



External Evaluation of TTI Phase Two

Interim Report, 21 June 2016

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ACBF	African Capacity Building Foundation
CADEP	Centro de Análisis y Difusión de la Economía Paraguaya
CBGA	Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability
CPR	Centre for Policy Research
CRES	Consortium pour la Recherche Économique et Sociale
CSEA	Center for the Studies of the Economies of Africa
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DFID	UK Department for International Development
EDRI	Ethiopian Development Research Institute
FC	Full cohort
FUSADES	Fundación Salvadoreña para el Desarrollo Económico y Social de El Salvador
Grupo FARO	Fundación para el Avance de las Reformas y las Oportunidades
HR	Human resources
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IEA Ghana	Institute of Economic Affairs
IPAR Rwanda	Institute of Policy Analysis and Research
IPS	Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MISR	Makerere Institute of Social Research
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
Norad	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
QA	Quality assurance
PCS	Policy Community Survey
RFP	Request for proposal
RPO	Regional Program Officer
SC	Sample cohort
Sol	Story of influence
SPDC	Social Policy and Development Centre
ToR	Terms of Reference
TT	Think Tank
TTI	Think Tank Initiative
TTI EC	Think Tank Initiative Executive Committee
TTIX 2015	Think Tank Initiative Exchange 2015
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group

I. Executive summary

This first Interim Report of the Evaluation of Phase Two of the Think Tank Initiative (TTI) presents initial findings and possible lessons sixteen months after the launch of the Evaluation. The Report marks a first major milestone in the Evaluation, which is investigating the relationship between the provision of TTI support and strengthening of think tanks, as well as the relationship between strong think tanks and changes in social and economic policy. Importantly, this Evaluation is expected “to provide independent, timely and actionable feedback to allow for the adaptive management of TTI, as well as providing rigorously documented and validated learning about the program.” At this early formative stage, the Team was encouraged to maximise the exploration of possible improvements and options for course corrections for the remaining years of the program, with more fully-documented summative assessments to come in later reports. The Report also serves to set the Phase Two baseline for the Evaluation, against which further progress will be assessed to 2019.

The Interim Report has benefitted greatly from discussions with the TTI Executive Committee, the Ottawa team and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) Evaluation Division. This has particularly helped to place early findings, evidence and possible lessons to date in the context of the overall TTI learning process and been an opportunity for guidance on the expected process of using this and future reports for broader reflection within and beyond TTI.

A brief introduction situates the Interim Report in relation to the Terms of Reference and the agreed Inception Report for the Evaluation. This is followed by a presentation of the methodology and quality assurance applied, including an acknowledgement of the limitations encountered. The main body of the Report is organized around the three pillars of the Initiative – organizational development, strengthening research quality, and enhancing policy engagement.

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

Question One: *In what ways does TTI support lead, or fail to lead, to stronger and more sustainable think tanks? How has this been achieved? Where evidence exists that TTI support has failed to contribute to the strengthening and improved sustainability of think tanks, what are the reasons?*

This question is addressed in relation to organizational development and research quality.

Question Two: *To what extent do stronger and more sustainable think tanks lead to changes in policy and practice? How has this been achieved? If evidence does not exist that strong, sustainable think tanks lead to changes in policy and practice, what are the reasons? What is the evidence of TTI contributions?*

This question is addressed in relation to policy influence.

Question Three: *What lessons can be drawn from the TTI experience regarding effective support to think tanks?*

Some very preliminary conclusions are presented, but this question will primarily be addressed in the Final Evaluation Report.

This Report presents the main findings, baselines, and potential lessons for consideration. Finally, brief

sections outline the overall emerging lessons and preliminary conclusions, the approach being taken to evaluating TTI's high-level program learning, and recommendations on future directions for the Evaluation itself.

DIVERSITY AND SUSTAINABILITY: KEY FOR THE PROGRAM AND THE EVALUATION

Evaluation work so far has confirmed the wide diversity of needs and priorities among grantees in relation to TTI's different objectives and modalities or channels of support. As one interviewee put it, there are very different needs between the 'big beasts' - reflecting their long history, size and often more academic inclination - in comparison with the generally younger, sometime smaller and often more directly socially-engaged think tanks. Receptivity and access for independent policy research in their respective contexts is seldom easy, but can range from merely challenging to extremely difficult. Grantees' funding environments also differ markedly, as does their level of reliance on TTI funding. As had been expected in Phase Two, the challenge for think tanks of building longer-term financial and organizational sustainability is a major strategic concern for the majority of grantees, with the dwindling and redirection of established funding sources for think tank support, and limited apparent alternatives emerging as yet. Most of the responses in this Report to the specific Evaluation questions are placed in the perspective of this central sustainability challenge.

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A solid core, perhaps a majority, of grantees show strengthening trends during the latter part of Phase One and the early months of Phase Two in their human resource management, recruitment and staff retention. In most cases, the key contributions of TTI to these trends have been through core funding that supports direct investments in recruiting and training staff, as well as creating better working environments within the grantee organizations. At times these benefits have been reinforced with a modest 'demonstration effect' of good think tank practice. Grantees show commitments to principles of gender equity and measures to enhance the well-being of staff as part of their human resource management procedures. Most grantees have either followed prevailing norms in their countries or had already achieved substantial advances in these areas on their own before receiving TTI support.

Core support has greatly facilitated grantee efforts to plan, think and act more strategically, largely due to the 'space' that these resources give for making independent decisions about organizational development and even the capacity to 'say no' to inappropriate research initiatives. Among the grantees the capacity and opportunity to think strategically and develop their organizations has in some cases been modestly enhanced through TTI support. In other cases TTI has been essential for achieving fundamental improvements. These capacities to think strategically are not always reflected in formal plans. This is not judged by the Evaluation Team to necessarily be a problem given the relatively strong leadership and governance in most grantee organizations.

In contrast with relatively robust evidence on the capacity-strengthening uses of core funding by grantees, the Evaluation has encountered limited evidence of outcomes generated by learning events and opportunity funds over the latter part of Phase One and early part of Phase Two. This may relate to the time lag for the transformations now underway in the TTI capacity development strategy to be recognized by the grantees. It may also suggest a possible need for course-corrections (some of which are

already underway). These could include more rigorous needs assessments, design criteria, and analysis of use – and possibly more modest and selective concentration of support in the future.

TTI's multi-year core funding for grantees – especially the financial 'space' to develop their capacities and research portfolios, relevance and communications – is making a necessary but not sufficient contribution to future financial and organizational sustainability. A more intensive and integrated focus on longer-term institutional strength – including governance and leadership, as well as generating new sources of income – will be essential for most grantees to emerge from Phase Two as more sustainable organizations.

RESEARCH QUALITY

Research quality is judged in varying ways among the grantees. Some of them see having highly qualified researchers itself as an indication of quality. Others emphasize rigorous research methods and data sets. Some view peer-reviewed publications as evidence of quality and even as evidence to ensure that policy makers recognize the quality of their work. Most emphasize developing systems for internal review of evolving research as the most important ways to improve the quality of their research, including both formal and informal research quality control systems.

Findings suggest that emphasis on peer-reviewed publications is highly varied among the grantees. In some, peer-reviewed publication is seen as the most important and impartial way to judge staff performance. By contrast, in the Latin America sample cohort peer-reviewed publications are largely not seen as important or relevant as an indicator of quality. A range of quality assurance procedures has been put into place among the grantees, mostly emphasizing internal peer review, but the extent to which these are consistently applied is not clear. Internal seminars, mentoring and open discussion of research quality may in fact be the most important means for enhancing research quality among the grantees.

The grantees are experimenting with a variety of ways to mentor younger researchers, including engagement with university-based research associates, involvement of Board members and arrangements with senior international researchers. Information about these practices could be more proactively shared among the grantees as a way of promoting mentoring in ways that have a significant chance of replication beyond the end of TTI support.

There is a wide variation among grantees in their depth and commitment to research on gender issues, reflecting their different pre-existing capacities, societal contexts and internal dynamics. This has influenced their response to TTI's efforts to date and suggests that a more differentiated approach should be considered to focus on carefully tailored inputs, undertaken in close coordination with regional program officers and ensuring that the capacities of the stronger grantees are mobilized for peer mentoring.

The quality-enhancing benefits of TTI to date include enabling grantees in the following ways:

- Building the capacities of researchers
- Attracting and retaining qualified staff
- Focusing on research that they recognize as relevant for influencing policy
- Strengthening internal process for research coordination and quality control

These processes should be well-documented and disseminated by TTI for the remaining years of the

program as valuable lessons for all concerned with think tank research quality, including potential financial supporters. A more nuanced understanding of how to support ‘research quality’ in a way that reflects diverse think tank capacity development trajectories and understandings of the links between research quality and relevance could be an important legacy of TTI.

POLICY ENGAGEMENT AND INFLUENCE

The significant contribution of TTI core support to the grantees’ ability to design their own research agendas independently (from both government and Northern agendas) has enhanced their credibility and self-confidence. Reputational strength has been further bolstered in some cases by their selection to participate in TTI, which may signify an important ‘seal of approval’. We find major variations in the conditions of free expression and receptivity to evidence-based policy research – and some worrisome widespread trends of decline in both. Nonetheless, we also find that grantee capacities to produce credible research and maintain constructive dialogues with political leaders and civil society - while managing the boundaries between research, advice and advocacy – can do much to create conducive conditions for policy influence.

The roles of the think tanks in policy development and debate, and the ways that TTI has contributed to this, vary according to the following factors:

- Independence from government and international actors
- Closeness of relations with civil society and the broader research community
- Demands from different policy actors for evidence
- Freedom of expression

The Evaluation Team judges that these are largely contextual factors that will profoundly influence TTI’s contributions. The program should build on the demonstrated latitude for credible and confident grantees to develop networks within their respective policy communities and gain potential policy influence. Wider and deeper issues of tracing policy engagement and policy influence have received little systematic attention by grantees. Most have developed communication strategies, but the extent to which these transcend dissemination activities and actually guide policy engagements appears limited. The need to trace policy influence is nonetheless widely recognized, and many grantees would welcome more support in this area. A suggested lesson is that TTI should take a more comprehensive approach towards stimulating analysis of how to engage for policy influence. The Evaluation suggests a TTI-facilitated action research project on this subject, with the full engagement of interested grantees, to focus on the uses and effectiveness of particular instruments to promote such engagement and influence, and help strengthen monitoring of influence. TTI might also use this to promote deliberative policy engagement to help capitalize on investments made in communication strategies and communications expertise.

TOWARD SUSTAINABILITY

In Phase Two, TTI has redoubled attention to using all capacity development modalities to work towards sustainability. However, it is not always self-evident how different modalities are intended to contribute to different aspects of the rather broad concept of ‘sustainability’. The Evaluation Team’s overall findings suggest that core funding is proving highly effective in feeding into diverse endogenous capacity

development processes. In many respects it is an ideal modality for building ownership for needed steps towards strategically driven organizational development. However, there are also concerns that access to this 'cash' has also constituted a temporary 'crutch' that may ultimately prove problematic from a financial sustainability perspective.

The Evaluation has found that TTI's support to the grantees has primarily resulted in progress towards the establishment or reinforcement of a 'critical mass'¹ in relation to:

- Well-functioning organizations
- Capacity to produce quality research
- Grantees with the self-confidence to engage proactively and from a position of credibility in engaging with the policy community

TTI's ultimate impact, and with that its legacy, will be determined by the grantees' abilities to sustain and build upon this critical mass. The Evaluation work to date leads the Team to judge that this is likely to continue to be shaped through eight processes:

- Developing capacity and 'space' for thinking strategically
- Strengthening leadership and governance
- Contributing to various 'technical' aspects of capacity development
- Improving the physical and organizational working conditions in the grantee organizations
- Helping the grantees expand/improve staffing on the assumption that these new staff will eventually attract the support needed to cover their costs
- Contributing to (and especially 'nudging' towards) stronger networks and greater capacities and commitments to engage with the policy community
- More concerted reflection and action on the 'business models' that could sustain these achievements
- Creation of national, regional and global networks of think tanks to join forces in comparative studies, exchanges of experience, dissemination of best practices, etc.

The Evaluation has found significant examples of progress in all of these areas. It has varied in relation to the different ways that the grantees have needed TTI's support and how they have taken advantage of the opportunities provided. We have also noted the quality and relevance of different types of TTI support, with critical advantages and appropriateness demonstrated in the modality of core support.

¹ This term is borrowed here from physics, where it denotes the amount of fissile material needed to maintain a self-sustaining chain reaction. As elaborated in this report (see especially section 3.1.6) it is applied in the case of think-tanks to refer to a sufficient mix of key elements – human and intellectual, material, organizational and reputational – needed to sustain a viable think-tank over time.

Many of the factors of success and failure can be traced back to the situation of the grantees at the outset of TTI and the extent to which gains have been consolidated or made sustainable. In many cases TTI began by ‘picking winners’ in the sense of supporting think tanks that were already very strong. These grantees have been strengthened further with TTI support and the Evaluation judges that it is very likely that these gains will be consolidated further in the future. In other cases TTI took a significant risk in investing in think tanks that showed significant potential and (apparently primarily due to strong leadership) most of these grantees were able to leverage this support to make significant progress towards achieving the elements of a critical mass, even though capacity to sustain it after TTI remains uncertain. In a small number of cases, due often to circumstances in their national contexts, the support from TTI has primarily served to keep the grantees ‘afloat’. Among these grantees significant progress towards a more solid critical mass and with that a trajectory towards sustainability is difficult to discern.

