supported by TTF, where think tanks interacted with other types of organisations, such as advocacy NGOs, with the goal of inspiring think tanks to move outside of their comfort zones and to think differently. The same idea could be applied to inviting external participants to think tanks' events, such as political consultants, public opinion firms, etc.

Katie Bryant, a trainer with extensive experience providing support to African researchers to strengthen their writing skills for different audiences, emphasises the need to build trusting relationships with those being trained, including developing a better understanding of the personal challenges they face when going through change. Her approach takes into account researchers' subjective experiences, and in particular, the transitions they must undergo, usually without adequate support, in order to develop new capacities. For example, producing a doctoral dissertation differs largely from writing a journal article, and a book chapter from a work report, but researchers are frequently not supported to effectively transition from one writing style to another. Bryant's "transitions" approach could also be applied to researchers becoming policy advisors, traditional communicators becoming effective in the online world, and fundraising coordinators moving between scanning funding opportunities, writing proposals, and designing strategic fundraising plans. In this context, the potential (and still frequently unrealized) role of senior researchers in mentoring their younger colleagues for these transitions could be revisited.

Action-learning projects present interesting experiences that could be included within supply-driven activities, such as TTI's upcoming Organisational Capacity Building book, which systematises the capacity building activities performed by some think tanks to strengthen their research quality. Another example comes from ACET (the African Center for Economic Transformation), which convened other think tanks to jointly produce the African Report 2014 through country case studies. To do so, instead of taking the traditional approach of sending out terms of reference for the production of the studies, ACET conducted a preliminary workshop to engage potential candidates in a discussion and to share views and knowledge. They then asked attendees if they wanted to be part of the report, and those who participated received indirect capacity building support to enhance the quality of their research. They learned as they were producing the case studies by receiving support from peer reviewers, with whom they were able to meet and interact, as well as by reviewing each other's work. Similarly, Brookings AGI collaborated with think tanks to produce joint research in five areas of common interest that are critical for growth. To this purpose, they combined peer review with communications support, as discussed above.

Finally, many experts acknowledge that the combination of ad hoc workshops (offline or online) with subsequent support (mostly through mentoring) is a very powerful capacity development mechanism. There is consensus on the importance of face-to-face interaction to build trust and teamwork, but agreement that much can be done afterwards through virtual interaction. However, in some regions, the quality of Internet connectivity should be taken into account for any virtual activity that requires the simultaneous presence of participants.

Monitoring, evaluation, and learning

Regarding the assessment of the results of CD support, Jon Harle from INASP (the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications) shared that for this organisation, one of the main challenges is that it is possible to develop individuals' skills to a certain extent, but it is more difficult to sustainably embed these skills into an organisation. Normal staff turnover means that simply training a large number of people within an organisation cannot fully solve this problem.

There is also significant agreement on the need and interest among donors like INASP, TTF and ACBF to produce more lessons learned, systematize experiences, and enable cross-learning among the different initiatives.

2.2 Strategic Recommendations

Based on finding of the Phase 1 review and the previous section's scan of other initiatives' insights and experiences, in this section, we present a series of strategic recommendations for Phase 2 CD, one of the main goals of the current report. The following questions guided the development of these recommendations:

Envisioning Phase 2
• How can CD activities be better designed in the future?
• What are the general criteria to bear in mind when designing Phase 2 programming (e.g. geographic considerations, level of maturity of think tanks, degree of participation and commitment)?
• Who should organise CD activities in general? Or, alternatively, should programming be organised on an ad hoc basis?
• How can organisation improve in the future?
• Are there successful modalities from other initiatives that TTI should consider adopting?
• Should new types of knowledge be developed? Why? How?
• Should there be any criteria determining who can participate in each modality?
• What can learners do to improve the results of CD?
• Should there be any new criteria for selecting teachers, mentors, and facilitators?
• Should CD programming become more horizontal?
• What can teachers do to improve the results of CD?
• How can results improve in the future?
• How can CD be better monitored and evaluated in the future?
• How can TTI take advantage of CD to generate relevant knowledge for others?

Recommendation #1: More focus, fewer activities, more time, and better timing

Even though offering a wide range of possibilities worked well in Phase 1 as an experimental approach, we recommend that TTI and its grantees focus their CD efforts in Phase 2 so as to attain mid- and long-term results. To achieve this, TTI should ensure that CD plans are embedded in think tanks' overall work plans. Planning should

be longer-term than in Phase 1, so that adequate time and human resources can be allocated to proposed activities. Plans should also build on the progress that was made in Phase 1 through longer training activities, like PEC, and through mentoring, so that think tanks can continue applying what they learned.

Recommendation #2: Prioritise demand-driven activities, but strengthen mechanisms to ensure active engagement, agency, and responsibility from grantees

Phase 1 clearly revealed that think tanks are capable of and willing to lead most CD activities, including assessing their needs, detecting modalities to address these needs, and finding experts, mentors, and peers to assist them. Therefore, we recommend that demand-driven activities be prioritised in Phase 2, building on what the think tanks have already learned and done. The wide range of CD activities in Phase 1 allowed a significant degree of exposure to topics, experts, modalities, and content, and so grantees already have a platform upon which to build their own processes.

One way of proceeding would to merge the Matching Funds and Opportunity Funds schemes into a single Matching Funds program that enables both organisational and group support. To apply for funding under this program, think tanks would be required to develop their own CD plan. Then, building on their plans, they would need to clearly link the gaps and needs they identified with the activities they propose to undertake. A financial co-investment would be required to promote engagement, agency, and responsibility.

Recommendation #3: Develop a set of principles that define how TTI can balance demand-driven activities with the overall and systemic changes that it wants to promote

There are several disadvantages in deploying an exclusively demand-driven approach, such as think tanks remaining in their comfort zones and therefore bringing about only minor changes, missing opportunities for cross-learning and knowledge systematisation, and being less exposed to new ideas. To mitigate these risks, we recommend that TTI develop an approach that combines very specific requirements for the demand-driven schemes proposed above with select supply-driven activities that address TTI's own principles and goals. Priorities for supply-driven activities might including the following:

- Individual and group projects that build on or contribute to ongoing or past TTI activities, projects, and efforts, in order to promote consistency among CD activities
- Activities that foster the skills development of diverse profiles of individuals within think tanks, embedding skills throughout the organisation and therefore ensuring more sustainable and viable change processes
- Annual or bi-annual learning events that ensure innovation and exposure to new ideas
- 'Positive deviance' case studies[6] on think tanks that have developed their capacities without dedicated financial or technical support
- Supporting strategic thinking by offering support to jointly develop CD plans and their corresponding M&E and learning components

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[6] This suggestion was made by Fred Carden, when discussing why some think tanks have been successful at developing their core capacities without specific donor support.

Recommendation #4: Develop a menu of supply-driven CD activities that think tanks can opt in to

Allowing CD activities to be driven solely by demand might not produce programming that covers all of the systemic changes that TTI wants to see. To ensure that the principles of its CD plan are fulfilled, we recommend that TTI complement demand-driven activities with a menu of supply-driven activities it would offer to support.[7] This menu could be developed one or two years into Phase 2, in order to ensure that it addresses any gaps in the demand-driven activities undertaken in this time.

For supply-driven activities in Phase 2, new ways of grouping think tanks should be developed. Some recommended criteria of grouping think tanks to ensure that group work is fruitful for all participants include:

- **Similar levels of development on the topic at hand**: Determine this by conducting quick self-assessments on where think tanks stand along three or four levels of development, such as years of experience with the topic, number of tools in place, etc.
- **Participants with similar roles and responsibilities in their organisation:** Formal job positions do not always indicate whether participants complete similar tasks and face common challenges, so requiring job descriptions might help.
- **Fostering dialogue among internal stakeholders relevant to the specific change:** For example, invite both a board member and the executive director for an activity addressing capacity building on governance.
- **Self-segmentation:** Allow think tanks to select the panels, sessions, or mentors they are most interested in under a common event, and conduct these in parallel.
- **Champions for change:** Engage those with a larger interest in or potential to effect change through formal or informal processes.

Recommendation #5: Develop an M&E and learning system that enables tracking results of dispersed activities in a more systematic way

In Phase 1, while supporting a significant number of demand-driven projects, it was difficult for TTI to monitor and evaluate CD progress and ensure learning, which is necessary if the Initiative is to contribute new and relevant knowledge to the field. To this end, an M&E and learning system should be developed defining a manageable set of methods and indicators. The system should be reflected in the way reporting is required for individual and organisational projects as well as other supply-driven activities. TTI may want to share this system or framework with the think tanks, as KSI has done, to promote buy-in and develop partners' own capacities to monitor and evaluate.

Recommendation #6: Build a legacy of relevant and innovative knowledge products

TTI is an incredibly rich and diverse laboratory for core support, technical assistance, capacity development, and experiences of collaboration. The Initiative offers a unique platform to promote learning among grantees as well as other think tanks, donors, and experts. A large research and policy community has already benefited from TTI, and TTI should take steps to ensure that this community benefits even more in Phase 2. We recommend the

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[7] Activities suggested by interviewees that could be included in this list are shared in Annex 4.

creation of two to three standardised knowledge product templates, from which the think tanks or groups conducting CD activities could choose in order to select the format that best suits sharing the knowledge gained through a given activity. Some examples include blog posts following a common storyline pattern; one-pagers relating to the advantages, disadvantages, and lessons learned about a particular tool or practice put in place by a think tank; two-way interviews between peers working on joint projects; and webinars, held by participants during and after a CD activity. Creating a platform on which to share these products – a virtual showcase – and holding annual or bi-annual learning events would enable cross-regional learning and knowledge sharing with stakeholders outside the TTI community.