TTI emphasizes the importance of strengthening grantee capacities to think critically about their own capacity development processes and break out of a “business as usual” mindset. Evaluation findings indicate that the grantees are indeed innovating in a variety of ways and are striving to think and act creatively and strategically. TTI is making significant contributions to these processes, mostly by creating space for the grantees to focus on this reflection. TTI’s capacity development planning processes are not as central to such processes as is perhaps implied by the Capacity Development Strategy, but the Evaluation Team judges that this is not a problem, given the need for this to be an adaptive and endogenous process within each grantee organization, particularly as TTI moves into its final years. This suggests emerging lessons regarding the importance of modest and appropriate ambitions for a global program supporting strategic capacity development among ‘43 categories of think tanks’, rather than a critique of failure to achieve all of the aims in a strategic plan.

As they have been encouraged to do, grantees are drawing on TTI contributions in direct and indirect ways to strengthen their base for the future. These contributions include enhancement in their skills-base, quality and relevance, credibility and communications. A significant number are also exploring a range of financing and ‘business model’ options in their different contexts, including different ways to generate income based on core products, mobilization of local philanthropy, educational activities, etc. Often, however, the focus is on individual actions rather than a broad and integrated approach to building financially sustainable organizations. The Evaluation has not yet seen evidence of comprehensive strategies for financial sustainability emerging. In other words, while the importance of using TTI Phase Two resources to build for future sustainability has been widely recognized, and many efforts launched in that direction, it is not clear that this predominant TTI objective has yet taken a sufficiently coherent shape to help the grantees as much as it could.

Evaluation work so far has confirmed the wide diversity of needs and priorities among grantees in relation to TTI’s different objectives and modalities of support. These findings confirm the wisdom of TTI’s primary reliance in Phase Two on core funding directed to individual grantees to support their particular strategic objectives, combined with intentions to ensure more responsive, tailored support for additional capacity development activities, events and supplementary funding. To date, however, the Evaluation judges there to have been a lesser level of engagement by grantees in many of these aspects of the program than might have been expected. Together with a number of possibilities - through TTI-facilitated action research- for stronger ‘legacy’ contributions on recognized critical issues by TTI, the Evaluation’s

analysis to date suggests important lessons for future programming about realistic expectations and incentives for participation by different sets of grantees, new approaches to needs identification and activity design, and/or perhaps a more selective strategy to focus resources for greater impact.

1. Introduction

As mandated, this first Interim Report primarily focuses on interim findings sixteen months after the launch of the external Evaluation of Phase Two of the Program. It is a first major milestone in carrying out the overall aim of the Evaluation, which is to investigate the relationship between provision of TTI support and strengthening of think tanks, as well as the relationship between strong think tanks and changes in social and economic policy. Importantly, this Evaluation is also expected “to provide independent, timely and actionable feedback to allow for the adaptive management of TTI, as well as providing rigorously documented and validated learning about the program.”

A brief introduction situates the Interim Report in relation to the Terms of Reference and the agreed Inception Report for the Evaluation. This is followed by a presentation of the methodology and quality assurance applied, including an acknowledgement of the limitations encountered. The main body of the Report is organized around the three pillars of the Initiative – organizational development, strengthening research quality, and exercising policy influence – in relation to the three evaluation questions.

Question One: *In what ways does TTI support, lead or fail to lead, to stronger and more sustainable think tanks? How has this been achieved? Where evidence exists that TTI support has failed to contribute to the strengthening and improved sustainability of think tanks, what are the reasons?*

This first overall evaluation question on effectiveness is analyzed in relation to organizational performance and research quality.

Question Two: *To what extent do stronger and more sustainable think tanks lead to changes in policy and practice? How has this been achieved? If evidence does not exist that strong, sustainable think tanks lead to changes in policy and practice, what are the reasons? What is the evidence of TTI contributions?*

This second overall evaluation question focused on outcomes is analyzed in relation to policy influence.

Question Three: *What lessons can be drawn from the TTI experience regarding effective support to think tanks?*

Some very preliminary conclusions are presented regarding question three, but this question will primarily be addressed in the Final Evaluation Report.

Sections 3.1-3.3 present the main findings, baselines, and potential lessons for consideration. Major and notable findings and conclusions are italicized throughout the Report. Finally, brief sections outline the overall lessons emerging, the approach being taken to evaluating TTI’s high-level program learning, and recommendations on future directions for the Evaluation itself.

The draft provided the basis for discussion and a learning dialogue with Think Tank Initiative (TTI) staff and members of the Executive Committee in April 2016. The draft has benefitted from preliminary discussion in a workshop with the TTI Ottawa team and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) Evaluation Division on 25-26 February 2016, sketching the interim findings, evidence and possible lessons to date and receiving guidance on the expected process and presentation of the Interim Report. The approach to this first Interim Report responds to several important expectations, all reflecting the

distinctive character of this Evaluation exercise:

1. At this early formative stage in a four-year process it has been agreed to focus on drawing out possible lessons for TTI support and improvements over the further stages of Phase Two, in the spirit of a learning dialogue and evidence-informed brainstorming between the Evaluation Team and TTI. This implies bringing forward findings and possible lessons based on what at times are more limited evidence than will be needed in later, summative reports. To ensure transparency this Report has been drafted so as to ensure clarity regarding all sources of evidence and where the Evaluation Team has applied its own insight regarding emerging overall findings and possible lessons.
2. Relatedly, this Report must serve both as an input into TTI's progress assessments and possible course-corrections on the programme, but will also set the Phase Two baseline against which further progress will be assessed at specified intervals to 2019. Identifying the appropriate baseline date for Phase Two in different areas has been complicated by the fact that the majority of grantees clearly do not perceive any sharp separation between Phases One and Two in their TTI participation, or ongoing work with TTI support.
3. These early months of substantive research on data around the full cohort (FC) of grantees and thirteen field visits to sample cohort (SC) grantees have progressively clarified the existing sources and limits of data, as well as approaches and tools for accessing and improving them. Striking diversity has been observed among grantees and their respective contexts. Particularly thorny challenges have been encountered around measuring change and attributing causality to a single support program in the grantees' varied trajectories. In part as a response to these challenges, the use of case studies will generally take on increased importance among the mixed methods being applied in the Evaluation.
4. Across different evaluation questions there are pronounced differences in the relative balance, and levels of confidence between the evidence derived from FC data and analysis and from the first data collection visits to grantees in the agreed sample. They seldom contradict, sometimes corroborate each other but are often still tentative. Only rarely can these sources yield precise quantitative results – especially in the SC findings, which are much richer in qualitative data - but all the results reported reflect triangulation among several sources and grantee cases. Where the Evaluation Team's confidence rating around each major finding and possible lesson is weak or moderate, this is acknowledged explicitly in the Report.

5. In reviewing the findings the Evaluation Team has identified several emerging cross-cutting themes most notably with regard to trends towards sustainability, where factors related to organizational development, research quality and policy engagement are interrelated. One central example is the progress of grantees towards achieving a critical mass² and enhanced strategic thinking. These cross-cutting issues are addressed at several points across the discussions on organizational development, research quality and policy engagement and considered with respect to how capacities (in all three areas) are being developed in TTI's work.
6. Baseline data and steps for measurement are described in the Report in shaded boxes and summarized in Annex One: Some of the sub-questions have yielded sufficiently solid evidence of results to provide clear baselines for continued assessment of changes through latter stages of the Evaluation. Others have generated less comprehensive but interesting insights into other key trends and issues. The latter will be followed throughout the Evaluation but in a less structured way and/or with an emphasis on providing a basis for learning about the influence of contextual factors on TT development (rather than TTI itself). With some issues the Evaluation Team judges that significant change is unlikely during Phase Two, and follow-up will be more limited. Finally, on a small number of other sub-questions, insufficient data have been found to support continuing Evaluation effort and it is proposed that they be removed from further consideration.

² This term is borrowed here from physics, where it denotes the amount of fissile material needed to maintain a self-sustaining chain reaction. As elaborated in this report (see especially section 3.1.6) it is applied in the case of think-tanks to refer to a sufficient mix of key elements – human and intellectual, material, organizational and reputational – needed to sustain a viable think-tank over time.

2. Methodology

The methodology for the Evaluation in its first stage (from June 2015 to April 2016) has followed closely the approach set out in the Inception Report. The Team began the research for this Report with the approval of the Inception Report in July 2015, first focusing on structured analysis of the FC data, followed by field visits to the thirteen SC think tanks and attendance at regional meetings in South Asia and West Africa (and brief engagement with a regional meeting in Latin America). The regional meetings provided some of the team members with a chance to also meet with representatives from the full cohort. Over 200 interviews were undertaken, excluding a range of more informal interviews undertaken in conjunction with regional meetings and the Think Tank Initiative Exchange 2015 (TTIX 2015). The Team has had regular internal skype meetings and also skype meetings with TTI Ottawa staff and had interviews with regional program officers (RPOs). The Team Leader and the Learning Coordinator attended a meeting with the TTI Team in Ottawa in February 2016 to review progress and plans for the Report. A draft of this Report was submitted in April 2016 and was discussed in meetings between the Evaluation Team, TTI and the Executive Committee later that month. This Interim Report has been extensively revised to reflect this feedback received.

2.1 APPROACH FOLLOWED

The Evaluation design is theory-based, centred on assessing performance against the TTI theory of change and revised results framework³. As requested, the Evaluation Team provided an early critique and suggestions on the draft results framework and several changes were made to it. The revised framework helped to frame the agreed Evaluation Questions and sub-questions in the Inception Report (see Annex Three). These questions reflect the theory of change embodied in the TTI results framework, but it should be stressed that the Evaluation Team has not attempted to assess progress systematically against the specific indicators in that framework itself. For this reason there is some divergence between the focus of the Evaluation and TTI's own internal monitoring systems.

The agreed methodological approach - of "realism" focused on "contribution"⁴ - has proved highly appropriate in coming to grips with a non-directive program working with a complex theory of change in such a highly diverse set of contexts. It has provided a way to delve into how the grantees themselves are bringing together organizational development, enhancement of research quality and policy engagement as part of their own endogenous capacity development processes, while confronting their own

³ <http://www.thinktankinitiative.org/sites/default/files/simplified%20results%20framework.pdf>

⁴ Drawing, as indicated in the Inception Report, on the foundational work of Ray Pawson and Nick Tilley, Realistic Evaluation. London: Sage, 1997 and John Mayne on contribution analysis. Please see http://www.cgiar-ilac.org/files/publications/mayne_making_causal_claims_ilac_brief_26.pdf

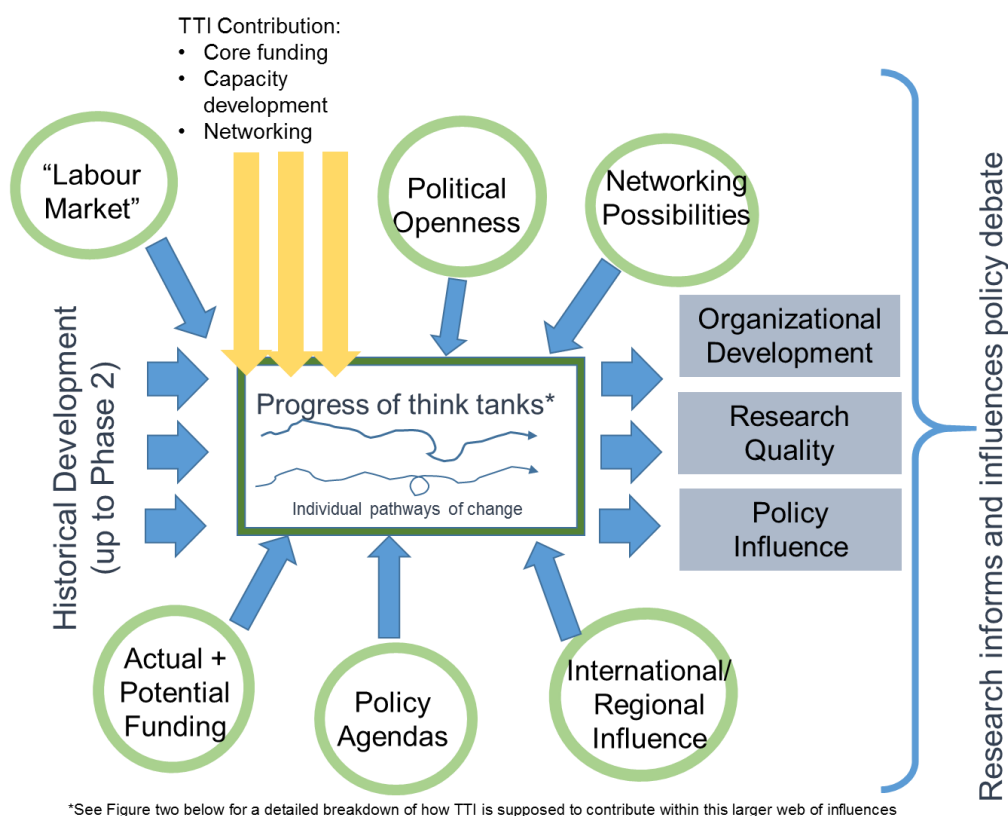
contextual risks and opportunities. The Evaluation Team has used the richness of these findings to explore and categorize key factors impacting on these processes. As such, the Evaluation has adopted a slightly modified perspective on the TTI theory of change. While TTI emphasizes (particularly in the Phase Two Capacity Development Strategy⁵) the extent to which “readiness” to break out of “business as usual” enables grantees to take advantage of TTI support, the Evaluation also recognizes that the grantees’ prevailing and diverse ‘businesses as usual’ will heavily determine the relevance of TTI capacity development support.