Recommendation #7: Define a new governance model for the overall CD process

Both TTI and other partners' experiences reveal that undertaking CD activities effectively and efficiently entails a significant amount of commitment. Therefore, we recommend that a new governance model be devised that strategically distributes roles and responsibilities. Even though demand-driven activities imply that part of the work falls to grantees, these nonetheless require efforts to effectively track results and promote cross learning and synergies. Also, a larger emphasis on knowledge generation will require a new set of functions to be performed, especially in terms of facilitating learning.

Recommendation #8: Foster innovation by convening an annual meeting to reflect on practices and develop new ideas on innovative CD mechanisms

Finally, we recommend that TTI seize the formidable opportunity to work as an incubator of new ideas and practices in the field, which it can do due to its capacity to convene not only leading and promising think tanks in diverse regions, but also to engage with other think tanks, universities, experts, donors, and policymakers committed to improving the field. We recommend that TTI consider hosting an annual learning and innovation event, where stakeholders (think tanks, donors, experts, etc.) are invited to take an "outside-in" look at the external forces that are reshaping the think tank field, and an "inside-out" look at exemplars of think tank success. These conferences could also serve to articulate and refine principles that are complementary to the ones developed initially by TTI that can then inform and drive future CD efforts.

Annex 1 – On Diagnoses and Assessments

- For several interviewees, this type of tools enabled them to think about things they have not thought about before: sometimes questions or the type of information required to complete these tools served as a revelation, or even helped to find some answers (for example: re-thinking how to better organise communications planning).

- To be effective and enable ownership, these tools need to be sensitive to people's concerns, in terms of framing problems, naming challenges, detecting weaknesses.

- These tools are also useful for future interventions, since they leave a valuable organisational legacy describing what needs to be done, and when detected gaps and weaknesses should be addressed.

- Some individuals have raised the importance of combining internal and external assessments: it is not only important to conduct a good self-assessment of where the think tank stands regarding a specific function or issue, but also to ascertain what other relevant stakeholders perceive about its strengths and weaknesses, etc.

- Assessments work better when different people with diverse responsibilities participate in the exercise, so that the issue is addressed more integrally, taking into account the diverse perspectives and expectations from the members of an institution.

- The degree of effort, complexity, and investment of resources in developing a sound assessment should be proportional to the scope of support and resources available to foster the interventions that will address the issues identified by the assessment.

- Many think tanks have already conducted several diagnoses on diverse aspects of their organisational development, so it is advisable to use information from these to build new ones or even to complement and narrow the focus of them. Having to respond to too many consultations and surveys tires staff members and may leave them sceptical about the real worth of investing time in this sort of exercises.

- As part of the PEC efforts, some detected as an unintended outcome of the assessment process that think tanks learned how to be very strategic in planning their CD needs. Some organisations used a similar format in the Phase 2 application and as part of the strategic planning in general.

- These tools work better when used to develop a common understanding about where people and institutions stand, with the goal of building on that, but they are also useful in gauging institutions' real interests and capacities for implementing needed changes.

- For future endeavours, implementers of diagnoses and assessments could use them as a strategy to identify who should participate in CD efforts, by tapping into a wide variety of perspectives and views on what needs to improve, why, and how.

Annex 2 – On Experts and Mentors

- Think tanks highly valued individuals who could combine very practical and concrete support on specific communications outputs with a more conceptual and strategic approach that led organisations to take a step further in their communications management.

- Most interviewees agreed on the need to either ask think tanks to select providers or at least to consult with them to ensure a good match.

- "Mentor" is a contested concept in some regions like South Asia and implies a certain way of interacting with the mentored. Using terms carefully and defining concrete roles and responsibilities is crucial for an effective and fruitful CD process.

- Relationship building should not be underestimated: it takes time for both parts to get to know and trust one another, and sometimes this does not happen. This limits the scope and depth of the guidance and help that can be provided.

- Who does the expert/mentor work with/respond to? A crucial decision with tangible effects on the CD process is with whom and how many staff members the expert will work, as well as how. Clarity on this will help the think tank make the most of the support and avoid mutual frustration. For example, some PEC mentors did not have a communications person to interact with, and thus faced serious problems developing a sound work plan.

- The ongoing and specific support provided by a mentor is an excellent opportunity to generate lessons and new policies as a way to align what they are doing now with what may emerge in the near future.