The agreed evaluation approach recognizes that multiple causal influences are at work and does not try to impose simple, linear attribution of results to the program interventions. Nor has the Evaluation attempted to judge the progress of the grantees against any single ‘model’ of what a think tank should be, in recognition of the diverse trends and goals among the grantees. Instead the Evaluation accepts complexity and has built frank and evidence-based assessments of contributions. Realist evaluation theory (Pawson 1997) stresses how it is the reasoning and decisions of actors in response to the resources or opportunities accompanying the intervention that will determine whether or not, or to what extent, it works as intended. Thus different underlying influences in each grantee’s context are central to understanding performance. The importance of these conditions has been clear in determining an appropriate and relevant set of baseline indicators in the introductory stage, and the approach will be even more essential as the Evaluation moves into more intensive performance assessment of the program in subsequent stages.

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

⁵ Think Tank Initiative Phase 2 Capacity Development Strategy. FINAL. March 15, 2015. January 2016 Status Update: TTI Phase 2 Capacity Development Implementation. The TTI Phase 2 Capacity Development (CD) Strategy was approved by the Executive Committee in March 2015.

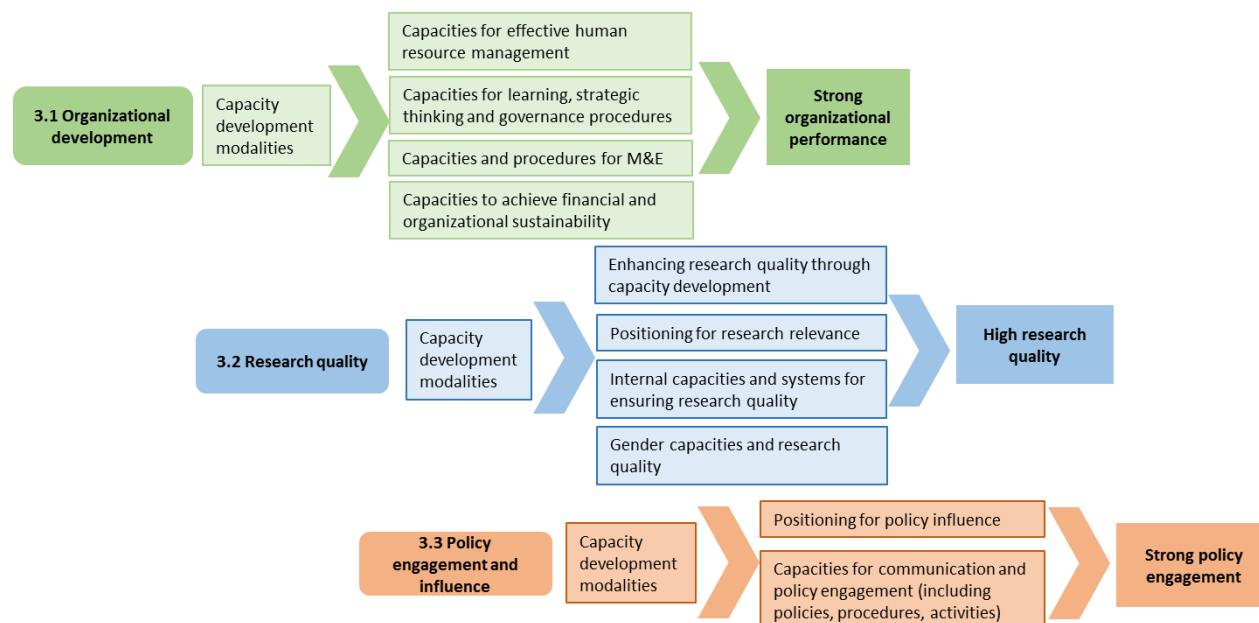
Figure 1: Contribution analysis framework



In this Report the Evaluation Team has made particular efforts to be clear and candid regarding the confidence level that can be placed on different findings, mainly depending on the volume, reliability, comparability and coverage of different data sources. All findings and lessons are based on primary evidence collected in this Evaluation, but our interpretations of the evidence and derivation of possible lessons also draw on past analyses of think tanks and policy influence. Where the Evaluation Team presents interpretations of the implications of findings that draw on its own insights, these statements are presented with explicit caveats.

The Report is structured around the aspects of the TTI Theory of Change related to organisational development, research quality and policy engagement that relate directly to the questions in the evaluation matrix (agreed upon in the Inception Report) and which arose in interviews as being central to development processes from the perspectives of the grantees. This is illustrated in the following figure, which also depicts how the TTI interventions are expected to contribute within the central ‘Progress of Think Tanks’ box in Figure one, without ever losing sight of the non-TTI factors that are often much stronger influences shaping the pathways of change.

Figure 2: Report structure



2.2 ESTABLISHING THE BASELINE

A major set of tasks in the first stage has been to establish the baseline for the Evaluation, but this has proved more challenging than expected, for two principal reasons. The first is that there is no sharp delineation in most of the available data (or in the minds of grantee institutions) between Phases One and Two. Often data on TTI support and assessments overlap the two Phases, as the work itself has continued across them.

The second challenge presented was the diverse, partial and uneven data for constituting a baseline.⁶ The pragmatic solution ultimately proposed by the Evaluation Team and agreed with TTI was to use the Phase Two application documentation as a central baseline source (in addition to analysing other data in the TTI database).

The FC analysis involved triangulating the statements found in the Phase Two applications with other TTI

⁶ The factors contributing to this problem include gaps in reporting by grantees, different interpretations of reporting requirements, relative freedom of grantees to use resources at a given time in a different way (within the objectives) than planned, or activities that are ongoing for which the status of implementation is difficult to capture in precise terms. The grantees also employ varying approaches to what is considered 'research excellence' (e.g., relative importance assigned to peer-reviewed publications, and 'policy influence' (e.g., reaching out to policy makers or participating actively in policy reforms), and also have different perceptions regarding governance issues. The diversity has meant that generalizations based on what emerge as almost '43 different categories of think tank' have had to be approached with special care.

monitoring data to make judgements on the issues selected for exploration under the agreed evaluation sub-questions. The baseline has been fixed insofar as possible to the launch of Phase Two, but a more fluid period overlapping the two Phases will be applied as necessary to yield valid and useful findings.

Baselines selected in this first Interim Report are summarized in Annex One. The baselines and selected procedures for measuring progress against them are set out as appropriate in relevant sections of this Report. The intention has been to highlight the contextual factors and diversity of grantee trajectories that have informed the selection of baselines and the data sources to be used in measuring against these baselines in future Evaluation reports.

Selection of baseline indicators has reflected a pragmatic judgement regarding factors that respond to the agreed evaluation questions from the Inception Report as adapted to the major strategic issues arising in the first round of data collection. These indicators also reflect factors for which the Evaluation Team judges that rigorous and comparable data can be feasibly collected given available resources.

2.3 PROGRAM LEVEL ASSESSMENT, FULL COHORT AND SAMPLE GRANTEE ANALYSES

During the first stage, the Evaluation Team has begun to deploy most of the range of data-gathering tools anticipated in the Inception Report⁷. It has followed the steps, methods and sources set out in the evaluation matrix, including interview guides and other tools to collect and report the data across the sub-questions at both program and individual grantee levels. An average of approximately 50 interviews were undertaken with each SC grantee, including senior management, governance, senior researchers, junior researchers, communications staff and administrative staff. A limited number of interviews were undertaken with informed observers and members of the policy community. Some interviews were undertaken individually and others in focus groups.

The SC data has been particularly important for providing a deeper understanding of the historical and contextual factors that have framed TTI contributions to these grantees' development processes. The selection of the sample has proved largely appropriate⁸ for providing an overview of the processes underway, but it is also recognized that some factors, including for example issues related to the use of opportunity funds and other modalities may possibly be under-represented in this sample of 30 percent of the full cohort.

A guiding precept has been to maximize the use of existing sources of monitoring data, thus minimizing

⁷ External Evaluation of The Think Tank Initiative. Final Inception Report, June 30, 2015. Indevalop Sweden

⁸ The sample of thirteen grantees was selected through a transparent process, elaborated in the Inception Report, to obtain a representative distribution in relation to region, longevity, size (staff and budget), proportion of TTI support in relation to latest budget, leadership, research focus, affiliation, mix of research work and attention to gender.

pressures on the grantees. While this is good evaluation practice, it must also be recognized as a limitation where the focus of existing FC monitoring data has diverged from the types of data required by the Evaluation Team. Therefore this Interim Report includes recommendations for modifications in the data collection approach to bring in additional data sources in future reports (see section five).

For each think tank in the SC the following documents were used for data collection:

1. All the mandatory grantee application materials for Phase Two, including i) most recent annual report; ii) human resource plan; iii) communication strategy; iv) resource mobilization plan; v) strategic plan; v) research output examples in support of the application and vi) legal and audit documents.
2. The assessment and recommendations for the Phase Two application, including the scores provided by the Programme Officer as well as the External Assessor.
3. The final Technical Report of Phase one.
4. The Monitoring Questionnaire⁹ and Policy Community Survey¹⁰ have been used as well as any relevant additional material such as Stories of Influence.
5. The grantee websites have been consulted to find additional data.

For each evaluation question and sub evaluation question, fiches were developed, the data used per question or sub question and put into a database.

In this Report the data collected for the FC was reviewed by the Evaluation Team and modifications were made to the original tentative indicators and questions to reflect the available data and the emerging understanding of grantee performance. This data was then uploaded into a thirty-four question FC web-based database and was used to quantify findings and compare relevant examples. As indicated above, there are some areas where data has proven especially limited. Most notably this is in relation to the outcomes of the Phase One capacity development initiatives as existing reporting is heavily focused on activities and outputs.

In addition to the data related to the specific FC grantees the Evaluation Team has reviewed overall TTI documentation and reporting. A full list of publications reviewed is included in Annex Six.

The data collected for the SC studies - from the visits, interviewee responses and review of grantee outputs, websites and other documentation - was assembled and entered into a ninety-eight question SC web-based database. Where possible, interviewees were asked to rate the importance of a factor or the expected relative importance of the TTI contribution in grantee processes during Phase Two. In most

⁹ The Monitoring Questionnaire (MQ) is conducted every year and monitors the grantees' performance in the three areas of support i) the organization and its environment; ii) research; and iii) policy engagement.

¹⁰ See also: <http://www.thinktankinitiative.org/content/2010-and-2013-policy-community-surveys>

cases the variance in the nature of responses was used to weigh the confidence level of the resulting findings. In almost all questions additional comments were also collected. These were particularly useful to bring to light contextual factors and the grantees' historical trajectories.

Subject to one tentative caveat noted above, the representative validity and utility of the original agreed sample of thirteen grantees was largely confirmed by review against available data on the full cohort. Given the diversity and unique features of each organization, it can be concluded that in effect the full cohort includes 'forty three categories' of think tanks. Thus, although the Team has tried to cluster evidence to identify broader trends, caution has been applied in generalizing from the sample. However, the sample data has enabled a thorough understanding of both the diversity of TTI and prevailing trends.

2.4 ANALYSES, SYNTHESIS AND REPORT WRITING PROCESSES

The FC and SC data uploaded to the web-based database were reviewed and synthesized in relation to the evaluation questions. A matrix of findings and evidence has been used, with attention given to assessing the Team's relative level of confidence around each set of findings, depending on the breadth, reliability and plausibility of supporting evidence. There are some gaps in both data sets and some evidence is indicative rather than definitive. Particularly with the sample, but in some cases with the FC as well, examples have been presented that help illustrate and explain the quantitative findings. The team members have reviewed their interview notes to develop the emerging themes further. Drafting has followed the steps set out in the Inception Report.

2.5 CASE STUDIES

The Evaluation Team has developed a methodology for case studies to be undertaken during Phase Two to ensure that data collected is as traceable and comparable as possible. The nature of the processes underway within TTI has led the Evaluation Team to conclude that a strong emphasis on the case studies will be needed in the coming years. The richness of the data that will be collected should inform learning in relation to complex questions in the evaluation matrix.

During the first evaluation stage the Evaluation Team discussed with SC grantees possible case studies to be developed over the course of Phase Two.¹¹ In addition, relatively short examples illustrating relevant achievements and challenges emerging from Phase One were collected and are described as examples¹² in this Interim Report. The case studies have been selected to be forward-looking, setting a baseline and describing the initial processes that will be followed in the coming years. Most refer to single grantees,

¹¹ Some of these cases are used in this report in boxes with green borders.

¹² Presented in grey shaded boxes.

but two (thus far) bring out broader trends and comparisons. The selection of the cases reflects examples where the Evaluation Team and the SC grantees have agreed that further exploration will provide a strong degree of learning. This has meant that ownership of the case study data collection has been stressed, with a 'downside' in that this opportunistic sample may not provide a fully structured overview of processes across the different regions. In some instances, there is enthusiasm by grantees in developing the case studies as the work evolves. In others it has proven more difficult to secure the engagement of the sample grantees in the case study process after the initial visits, and retrospective reconstruction of case studies will be needed when further SC visits are made.

The primary foci of the case studies are:

1. To unpack and verify the underlying tacit *theories of change* of grantees' strategic efforts in relation to organisational development, research quality, sustainability and policy influence.
2. To anchor the analyses of the Evaluation in an understanding of the *contexts* in which the think tanks operate.
3. To provide a more in-depth understanding of the *categories* of think tanks and the ways in which they are changing or perhaps even shifting along the continuum of different categories over time.
4. To understand the ways that TTI *core support and capacity development* inputs are contributing to these changes.

Case studies will seek to clarify the links between different internal organisational development processes underway within the grantees and the contributions made by TTI. The case study approach has been selected as a tool for contribution analysis, and as a way to relate findings to the varied contexts of TTI's work (see Brown et al 2014).

2.6 MAIN LIMITATIONS OF THE INTERIM REPORT

The first limitation to note applies to the prospects for the entire Phase Two Evaluation. The Team's work in this first stage has already established that there are unusual limits on the generation and collection of comparable data in this program. This relates to the nature of TTI rather than to inappropriate monitoring tools. For this reason, and as the Team is well aware of the limits to what grantees find useful and appropriate to report on, major modifications to current monitoring practices are not proposed. There are two crucial reasons for this. First, the deep diversity among the grantee institutions and their respective contexts would quickly dilute the relevance of many more specific common standards.¹³ Second, and equally important, the basic 'aid-effectiveness' philosophy underlying the program would not be compatible with any attempt to impose further standard reporting requirements or demands on

¹³ For example, standards related to more 'advocacy' oriented TTs would be inappropriate for the more 'academic' grantees and vice versa.

grantees, and would anyway be resisted by these autonomy-minded institutions. The Evaluation itself has been constrained and cautious about adding additional burdens on grantees, and has sought ways to build confidence and offer added value in its dealings with the SC grantees. Notwithstanding these limitations, it is our judgement that - as reflected in the baselines, findings and suggested lessons in this Interim Report - a successful evaluation can be carried out rigorously and usefully, for both learning and accountability.

At this first stage of the Evaluation, the Team has made conscious efforts to engage with the SC grantees, explaining the purpose of the Evaluation and creating mutual engagement for the coming years. The focus of the first visits have been on mutual familiarization and collecting data for the baseline and case studies.

Other limitations around the first Interim Report have been in part a result of the late start and reduced duration of the first stage of the Evaluation.¹⁴ In the time available, the Evaluation Team has not yet been able to engage substantially with a wider group of stakeholders beyond the TTI Program Team and informants from the sample grantees. In part this is due to the difficulties in utilizing regional meetings as fora for data collection. Key priorities and challenges for planning the next stage are twofold. First will be to identify realistic and effective ways to engage representatives of the policy communities surrounding the SC grantees, given the resources available to the Evaluation Team. TTI's Policy Community Surveys (PCS) provide an important overview, but using them to measure change rigorously over the course of Phase Two will be difficult as there is an inevitable time-lag and variability in how their 'policy communities' come to recognize changes in the work of the grantees.

A continuing limitation will be the need to collect additional data directly from the FC grantees in a way that reflects the need to ensure modest demands on their time and to optimize the use of time and resources available to the Evaluation Team.

2.7 QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES

As committed in the Inception Report, Indevalop's full quality assurance system has been applied to both the process and the products for the Interim Report. A full account of the quality assurance steps to date is set out in Annex Five.

2.8 LEARNING PROCESSES

The Evaluation Terms of Reference specified that "the evaluation will provide periodic, timely and actionable feedback to allow for the adaptive management of the Initiative, as well as providing rigorously

¹⁴ From a planned 18 months to only nine in practice.

documented and validated learning about the program.” The Team is prepared, as described in the Inception Report, to organize focused learning efforts at key points throughout the evaluation process, particularly around reporting milestones and dedicated learning events. This work has proceeded in line with the specified tasks and responsibilities and targeted uses and users.

These feedback functions over the course of the Evaluation are primarily intended to furnish lessons to improve TTI’s management by the Program Staff and decision-making by the Executive Committee. But they are also expected to contribute to the understanding and effective use of the Program by grantees, and to TTI’s wider sharing of its learning about strategies for building and managing successful and sustainable think tanks (See Section 3.5).

The first major structured learning contribution of lessons is found in the ‘potential lessons’ accompanying the relevant findings in this Interim Report. These lessons are tentative and not summative assessments. They have been designed to maximise the exploration at this early formative stage of possible improvements and options for course corrections for the remaining years of the program. Here the Evaluation Team has been encouraged to ‘stick its neck out’, and it has done so here.

3. Main findings, baselines and potential lessons

Evaluation Question 1: In what ways does TTI support, lead or fail to lead, to stronger and more sustainable think tanks? How has this been achieved? Where evidence exists that TTI support has failed to contribute to the strengthening and improved sustainability of think tanks, what are the reasons?

Evaluation question one covers issues of *effectiveness* related to two of the pillars of TTI's efforts, organizational performance (3.1) and research quality (3.2). The findings are presented in relation to the sub-questions agreed upon in the Inception Report for this evaluation, and are thus informed by the TTI Results Framework, but do not directly follow the structure of that Framework. The Evaluation focus reflects the TTI focus on capacity development as the cornerstone of effectiveness. According to the Phase Two Capacity Development Strategy, TTI's objectives here are to:

- Strengthen institutional capacity of TTI-funded think tanks to achieve improvements in organizational performance, research quality and policy engagement.
- Share learning about capacity development support for think tanks with stakeholders both within and outside the TTI community.

3.1 ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE AND CONTRIBUTIONS THROUGH TTI MODALITIES

Sub-questions focused on: *Integrated strategic planning and management for sustainability • Grantees' 'human capital' base - human resource management policies and guidelines, including gender equity/inclusion • Ability to recruit, retain and develop staff • Grantees' 'learning cultures'.*

This chapter is structured around the findings directly related to the sub-questions and reflects grantee perspectives on how the TTI modalities have contributed to improvements in organizational performance. In answering the sub-questions agreed upon in the Inception Report, the Evaluation Team has broken down the elements of institutional capacity to focus on areas that have emerged as central to ensure that organizational performance feeds into financially-sustainable enhancements of research quality, learning, strategic thinking and reflection on experience. These are expected to ultimately provide a basis for greater policy engagement and influence. Emphasis has been placed on four aspects.

- TTI contributions to changes in the policies and procedures for human resource management (with particular attention to gender equality).
- How TTI has contributed to helping the grantees to strengthen their capacities to act as learning organizations, with strong leadership and governance.
- TTI's contributions to monitoring and evaluation capacities and commitments, particularly as related to using an understanding of outcomes to inform strategy.
- TTI's overall influence on the grantees' efforts to achieve greater financial and organizational sustainability.

Figure three: Organizational development



3.1.1 Human resource management

Policies and procedures

When discussing human resource policies, the SC almost all refer to following government regulations and national guidelines and norms. A majority of the SC report having some form of policy related to human resources, but sometimes in draft form or as brief references to human resource issues within strategic plans.¹⁵ Among the full cohort grantees, the majority of have human resource management policies, but of those with policies in place FC and SC data suggest that these policies are often basic, remain in draft form and/or are not comprehensively applied. The Evaluation Team judges that the production of these policies may sometimes relate to a desire to respond to TTI requirements rather than an internalized view that these are important tools for organizational development. Despite the widespread lack of formalized human resource plans, most FC grantees report having well-being and non-discrimination measures, a finding corroborated by the SC data. *Overall the Evaluation judges that the process of developing and implementing human resource policies is rather vague and intuitive, and often focused on modest enhancements to standard terms and conditions of employment to make the organizations more attractive.*

All in the SC have policies for maternity leave, which mostly reflect national laws. Just under one third have systems for ensuring availability of childcare, as this is more often seen to be the responsibility of the individual staff member. Approximately half take family roles into consideration in planning field-work, largely in an informal manner. SC statements (and observation) show that some grantees in South Asia, West Africa and East Africa are already well oriented towards gender equality in the workplace. For example, three of the South Asia SC grantees' had already put in place human resource management processes or gender policies before receiving TTI support – one even had a policy for paternity leave. Latin American grantees are judged to have shown some modest progress during Phase One from a

¹⁵ For example, lists of new positions to be established.

more limited starting point. All but one of the SC sample grantees report having a generally open and constructive dialogue on staff well-being, and the general impressions of the Evaluation Team confirm this.

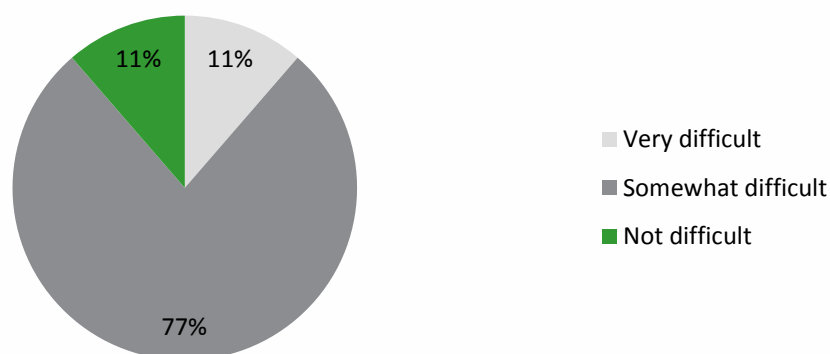
Staff recruitment and retention

Generally TTI core funding has contributed to enabling the grantees to recruit and retain highly skilled senior staff and promising junior staff, with most of the SC seeing TTI as important for this. Evidence from the SC, suggests that ease of recruitment is strongly linked to core support where TTI's support has been used to make the grantees into more attractive workplaces. In the FC almost all (97.6%) use TTI support to attract/retain qualified staff through improved working conditions, and significantly, this support was used to invest in training and further education of these staff (90.7% of cases).

The SC data suggest that paying competitive salaries is central to recruitment and retention, but some grantees had concerns about their ability to sustain these salaries after TTI. Other additional benefits related to TTI support include good physical working conditions, food/tea at work, insurance, credit schemes, etc. Some grantees also expressed a range of views that the Evaluation Team interprets as indicating that the reduced pressure to constantly chase funding opportunities (especially those deemed to be of minor strategic importance) has provided for a more congenial working atmosphere. Stable TTI financing has also been important for the grantees to provide longer-term contracts for staff. Indeed, two of the grantees in the sample stressed that one of their biggest obstacles to developing effective human resource policies in the past has been the inability to provide long-term contracts. A large majority of the SC see TTI support as moderately to highly important for their human resource management during Phase Two, but in most cases the examples provided suggest that this is overwhelmingly related to continuing access to financial resources for salaries, top-ups, etc. and supporting further education. The sustainability of these benefits is discussed further in Sections 3.1.5-3.1.6 below.

TTI monitoring questionnaire data (December 2014) on the level of difficulty in hiring qualified staff (figure four) describes the broad range of perceived levels of difficulty in staff recruitment.

Figure 4: How difficult is it for your organization to hire qualified people?



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

Competing for talent

It is widely recognized that think tanks must compete for talented staff, and that they are in some respects at a disadvantage (Struyk, 2015). SC grantees express clear awareness of this reality and commonly reported that universities (and in some cases the public and private sectors) provide greater job security and international non-governmental organizations provide higher salaries. However, they also reported that these disadvantages can sometimes be offset by the think tanks' ability to offer a more stimulating environment and in some cases opportunities to continue with higher-level studies. Attractiveness of think tank employment is sometimes also related to a declining attractiveness of university employment (particularly in South Asia¹⁶ and to a significant extent in Latin America) and in one case the uncertainties of NGO employment due in part to declining aid flows.

It would be mistaken, however, to assume that there is always competition for highly qualified researchers between think tanks and universities, as there are also sometimes strong synergies. *Evaluation findings are similar to TTI-commissioned analysis of these relationships that highlighted diversity, including both synergies and disconnects, as well as both competition and collaboration through various employment forms and "moonlighting"* (Partnership for African Social & Governance Research 2015;

¹⁶ Linked in part to them becoming increasingly subject to external political influence: see for example the recent pressures on Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi, <https://jooneedjkhan.wordpress.com/2016/02/19/why-indias-leading-university-is-under-siege-by-vijay-prashad-rnn-counterpunch/>, February 19th 2016.

PASGR 2014). There are SC cases where either direct employment within the university (two examples) or opportunities to retain links with a university (one example) are important. Some senior researchers use occasional teaching in universities to identify and recruit promising students, as well as to encourage talented students to consider a career in policy research.

Example: Deciding on a path for human resource development

Despite the dearth of formal plans, the SC data suggests that the grantees have given great attention to organizational development processes. In interviews, executive directors frequently refer to proactive steps to ensure that their organizations develop in an appropriate and sustainable manner. One executive director related how one major donor had, some years ago, pressured them to pay very high salaries to attract the best possible staff. This advice was rejected as they felt this would not be sustainable and would furthermore deplete the capacities of the universities and thereby impair growth in national capacities. They also foresaw issues around sustainability when the funds would run out. Instead the grantee decided to build its own capacity internally over time and developed a proposal to do so. The intention was to attract good bachelor's degree holders and send them for further training. This has paid off. Now the grantee has thirteen staff with doctorates and five more currently studying for post-graduate degrees.

Gender in organizational development¹⁷

In the SC gender has been described as not being a major recruitment and retention issue. Some statements made by female staff indicate that they value the environment of a think tank, flexible working conditions, and appear not to be discouraged by lower salaries than they might earn elsewhere. As noted above, policies and procedures for equitable human resource management are in place. However, FC data suggests high gender imbalances, with somewhat less differentiation in Latin America than in other regions. Monitoring questionnaire data (figures five and six below) highlights how, even though there is a fairly even distribution of male and female research staff overall, more senior level staff are primarily male.

¹⁷ This Report analyses two types of gender issues. In this section, gender has been taken up in terms of organizational development and steps taken to ensure equity in the ways that the organizations are creating opportunities for the staff. In section 3.2.4 the Report looks at the 'qualities' of gender research.