- Mentors are valued when they are more flexible than when they appear with a very tight and closed work agenda, when they help to find solutions to tangible and real problems and challenges.

- Here is an interesting example: "We offer partners 15 person days of mentoring, to be delivered along a schedule that matches the needs of the partner's project. We add two face-to-face visits, and the rest of the mentoring is done remotely. We have come to the conclusion that this approach has merit in that we are sharing steps at the time when the partner is ready for them and can absorb the learning. We have also discovered that the magic of learning is noticed a few steps into the process when the users realize the power of being in the drivers' seat. While we still do short workshops, we see their value as sensitization events, as opposed to capacity development moments. We now favour processes which build in mentoring along the way in contrast to one shot workshop events." (Source: Managing for impact. Ricardo Ramírez and Dal Brodhead: Readiness & Mentoring: two touchstones for capacity development in evaluation.)

Annex 3 - Considerations for Next Rounds of Matching Funds

Besides arguing that a specific internal reflection about Matching Funds should be conducted in order to fine-tune this mechanism of support which could potentially grow, we have a set of specific recommendations that emerge from our light touch review:

- A more structured format for presenting proposals will help in tracking results and in making comparisons among projects. This should be aligned with the new recommended overall M&E and learning framework, and would also enable evidence related to an indicator of the Results Framework: quality of proposals received, including the clarity of their tailored objectives.

- Develop criteria for the allocation of funds, probably combining principles agreed upon from the beginning, with specific ideas emerging from the review to enhance the effectiveness of this modality.

- Emphasis should be put on technical and capacity support that is delivered through "learning by doing modalities," rather than conventional training and consultancy models.

- Proposals should be explicit in terms of who will be accountable in each organisation for the results of the project. A good example can be identified in ISSER MF Round 5's proposal: "The overall responsibility for the training workshop will be the Director of the Institute of Statistical, Social and economic Research (ISSER) and will be coordinated by Dr. Elizabeth Asante, a Research Fellow of ISSER," and IPAR-Rwanda MF Round 1: "The project will be supervised by Professor Pamela Abbott, IPAR Director of Research (…) who will be able to supervise the delivery of training by IPAR researchers and ensure ongoing professional development."

- Projects involving workshops or conferences should submit a specific report with results of an evaluation of the event. As an example, CSTEP MF's final report contains indicators related to the Communication Training, such as number of attendees, products developed, and evaluation results.

- Require a clear demonstration of how the MF will help think tanks achieve their long-term objectives. For instance, CPR MF Round 5's proposal has a specific section named "Link to CPR's Institutional Objectives"; ACODE, STIPRO and KIPPRA's Round 3 proposal also considers the contribution that the project will make to their long-term objectives.

- It is advisable to include a section in the application form in which applicants can provide details on how the project will take advantage of (or be in synergy with) other TTI CD activities.

Annex 4 - Ideas for Supply-Driven Activities

Here, we share a set of innovative or ongoing ideas on what TTI could support in the near future.

Modalities

- Cross-regional visits/exchanges

- Scaled up internship programs

- Bring researchers into residency at international think tanks or universities to improve the quality of research and give them an opportunity to work with leading researchers to help shape the direction of research projects

- More mentorship in research: senior researchers from other countries coming to mentor junior researchers

- Facilitate the visits of different decision-making staff and board members to relevant think tanks in both developed and developing countries

- Post-graduate education for researchers

- Fellowship grants provided by IDRC with universities in the region (students) or with other think tanks

- Support a doctoral fellowship program to attract post-doctorate fellows

- Annual peer-to-peer events

- Continue with the peer review program and strengthen the external peer review processes for the TTI grantees; TTI could create a pool of possible reviewers whom the grantees could easily reach out to at any time

- 'Write shops'

- Combination of on-location and distance modalities by further exploring virtual learning: continue face-to-face work with virtual classrooms and activities (this should be limited to those countries with reasonable and reliable internet access) in a number of countries makes e-form unreliable

- Workshops could be organised for board members to learn from innovative experiences

- More action learning projects, where think tanks learn as they do with others (in similar or different contexts)

Topics: Research first, but organisational development too

There is wide agreement that Phase 2 CD should focus more on research: promoting the enhancement of quality and quantity, by helping think tanks improve their academic skills. Some specific topics under research include:

- Work to ensure local researchers take substantive roles in collaborative research involving researchers from the North

- Build the capacity of researchers to publish in international journals and comply with research ethics

- Main technical research issues: analytical capabilities and quality assurance, innovative research methodologies, use of online data and tools, collaborative research with policy agencies and leading policy think tanks, book writing projects, econometric analysis and data management, and impact evaluation

However, several also pointed out the need to continue support on organisational issues, such as communications and policy influence, and strengthen interventions on as-of-yet underdeveloped topics, such as leadership and governance.