Figure 5: Gender distribution of research staff by region

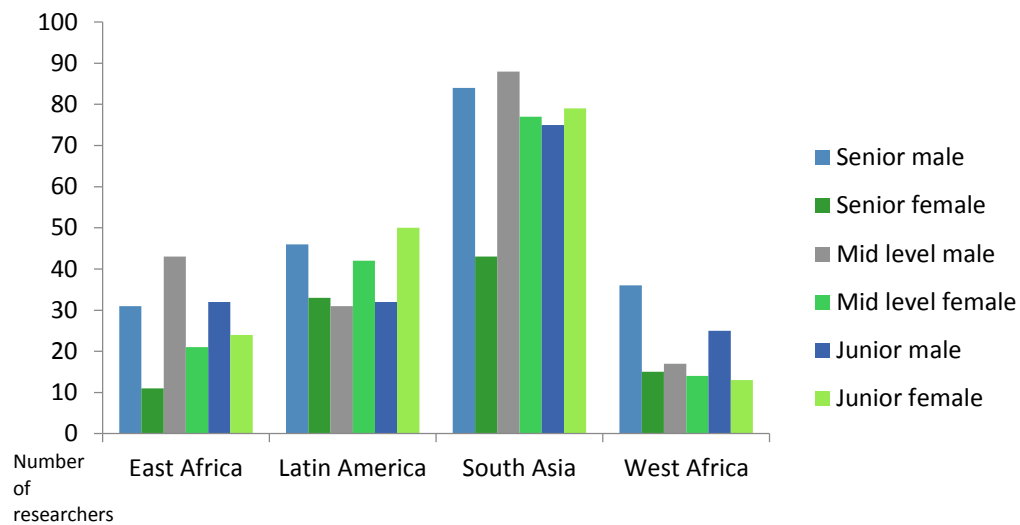
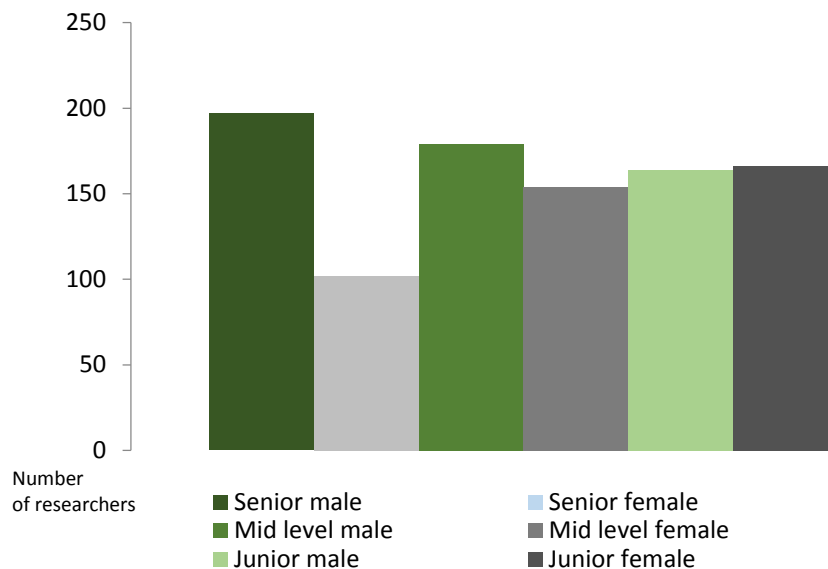


Figure 6: Gender distribution of research staff overall



Baseline Two: Gender and or- ganizational de- velopment	Among senior fulltime staff there is a major predominance of male staff (197 full time senior male staff/102 full time senior female staff) even though there is better gender balance at mid (179 full time mid level male staff/154 full time mid level female staff) and even a slight predominance of women at junior levels (166 full time female staff/164 full time male staff).
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Measurement:	Monitoring questionnaire data will be used to measure changes in staffing patterns with particular attention given to senior fulltime staff. SC data will be used to triangulate these findings with qualitative data regarding the factors that may contribute to changes.
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3.1.2 Capacity development modalities

Core funding as the central modality

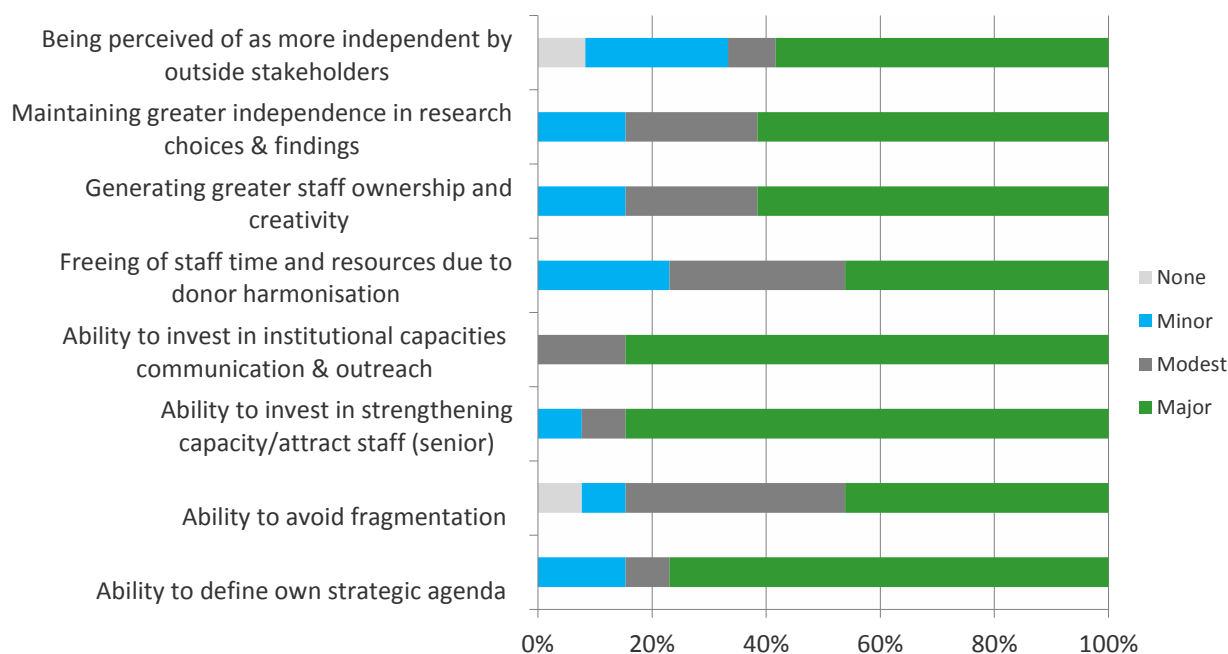
In Phase Two, TTI has redoubled attention to using all capacity development modalities to work towards sustainability.¹⁸ However, it is not always self-evident how different modalities are intended to contribute to different aspects of the rather broad concept of “sustainability”. *The overall findings of the Evaluation suggest that the fact that core funding automatically feeds into endogenous development processes implies an ideal modality for promoting sustainable organizational development. However, there are also concerns that access to this ‘cash’ has also constituted a temporary ‘crutch’ that might in the longer-term prove problematic from a financial sustainability perspective.*

There is substantial evidence of actual human resource and organizational development among the grantees, with most evidence of the TTI contribution related to the very considerable benefits of core funding. When SC grantees refer to their own capacity development processes they highlight strongly how TTI core funding has enabled them to pursue internal processes (of their own design) to strengthen their organizational and human resource capacities in ways that reflect their own challenges and visions. FC data show that TTI support has been important (if not crucial) in this ‘ownership’. Across the FC, numerous comments testify that 74.4% felt that strengthening/maintain a focus on strategic planning and priorities constituted a key aspect of TTI support for organizational development. Specific advances include building or maintaining focus on priority research areas and subjects. This includes strengthening the critical mass of researchers, internal strategic planning and direction, and enabling a focus on core mandates, vision, mission and objectives.

Figure seven below summarizes the Evaluation Team’s findings regarding the underlying values of core funding for the SC grantees.

¹⁸ The Capacity Development Strategy states: “TTI’s Phase 2 CD approach will integrate sustainability as the central focus and all CD activities will be an opportunity to invest in the sustainable future of TTI-supported think tanks.”

Figure 7: Values of core funding in the SC



To date it is difficult to discern a significant causal relation between capacities that have been developed and TTI Regional Program Officer (RPO) advice/accompaniment, learning events and matching/opportunity funds. Apart from various anecdotes, FC data rarely provides a clear path of evidence linking capacity development outcomes to these types of support. For example, communication plans have been drafted with direct TTI capacity development support for many grantees, but it is unclear whether and how such plans have been used.¹⁹ Unless prodded, informants rarely attribute capacities developing in their organizations to learning events and matching/opportunity funds.²⁰ Even when prodded on TTI capacity development inputs, their replies tend to be somewhat vague, which the Evaluation Team interprets to suggest that *the concrete capacity development planning process described in the 2015 Capacity Development Strategy has yet to become a central aspect of how the grantees think about their own capacity development processes*. This should not necessarily be interpreted as a criti-

¹⁹ In the FC 53.5% of grantees report that TTI contributed to developing and implementing communications strategies by providing training/advice on how to develop a strategy.

²⁰ This is in particular contrast to their spontaneous emphasis on the benefits of core funding which allows for greater tailoring and more time to build capacity in strategic areas relevant to the grantee, and for observing potential results.

cism however, if it is recognized that their capacity development processes should be endogenous and not reliant on TTI support.

TTI has clearly engaged in critical reflection on these challenges (Weyrauch and Echt, 2014), the results of which may not have filtered out to the grantees at the start of Phase Two. As such the findings here may primarily illustrate the outcomes of TTI support that were undertaken during Phase One before lessons from this past experience began to be applied. Indeed, the limited results seen so far largely mirror the concerns raised in TTI's own analysis of capacity development in Phase One, which resulted in the new TTI Capacity Development Strategy approved in March 2015.

Training

FC data on training tends to refer mostly to attendance at training events but not necessarily to shed much light on the outcomes. The Evaluation Team judges the training feedback reported by TTI to suggest positive, but not enthusiastic, views of recent training.²¹ Responses (or lack thereof) in the SC regarding the value of training suggest to the Evaluation Team that support has not been consistently demand-driven or well-tailored to identified needs. In general the recollection of TTI training within the SC is limited, though in some cases this is due to the fact that the staff who attended training are no longer employed. Across the SC, almost none of the grantees were able to cite examples of benefits of training and interviewees generally had significant difficulties in recalling who was sent to training in the past. It should be noted here that responses largely reflected training undertaken during Phase One, and that there was little recognition of changes currently underway.

Matching/opportunity funds

Matching/opportunity funds are generally perceived among sample respondents as a window for additional funding and for networking, but respondents did generally do not articulate capacity development outcomes stemming from this support. However, the confidence rating for this finding is judged to be moderate to weak as it may relate to the distribution of access to matching/opportunity funds in the sample, which may not be strongly representative of the FC. Furthermore, here again the changes in this modality during Phase Two may not have become fully apparent to the grantees. Also, the monitoring data for the FC is not appropriate for drawing conclusions regarding the outcomes of this support, particularly given the relatively recent changes in the modality.

Advice and accompaniment

In some contrast, advice and accompaniment from RPOs is spontaneously rated as important by many

²¹ January 2016 Status Update: TTI Phase 2 Capacity Development Implementation

grantees in the SC, though less so in Latin America. Some note the very constructive relationship (one informant referred to this as “nudging”) with RPOs. Some point out the benefits of meeting with “equals”.

The Evaluation judges that the confidence level of the findings regarding the TTI capacity development modalities is moderate as, although the lack of responses is consistent, there may be examples beyond the SC where more positive evidence would dispute this finding. A bias towards output reporting in the FC has limited the availability of data.

The Evaluation recognizes that TTI is aware of the challenges facing the current approaches to capacity development. Discussions have already begun between TTI staff and the Evaluation Team regarding recommendations for shifting some of the limited resources available to engaging grantees on key shared challenges in capacity development through action research projects, and perhaps moving further towards an even more ‘self-selecting’ approach to capacity development activities. These ideas are elaborated in the ‘lessons’ sections below.

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

3.1.3 Capacities for learning and strategic thinking

Space to learn and be strategic

Core funding has clearly contributed to giving many grantees’ greater ‘space to learn,’ largely through internal and multi-stakeholder dialogue, and to explore ways to work better towards their intended objectives. The opportunities to engage in direct dialogues with other think tanks in meetings and events have also contributed to learning in some cases.

SC data in particular suggest that a number of aspects of maturation and/or fundamental reforms of the grantee organizations can be attributed to TTI (core) support enabling them to grow, educate and retain staff, and design their own research programs (see figure eight below). Thus, TTI has enabled them focus on needs that they have identified themselves. Furthermore (though not necessarily related to TTI support *per se*) virtually all the SC grantees all appear to be highly open organizations with flexible measures in place for staff to discuss concerns and ideas for the future. The Evaluation Team was struck in most cases by the collegial atmosphere in the organizations and judges that these intrinsic measures are cen-

tral to generating staff satisfaction (see Struyk 2015). Several grantees in the sample state that the space to learn has meant greater ability to devote time to working on topics that they consider relevant and important for policy makers. This has allowed them not to just respond to what policy makers are saying, but added a level of reflection supported by evidence, thereby creating new space for dialogue. One example also notes the ability to take a “daring” approach to policy framing that goes beyond prevailing demand.

In the FC 74.4% of grantees indicated that TTI core support helped to strengthening/maintaining a focus on strategic planning and priorities. The ways these factors have manifested themselves had varied across the range of grantees. Figure three below summarizes the percentage of grantees which made reference to these different values (more than one could be selected) of core funding in documentation reviewed.

Figure 8: Roles of core funding in organizational development (full cohort)



However, the extent to which this learning has become formalized or embedded through strategic planning procedures is highly variable. Despite SC evidence of how grantees are active in strategic thinking, the extent to which this is reflected in formal plans is uneven. Indeed, grantees tend to put far greater stress on the informal dialogue underway in their organizations than on formal strategic plans. In some cases this informality is justified by the need to be responsive to emerging issues and opportunities, whereas in others the existence of a relatively rudimentary strategic plan has enabled them to assess and decide ‘how flexible they should be’ when confronted with emerging demands and needs. In some interviews strategic plans are primarily described as a tool to ‘say no’ to requests for research that lie outside the areas where the grantee wants to develop capacities.

The SC data unequivocally shows that the effectiveness of TTI support for strategic thinking can be positively correlated with the existence of dynamic leadership (and engaged governance in most cases) that can capitalize on the opportunities created by the extraordinarily flexible support received.

The experience in Phase One showed that in some cases the governance of think tanks was not very strong and additional support through RPOs and other measures were strengthened. There are some examples where TTI support has been used to strengthen the Board function, including attracting new

board members – at times based abroad with different think tanks or with internationally recognized careers in development which often come with a strong network. There are other examples of reorganizing Board functions to strengthen and increase interaction between the Board and the grantee’s management and staff. This appears to have had positive results on different parts of the TTI support, including assistance with the peer review process, recruitment of (junior) researchers, resource mobilisation and creating opportunities to reflect and brainstorm about new ideas.

All but one of the SC grantees has substantial procedures in place for self-assessments, brainstorming and other critical reflection. Two grantees note that they need to respond to emerging issues (including Board requests, which are not always reflective of longer-term strategic planning). This may shift the balance from ‘strategic planning’ to ‘strategic thinking’. As the case study outlined below illustrates, although one grantee’s formal strategic plan has been entirely shelved and cannot be replaced due to a non-functioning governance structure, weekly internal staff seminars provide a regular platform for strategic discussion.

Case Study: MISR Uganda; Developing a vision within a governance vacuum

It might be assumed that strong governance is a precondition for strategic planning and achieving visionary reforms in a think tank. The Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR) experience suggests that this assumption may not always apply. Since TTI support began, MISR has been operating without a clear and operational formal governance structure. Despite this, the organization has undergone a fundamental restructuring and established a strikingly apparent vision for its work. As this Report is being finalized, concerns are emerging about the extent to which these reforms can be sustained. This case study will track how MISR is ‘getting by’ in this governance vacuum, highlighting any lessons for other think tanks regarding how to move forward with ‘good enough governance’ when the conditions for more formal governance are not present.

During Phase Two it should become apparent if and how a more appropriate governance structure can emerge as Makerere University, within which MISR is based, will undertake a review of its problematic structures, including the role of semi-autonomous institutes and centres. Also, MISR intends to engage in an internal evaluation of its PhD programme involving a range of stakeholders and then arrange an external evaluation. These processes should provide opportunities to explore options for moving towards more ‘normal’ governance and planning structures.

The following three figures summarize the Evaluation Team’s judgements regarding the extent of engagement of governance and leadership in strategic thinking and planning, and also the level of formality of these (often intuitive) processes. They reflect a triangulation-derived synthesis of related responses to a set of standard questions addressed to all SC grantees. The numbers refer to how many of the thirteen SC grantees are judged to fall into each category.

Figure 9: Engagement of governance structures in strategy in SC

	Very limited			Moderate				Strong		
Extent to which grantee governance structures are active and influential in strategic development efforts	1	0	0	1	2	2	1	3	1	2

Figure 10: Engagement of leadership in strategy in SC

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

Figure 11: Formality of strategic planning processes in SC

	Very limited				Informal/ intuitive				Formal/ structured	
Level of formality of the grantee's state of strategic planning	0	0	1	1	0	4	3	2	2	0

3.1.4 Monitoring and evaluation capacities and procedures

Mixed progress with M&E

As noted above, there is ample evidence demonstrating how TTI support has provided the space for grantees to adopt a learning approach to developing clearer strategic direction. It is difficult, however, to trace links between these processes and the establishment of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems to feed strategic thinking with evidence on organizational performance. TTI has commissioned research into how to enhance M&E with particular attention to policy influence (Alcázar et al 2012), but the Evaluation Team has seen little evidence that this thinking has filtered into grantee practice. The richness of discussions on policy influence at TTI 2015 can be interpreted as evidence of an emerging concern for analyzing policy influence, even if this has not yet had a direct impact on M&E systems.

FC data regarding M&E reveals varied perceptions on what should be monitored and evaluated, and notably little regarding the intended uses and users of these systems. Both data sets show mixed results in terms of establishing -and using- M&E systems. Good practice is that such systems should mainly provide a basis for ongoing learning and adaptation, but SC interviews indicate that M&E is frequently seen to be about reporting to donors on activities and outputs. Most grantees appear to have established M&E plans during Phase One,²² but the Evaluation judges most of them to have been limited to rudimentary output data management procedures. Some examples also demonstrate that M&E processes are often new to the grantees, and that they are in an early stage, not only of building an M&E system

²² 72% of the FC indicate that M&E related processes are part of their strategic planning processes and priorities.

per se, but developing training routines, hiring M&E personnel, and generating a ‘monitoring and evaluation culture’. Many examples show that M&E processes are most strongly linked to research quality assurance systems (implying perhaps less relative attention to tracing performance in relation to organizational development, policy influence and integrated strategic plans).

Two SC grantees report significantly heavier pressure for outcome-related M&E reporting from other donors, perhaps reflecting the gentler ‘nudging’ approach employed by the TTI RPOs. Performance monitoring is seen by some as a way to objectively structure merit-based incentives for staff. Only two of the sample see TTI support as very important for developing M&E systems in Phase Two, which (from comments made) could be interpreted as a positive indication that the grantees recognize that it is time for them to take full ownership of these systems. One grantee stressed the desire to use M&E to be able to demonstrate what the TTI resources have delivered, as a tool for progress tracking as well as accountability. Across the full cohort, the grantees show mixed levels of satisfaction with their M&E systems.²³

Individual SC comments suggest that there is interest in more support on outcome-oriented tracing of policy influence. However, other comments suggested that such information is not needed due to the grantees’ close relations with policy makers. There is a degree of concern that such efforts could be a reflection of donors’ agendas rather than the grantees’ own learning needs.

The confidence level of these finding is judged to be moderate as the diversity of perceptions regarding the content, use and importance of M&E has meant that examples are relatively anecdotal, although the overall direction is consistent.

Figure twelve below summarizes the Evaluation Team’s judgements regarding the extent to which M&E systems are actively used to track and inform efforts to follow and adapt strategies.

Figure 12: Use of M&E systems to inform strategy

	Very limited			Moderate					Strong	
Extent to which strategic plans are tracked and informed by M&E systems	1	2	1	3	2	1	1	2	0	0

Baseline Four: Strategic thinking and	At the end of Phase One, grantees have strengthened their capacities and space for strategic thinking. Some were already strong in this respect at the outset, whereas others were weak. However, <i>in many instances the time and space for strategic think-</i>
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²³ In the FC 54% indicate that their M&E systems are performing satisfactorily, 15% very well, and 31% not at all or limited.

M&E	<i>ing is reliant on temporary TTI core funding.</i> As illustrated in figure eleven above, the range of formality of strategic planning is variable, as are the roles of leadership and governance. The <i>extent to which M&E systems are informing strategic planning is generally low.</i>
Measurement:	<p>As illustrated by the MISR case study, the Evaluation will use SC interviews and discussions with RPOs to <i>trace whether and how changes are underway in the SC grantees' processes for developing their organizational capacities for formal and informal strategic planning, with particular attention to whether and how the currently relatively informal processes (a) move towards greater formality, (b) are being anchored in governance structures, (c) draw on strong leadership (including leadership succession processes), and (d) are informed by monitoring and evaluation systems.</i> As reflected in the progress of organizational development at MISR despite an apparent 'governance vacuum', the evaluation will not assume that less formal governance and strategic planning are necessarily obstacles to development. Rather it will explore how factors related to leadership and positioning (see section 3.2.2 below) support strategic thinking.</p> <p>The Evaluation judges that the most important aspect of M&E systems (but also currently the weakest) should be that of tracing policy engagement and ultimate influence. Thus in the SC the Evaluation will identify and track any efforts related to integrating a greater focus on these outcomes into M&E systems during the course of Phase Two, particularly as part of the case studies of research programs. Interviews with the RPOs and FC will also be used to identify other examples of change, but it is recognized that evidence obtained in the brief FC interviews will probably only be indicative.</p>

3.1.5 Capacities to achieve financial and organizational sustainability

A widespread concern and a range of responses underway

In Phase Two building viable business models and financial sustainability is a growing concern for the majority of grantees. This reflects the dwindling and redirection of established funding sources for think tank support, and limited apparent alternatives to TTI for core funding emerging as yet. The TTI Results Framework sets targets for expanded access to unrestricted funds and diversification of funding as the two main paths to sustainability. *Overall there are some positive tendencies regarding diversification, as will be discussed below, but there are fewer signs of increased access to unrestricted/core funding.* The importance of TTI core funding for covering the costs of key functions (particularly leadership, research coordination and communications) is largely undiminished, which raises concerns around the plausibility of the TTI *de facto* 'exit strategy'.

This concern is made more critical for some by the impending end of TTI core support in 2019 and in East Africa by the phasing out of their African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) core support. A good number are exploring a range of financing and business model options in their different contexts, including different ways to generate income based on core products, mobilization of local philanthropy, providing training, etc.

Overall judgements on the state of resource mobilization planning in the SC are summarized in figure thirteen below. In the SC only two grantees have formal resource mobilization plans in place. Others

acknowledge that their approach to resource mobilization has been relatively intuitive and informal (but in some cases successful). In a few it has been non-existent or in the process of being developed. Only one claims to have a comprehensive resource mobilization strategy in place. Examples suggest that the *focus among many of the grantees has primarily been on specific ‘tools’ for resource mobilization, rather than overall ‘business plans/models’*. Examples of such tools include incentive structures to encourage staff to undertake consultancies, purchasing property or building a training center (with TTI funds), developing concept notes to present to donors, etc. Some of the SC apply various approaches to using TTI core support as ‘seed money’ to build an initial track record in emerging research areas. This is then used to leverage larger program grants. Interest exists in at least two SC grantees in pursuing support from local philanthropists, but with no notable successes thus far.

There are some signs of concrete steps to formalize and implement resource mobilization plans. In the SC there were two references to constructive dialogue with RPOs on this. Others express recognition that TTI is very supportive of their search for financial sustainability, while not trying to impose standardized models. Overall the Evaluation judges that there is a wide range of views about whether TTI support for enhanced future resource mobilization is needed. Some are eager for support, whereas others see this as an internal matter for management and governance to address in relation to local challenges and opportunities. In the SC, ten grantees report TTI to be moderately to very important for resource mobilization in Phase Two.

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

	Interviews with the FC and RPOs will be used to identify other examples of change, but it is recognized that evidence obtained in the brief FC interviews may only be indicative.									
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Figure 13: Status of resource mobilization plans

	Non-existent				Piecemeal and/or intuitive				Strong/explicit	
Status of the grantee's resource mobilization/business plans	0	0	1	1	3	2	3	3	0	0

With some differences of degree, depending on TTI's share in grantees' overall budgets, core funding has helped all grantees to smooth financial volatility and most to develop their internal capacities and a respected research portfolio. This can be expected to enhance the prospects for future financial sustainability. However, apart from the largest and most well-established grantees, these steps towards greater financial stability have not yet been tested, and the continued reliance on TTI core funding for salaries of key staff (four in the SC) is cause for significant concern.

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

Case study: Comparison of business models of three Latin American think tanks

The context for the operation of Latin American think tanks has changed during the last three decades. Towards the end of the 1980s, bilateral cooperation agencies, international foundations, and international organizations saw support to civil society organizations, and particularly think tanks, as a way of promoting democracy and of improving public policy making. The situation began to change in the 1990s, when international cooperation agencies became more focused on Africa, at time when Latin America started its economic recovery and democratic regimes prevailed in most of the region. Financial support from international sources diminished further in the 2000s, when worldwide commodity prices increased significantly, and economic growth picked up in the region. Many Latin American countries shifted from the "low income" and "lower middle income" categories towards the "higher middle-income" category, which made them ineligible for development cooperation from bilateral and multilateral agencies, and also reduced the interest of private foundations and other sources to support think tanks in the region. Many institutions closed, others reduced their activities to a bare minimum and quite a few shifted to become consulting institutions. A few forged alliances with universities, and the stronger ones managed to survive as independent think tanks, primarily with support from international financial institutions and a few private foundations. Greater priority was given to comparative research projects involving collaboration with other policy research institutions, which became a favoured mode of support for international organizations. During Phase Two the Evalua-

tion Team will engage with the three SC grantees, agreeing with them on a “business model baseline” for the beginning of 2016, and then following jointly their progress every six months.

Case study: Development and implementation of the IPAR-Rwanda Resource Mobilization Strategy

Rwanda has very few think tanks and therefore there is no basis upon which to draw local lessons about what is a ‘normal’ business model in the local context. The dearth of think tanks -and the fact that institutions of higher education are in a phase of rapid expansion, and therefore have limited capacity to take on policy research- has meant that the demand for think tank outputs is greater than the supply of relevant, well-grounded research. However, this demand-pull has also led to an emerging market for policy analysis which is spawning consulting firms and increasing involvement by international research institutions and non-governmental organizations.

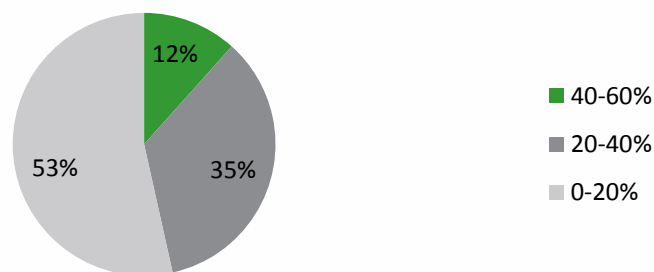
The Institute of Policy Analysis and Research (IPAR-Rwanda) started with strong ‘pump-priming’ support from central government that covered approximately a third of costs during the first years of the organization’s existence, up to 2011 (see Abbott and Mutoro 2015)). During IPAR’s start-up period, weak research and leadership capacities and the lack of a track record of research limited IPAR’s attractiveness to funders. Heavy reliance on government funding at that time also raised concerns about IPAR’s independence. Furthermore, the discontinuation of government funding at first led IPAR to aggressively pursue consultancies that were not always in line with its strategy, thus endangering its reputation as a mission-driven research institute.

TTI and ACBF therefore took a significant risk in providing core funding to this fledgling institution. This support has been vital for enabling IPAR to develop into a strong and credible institution, worthy of support and partnerships. ACBF support is likely to be discontinued in June 2016 and TTI support will end in March 2019, so the urgent need for a new business model is recognized at IPAR. Even in the current Strategic Plan (2012-2016), reduced reliance on core funding was already a stated objective as it was recognized that the prospects for attracting continued un-earmarked support were limited.

IPAR prepared a draft Resource Mobilization Strategy in 2015, which will be followed by the Evaluation Team over the coming years. Parallel to developing this Resource Mobilization Strategy, IPAR has already been significantly shifting its business model, even though the emergence of this model has been more intuitive than explicit. A significant reliance on consultancies was noted in TTI reporting and elsewhere as a problem. It could limit opportunities to focus on IPAR’s own strategic priorities and also pose reputational risks if IPAR slipped back into being seen as a consultancy firm. In recent years IPAR has responded to these risks by reorienting its research portfolio to include an increasing proportion of funding through mid- to long-term research collaboration with international (Northern) research institutes and more selective and strategic choice of consultancies. IPAR’s independence is far less questioned now, as the institute has been able to demonstrate its capacity to undertake rigorous, evidence-based analyses, some of which have been controversial. The new draft Resource Mobilization Strategy can be seen as a step towards more formal integration of these trajectories into operational plans.

It should be noted that not all grantees see the end of TTI support as a looming crisis, as some have sufficient resources, or are in the process of developing a good success rate in attracting a range of funding for major research programs, or both. Approaches have included securing funding for doctoral fellowships for current and prospective future staff. Finally, as seen in figure fourteen below, the proportion of the budgets of different grantees coming from TTI varies enormously, which naturally has a major bearing on the extent to which its termination will be a ‘crisis’ for them.

Figure 14: Levels of TTI Phase Two Funding as Percentage of Overall Grantee Budgets (FC)



Consultancy work

A major topic of interest in relation to financial sustainability among several of the SC grantees relates to whether, how and how much to select and undertake consultancies, and how to harness this type of work as a financial incentive for staff.²⁴ Although providing some cash flow, these assignments are seen by some grantees as a factor that has in the past weakened their credibility for attracting more sustainable and significant funding, i.e., by being perceived as ‘just consultants’.²⁵ Individual researchers express some concerns regarding implicit pressures in consultancy work to produce more outputs of “just acceptable quality” (a risk noted by Struyk 2014:30). Across the SC, approaches to consultancy vary across a spectrum. At one end is an absolute refusal to do consultancies in order to break unequivocally with a past negative reputation as ‘just consultants’. Others are striving to be more selective and refuse (a) consultancies that are not related to the grantee’s strategy and (b) consultancies where researchers are just used as data collectors by Northern partners. Most do consultancies as part of engaging in a network, to respond to what are seen as strategic government and Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) requests, and/or to generate a modest flow of income. Some grantees view consultancies as an important way to influence the policy agenda, especially when the client is an international organization that has the ear of governments. The consultancy issue is notably not a significant concern in South Asia.

²⁴ The Evaluation Team has noted a continuum between consultancies and research. At the one end there are short, intellectually shallow assignments, sometimes just involving data collection without analysis, or presenting opinions without evidence. At the other extreme, there are some assignments involving completely free research chosen and designed by the researchers themselves. Each think tank has its own more or less narrow definition of the types of assignments that are categorized as ‘consultancies’. The comments here reflect the flexible limits that they perceive regarding what constitutes a ‘consultancy assignment’ and what kinds of consultancies are perceived as being appropriate.

²⁵ The PCS data includes anecdotal comments that confirm such a risk.

3.1.6 Achieving a critical mass for sustainability

Finance and organization

Among a number of grantees, *core funding has provided a basis for developing a critical mass of senior staff and a research portfolio that together may provide the credibility needed to set their own research agenda and help generate funds from a variety of sources to match*. Some grantees, notably those with strong university links, have been able to *leverage their growing credibility to access longer-term research grants with characteristics that are relatively similar to core funding*. This may consist of longer-term research programs and various forms of partnerships with international research institutions, donors and non-governmental organizations. It is difficult to quantify this shift towards a ‘middle ground’ between core funded research and contracted research/ consultancy, but it is significant among some of the SC grantees and is judged by the Evaluation to indicate a significant positive trend with regard to sustainable financing (in lieu of opportunities for core funding).

Financial sustainability is *seen by most of the SC grantees as both an outcome and a pillar of organizational sustainability*, which in turn is related to the extent to which grantees have established (or expect to establish) a critical mass. The critical mass challenge relates to the interlinked factors of substantive, organizational and financial sustainability, as evidenced by both being able to manage core organizational functions, and also by having the quantity and quality of research staff and production required to maintain credibility.

Baseline Seven: Critical mass for sustainability	Existing data does not provide a basis for quantifiable baseline findings regarding how a reputation for high quality research is being leveraged for greater financial sustainability, but SC interviewees present plausible arguments that this is the case and report various examples of expanding engagements with respected international research institutions and undertaking research programs more selectively.
Measurement:	<p>As part of case studies of grantee research programs, the Evaluation Team will explore evidence of <i>where strategic use of TTI support is generating credibility that is in turn contributing to greater financial sustainability</i>. It should be noted, however, that these examples are likely to be contextually dependent and case specific.</p> <p>The Evaluation will also, in SC and FC interviews, trace the <i>emergence of a ‘middle ground’</i> of less restrictive programmatic financing (sources, quantities, types, levels of relations to strategic plans), emphasizing how it began during Phase One and the extent to which it can compensate for the expected severe reduction of core funding at the end of Phase Two. The Evaluation will be attentive to regional trends and emerging categories of how different types of grantee are developing greater capacity to access this ‘middle ground’ of funding.</p> <p>The extent to which a critical mass could be sustained and leveraged to attract suitable forms of support - if not core funding, at least more appropriate programmatic and flexible support aligned with grantee strategies - would only be fully clear in an <i>ex post</i> evaluation. In lieu of this opportunity, at two further milestones the Team will closely measure (both quantitatively and descriptively) the extent to which SC grantees perceive their organizations to have achieved -and expect to maintain- a critical mass over the course of Phase Two. Though difficult to quantify, the examples in Table One below will be used to guide this tracking.</p>

What is a 'critical mass'?

Drawing on the collected SC data, the Evaluation Team sees the key requirements of 'critical mass' to include: highly qualified leadership (executive director and in most cases a research coordinator or similar post); a well-functioning finance and administration department; an effective communications department (or at least a well-placed individual responsible); a balanced and diverse research portfolio that confers credibility, and a sufficient number of senior and junior researchers to undertake the tasks reflected in the organization's strategic goals. Adequate governance is also necessary.

Strong grantees already had a certain critical mass or were well on their way during Phase One, whereas some went from being very shaky to being close to having a critical mass and significantly more credibility by the end of Phase One. But in the SC, for example, in four instances this credibility relies on key leadership staff who are financed by TTI (as noted above), and the ability to top-up salaries of senior researchers and those returning with doctorates. Also, other important functions that make the organization a respected institution and attractive employer may depend on this core funding (examples cited in interviews include possibilities for further education/training, well-functioning IT, user-friendly library, well maintained facilities, etc.). In effect, it is uncertain among most grantees how much this often quite impressive strengthening during Phase One can be seen to have generated a *sustainable* critical mass that will attract new forms of support to replace TTI in the future.

Table One: Current critical mass status among the SC grantees

	Significant advancement needed to achieve critical mass (high risk for financial and human resource unsustainability; currently 3 grantees)	Well on the way to achieving a critical mass (moderate risk for financial and human resource unsustainability; currently 1 grantee)	Recently achieved critical mass (low risk for financial and human resource unsustainability; currently 5 grantees)	Well established critical mass (minimal risk for financial and human resource unsustainability; currently 4 grantees)
Funding of key staff positions	<i>Rising proportional contribution of TTI funding</i>	<i>Critical mass 'almost' in place, but significantly dependent on TTI funding</i>	<i>Diversified funding of key staff</i>	<i>Modest use of core funding to initiate new research areas</i>
Appropriate and clear approaches to organizational and financial management	<i>Over-reliance on TTI core funding to cover key organizational functions and lack of plans to overcome this</i>	<i>Growing recognition of actual costs (in terms of salaries for leadership and support functions) for research efforts</i>	<i>Structures in place for almost all key functions, but weak in communications</i>	<i>All key staffing positions funded without undue reliance on TTI core financing</i>
Opportunities to enhance the 'critical mass'	<i>Pressures due to the ending of TTI support may lead to reassessment of future directions</i>	<i>Strongly enhanced reputation creates a demand for services</i>	<i>Signs of momentum in attracting highly qualified staff</i>	<i>Established reputational position</i>
Threats to the 'critical mass'	<i>Inability to provide longer term contracts and other challenges leading to loss of junior and senior researchers</i>	<i>Strong demand combined with as yet limited internal capacities creates risks of being over-stretched</i>	<i>Uncertain commitments to communications functions</i> <i>Uncertain leadership succession processes</i>	<i>Despite strong critical mass, continued threats due to contextual uncertainty and volatility</i>

3.1.7 Conclusions: Contributing to differing organizational trajectories among the grantees

Evaluation findings thus far have confirmed the wide diversity of needs and priorities among grantees in relation to TTI's different objectives and channels of support. As one interviewee from South Asia put it, there are very different needs between the 'big beasts' reflecting their long history, size and often more academic inclination in comparison with the generally younger, sometime smaller and often more directly socially-engaged grantees. Grantees' funding environments also differ markedly, as do the degrees of their reliance or dependence on TTI funding.

A solid core, perhaps a majority, of grantees show strengthening trends during the latter part of Phase One and the early months of Phase Two in their human resource development, recruitment and career development activities. In most cases, the key contributions of TTI to these trends have been through supporting direct investments in recruiting and training staff, together with greater financial stability and 'space' to develop their own strategic direction. In a minority of cases, grantees have applied TTI-provided support to strengthen their human resource management, e.g. in relation to gender, including enhanced awareness of the role of gender in their organizations. Nonetheless, most grantees have either followed prevailing norms in their countries or had already achieved substantial advances on their own.

3.1.8 Organizational development: Possible lessons for improvements in TTI or for wider learning

1. In contrast with relatively robust evidence on the capacity-strengthening uses of core funding by grantees, the difficulty in tracing outcomes generated by learning events and matching/opportunity funds over the latter part of Phase One and early part of Phase Two may point to a need for course-corrections. These could include more rigorous and focused needs assessments, design criteria, and analysis of use – and possibly more modest and selective concentration of support. Such directions have been proposed in the current Capacity Development Strategy and steps are already being undertaken to address these issues. The Evaluation Team suggests particular attention to the respective time frames for achieving influence and costs of different capacity development modalities as part of selecting possible alternative uses of the limited TTI resources still uncommitted.
2. The demonstrated benefits of TTI's multi-year core funding for grantees – especially the financial 'space' to develop their capacities and research portfolios, relevance and communications - make a necessary but not sufficient contribution to future financial sustainability. A more intensive and integrated focus on longer-term institutional strength – including governance and leadership, as well as generating new sources of income – will be essential for most grantees to emerge from Phase Two as more sustainable organizations. A TTI-facilitated action research project on this subject, with the full engagement of interested grantees, could bring together scattered promising practices and relevant examples from elsewhere for further improvements over the period to 2019 and constitute a valuable legacy of TTI.

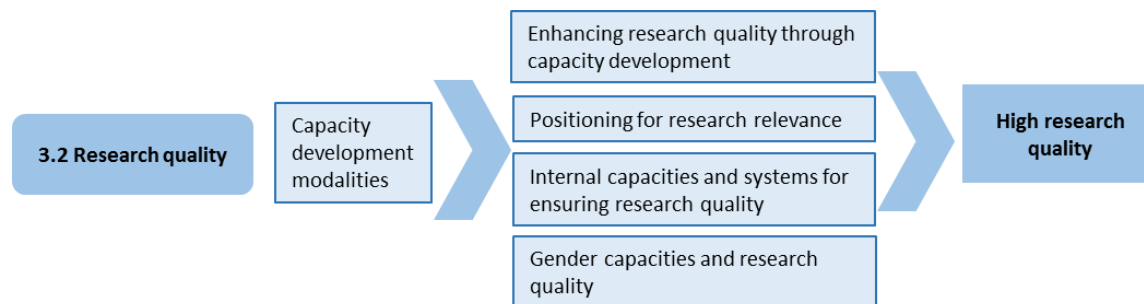
3.2 STRENGTHENING RESEARCH QUALITY AND CONTRIBUTIONS THROUGH TTI MODALITIES

Sub-questions focused on: *Research assets for TT sustainability • Staff capacities and the emergence of a critical mass to produce high quality policy research • 'Independence', stability and 'space' for enhancing research quality • Procedures and approaches for ensuring scientific quality as well as research relevance • Increasing attention to*

gender in overall research efforts.

This sub-chapter presents findings related to the contributions of TTI support to research quality. In many respects the Evaluation has found that research quality has been a bridge between the strengthening of the grantee organizations and their capacities to influence policy. The chapter starts by specifically examining the extent to which TTI has contributed to the development of research staff capacities, given that any research institute relies critically on the capacities of its staff. The Evaluation then describes how the grantees perceive TTI's contribution to their capacity to position themselves to provide relevant research. A major finding of the Evaluation has been that capacities to influence policy depend on the relevance and the quality of research work. The Report then looks at the formal and informal systems in place to ensure research quality. This chapter ends by looking at gender research as an important aspect of how relevance and quality come together. It is noted that gender is not given prominence in the TTI results framework, but (as reflected in the agreed questions in the Inception Report for this evaluation) this is seen to be an important indicator of commitments to addressing priority development issues in a critically reflective manner.

Figure 15: Research quality



The Evaluation Team began its work by attending TTI 2015 in Istanbul, an event which encapsulated the ongoing (and far from conclusive) debate) within TTI and the think tank community more generally (see Boaz and Fischer, 2003) about what constitutes ‘research quality’ and the relationship between these different aspects of ‘quality’ and goals of policy influence. The importance of keeping a focus on research quality as a *means for achieving intended results*, without assuming an unduly mechanistic relationship to the end goal of policy influence, was summarized by one TTI 2015 participant in the following terms:

“... some speakers used the expression of “research value chain”, depicting a linear process... But I do not think this is a linear process. Especially when planning on influence policy research and analysis one shouldn’t wait until the end of a project to fix it in the context and debate.”

(<http://www.politicsandideas.org/?p=2473>)

The Evaluation findings highlight the importance of how *grantees are combining efforts to strengthen more conventional capacities, based on e.g., capabilities to manage data sets and produce peer reviewed publications, with internal review systems and discussions about how to “fix it in the context and debate” even if the factors determining the relationship between research quality and policy influence remain a topic of open debate.*

3.2.1 Enhancing research quality through capacity development

Formal and informal strengthening

The grantees have used TTI support to develop their own human resource capacities for undertaking quality research through attracting new staff and retaining senior and promising younger researchers. In the latter case this refers most notably to those who have returned from higher education abroad, financed by TTI and others. Building the human skills components of a critical mass is important for ensuring research quality as well as for overall sustainability.

The SC data suggests that for most (eight) grantees this *capacity strengthening of researchers is undoubtedly the most important area where TTI has directly contributed to enhanced capacity for research of a higher scientific quality*. The confidence rating for this finding is judged to be high due to the breadth and consistency of responses. Among the grantees that already had a critical mass of very qualified and competent staff (in the SC, primarily in South Asia), it is more difficult to discern a clear contribution from TTI. In the SC most African grantees strongly prioritize the human resource development aspects of enhancing research quality. They have trained young researchers both through higher education and in specific skills (e.g., surveys) and also engaging them in analysis, rather than just data collection (see Ofori Mensah, et al, 2015). All tend to stress the importance of informal, ongoing training through seminars. Two have doctoral programmes. South Asia grantees may have put less focus on internal human resource development since in general they already had very qualified staff before receiving TTI support. They also report having been able to benefit greatly from the flight of qualified researchers from declining university systems.

Baseline Eight: Sustaining a critical mass of researchers	Approximately two thirds of SC grantees can be judged to have established a critical mass of senior and rising junior researchers prior to or during the course of Phase One.
Measurement:	The Evaluation Team will assess any changes to the <i>sustainability of Phase One achievements</i> in attaining a critical mass of research staff and the steps being taken to <i>ensure continued research capacity and future strengthening after the end of TTI support</i> . The case studies of research programs, together with SC and FC interviews more generally, will be used to look at (a) how the grantees are <i>leveraging opportunities to develop staff research capacities in the course of undertaking major research programs</i> –e.g., inclusion of doctoral fellowships, mentoring from senior international researchers, etc., (b) <i>building partnerships</i> with local and international research institutions so as to draw on outside capacities, and (c) encouraging <i>a shift in thinking among donors and other key stakeholders</i> away from instrumentalist perspectives regarding the ‘use’ of think tanks to a recognition of the importance of building national policy research capacities as a goal in itself (a concern noted in Rashid, 2012). Assessing this third variable will require interviews with outside stakeholders and findings are likely to only be indicative.

3.2.2 Positioning for research relevance

For many grantees ‘*doing the right thing*’ (i.e., *relevant research*) receives at least as much attention as ‘*doing things right*’ (in terms of *rigorous research*). Thus research quality related to relevance overlaps

with the efforts of grantees to focus on appropriate entry points for policy engagement. A large proportion of the grantees have proactively used the ‘space’ afforded by TTI support to enhance or reposition themselves in their regional or national policy debates for greater relevance and potential influence on existing and emerging issues. Sharing of peer experience, partly facilitated by TTI, may have also reinforced this trend. Although policy relevance is highly context-specific, there are some trends in the ways that grantees pursue research relevance. Examples include revisiting the quality of existing data or anticipating emerging policy issues and questioning conventional assumptions. *TTI support has given grantees greater room to design research programs as they see fit, rather than responding to demands of those financing research. This has in turn led to a greater focus on scientific quality, freed of constraining contractual conditions.* Researchers in Africa and Latin America emphasize that core funding has given them the independence and negotiating power to *avoid being forced to accept assignments or tasks that do not contribute to their capacities for quality research.* Interviews clearly indicate that these factors have increased the self-confidence and self-esteem of younger researchers in particular.

The Evaluation Team judges that there are four ways²⁶ that this ‘space’ has been used to ensure or enhance relevance, and has illustrated them with examples below:

- 1. Defining the key issues where policy makers and publics need a deeper and more critical level of analyses, or better quality data, to inform decision-making.**

Example: Helping government to understand its own performance: IPAR Rwanda’s Imigiho evaluation and Grupo FARO’s monitoring and evaluation of education sector reform

A centrepiece of Rwanda’s unique and concerted efforts to ensure public accountability is the national system of performance contracts, referred to as Imigiho, under which national and local government are held to account for achieving a range of targets for service provision and economic development. Government agencies are tasked with defining objectives and are assessed on their performance in achieving them. In early years performance was assessed by the authorities themselves, which was seen as unreliable by national leaders. In 2014 IPAR Rwanda was contracted by the government to evaluate how these targets were being set and what was being achieved. Findings from the evaluation have been used to give the government a more reliable set of data on performance and also to stimulate critical assessment of the process behind the setting and measuring of targets at community level and between authorities and their constituencies.

Similarly, the Fundación para el Avance de las Reformas y las Oportunidades (Grupo FARO) has been active in monitoring and evaluating the Ecuadorian government’s implementation of policies and initiatives in the education sector as part of the Decennial Education Plan (PDE). Grupo FARO has taken on this role based on a legal mandate that underpins educational reform, which contains specific provisions for civil society to evaluate its progress.

²⁶ The Evaluation Team will use cases to trace these factors, discussed further under policy engagement in section 3.3.

The European Union (EU) has supported the implementation of the PDE as part of its direct budget support for social development in Ecuador. To overcome challenges and risks of this aid strategy, the EU has also financed the initiative “Educiudadanía”, which promotes the participation and involvement of civil society actors in the monitoring of the PDE’s implementation.

2. Selecting entry points for more effective policy advice and advocacy

Case studies: Selection of entry points

Assessing the impact of expansion of industrial parks in Ethiopia: Ethiopia’s development policies are heavily oriented towards a transformation from an economy reliant on agriculture to industry-driven development. The risks facing the traditional agricultural economy are disturbingly apparent with the impacts of the current El Niño drought. A key aspect of this fundamental societal shift has been a focus on industrial parks as “transformational institutions”. These policies rest on a number of assumptions regarding the expected environmental, social and economic impacts of these parks. More is known about the economic aspects than the social and environmental impacts, which are related to a range of other societal changes. The Ethiopian Development Research Institute (EDRI), through its close and trusting relationship with the government, has recognized that there is a growing desire among high-level political leaders to better understand the full range of positive and negative impacts of industrial parks. In a recently-launched research program EDRI will focus on two aspects. First is the extent to which industrial parks can provide a ‘greener path’ to industrialization than less concentrated approaches to promoting industrial investment. A second focus is the interplay between these parks and broader urbanization and migration processes. Tensions are appearing in conjunction with Ethiopia’s rapid urbanization, with potential unexpected ‘winners and losers’ among the poor who are streaming to the cities to take advantage of new job opportunities. EDRI has recognized that this is therefore an important critical juncture to support authorities to better understand the ways that industrial parks might be used to address potential pressures at an early, planning stage. The Evaluation Team will explore how research into industrial parks serves to support more informed decisions surrounding a lynchpin of overall social and economic development policy.

Electoral reform in Ghana: In October 2006, the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA Ghana) began research to address the deficiencies in Ghana’s democracy since the promulgation of the 1992 Constitution. On completion of the research, the draft findings were published as the draft Democracy Consolidation Strategy Paper (DCSP). IEA then undertook a series of stakeholder consultations and the broadly-agreed suggestions were incorporated into the draft paper. The final DCSP was produced after a period spanning two years. Events following the 2012 Presidential elections not only echoed but also reinforced the IEA’s position on the need for reforms in Ghana’s electoral system. The major opposition party, the New Patriotic Party, petitioned the Supreme Court over the legitimacy of the results of the Presidential election. The court ruled in favour of the ruling National Democratic Congress, while recommending a review of the country’s electoral processes and systems. The challenges facing Ghana’s electoral system and suggestions for improvement were key areas of focus in IEA’s paper. The 2012 presidential elections highlighted IEA’s advocacy on the need for reforms in Ghana’s electoral system and provided IEA with opportunities to contribute to and push for further reforms. In January 2015, the Electoral Commission inaugurated a 10-member committee, including political party leaders and other stakeholders to oversee the implementation of electoral reforms ahead of the 2016 general elections. Given the IEA’s extensive work in the area of electoral reforms, it was invited to join.

3. Radically reframing questions and topics in the development arena to challenge unquestioned data sources, policy assumptions and conventional or consensus paradigms.

‘Seed money’ to rethink data and transcend prevailing policy frameworks

Some grantees pride themselves in the use of TTI support as ‘seed money’ to initiate new research ideas that reflect their own agendas and perceptions (Weyrauch and Echt 2014), and which many donors might see as being too risky to fund at the outset. They undertake research to reframe policy questions that are not yet on the policy agenda or which are currently framed in such a way as to deflect attention from important issues (referred to in

Grupo FARO 2012 as “unstructured problems”).

Case studies:

A recent initiative of India’s Centre for Policy Research (CPR) used TTI funding to recruit a staff member to work on ‘big data’ and his first task was to do a detailed analysis of the numbers on potential outcomes for the elections in the Indian state of Bihar. Findings challenged the pundits’ political wisdom regarding what might happen. Most of CPR’s programmes have grown from seed funding. The executive director sees the use of big data as growing in the same way. As such, sustainability in the short- to mid-term may be related to the extent to which these seeds ‘germinate’ and the risks prove worth the ‘gamble’.

MISR is also using seed support to build on previous research on land access, conflict and governance in Uganda by introducing a feminist perspective that will address questions of gender and inequality in relation to land and landed resources. Existing research projects on land will be reformulated better to explore issues focused on *The Gendered Commons and Accumulation from Below*. This involves strengthening the gender and feminist political economy components of existing agrarian research. The Evaluation Team will trace how this radical reformulation of the prevailing assumptions on land governance and conflict is used to influence both the broader research community and policy actors.

Example: The Centro de Análisis y Difusión de la Economía Paraguaya (CADEP) in Paraguay

CADEP questioned the country’s prevailing foreign trade statistics and their implications for policy. A highly visible and influential project of the Economic Observatory has been a study of trade with Paraguay’s partners in the Mercado Común del Sur (MERCOSUR) free trade agreement. It questioned the way in which foreign trade statistics were gathered and processed by the Central Bank, and dispelled several prevailing misconceptions. The study pointed out some gross errors in the way import/export data were gathered, recorded and interpreted. These errors were identified after doing the painstaking job of reconstructing trade statistics by examining, line-by-line and item-by-item, customs data back to 1995 and extending to 2012. CADEP’s work led to correcting gross errors (of the order ten to one) in the destination, value and volume of exports; to clarify the role of Southeast Asian trade in the economy; to recalculate the trade deficit of Paraguay, showing that it was less than a third than estimated by the Central Bank; and to point out —against prevailing conventional wisdom— that participating in MERCOSUR was beneficial to Paraguay. A “Myth Busters” policy brief showed these mistakes were the result of not appropriately taking into account many imported products. These included luxury and large white goods that were re-exported to Brazil, which were classified as “errors and omissions” and not registered as regular exports. This study, emerging out of CADEP’s dissatisfaction with the quality of empirical evidence on Paraguayan foreign trade, informed public debates and public policy and led to substantive changes in how the Central Bank calculates trade statistics as of 2013.

4. Defining a niche and creating a clear and visible identity in the policy arena.

Case study: ‘Saying things no one else is saying’

The Indian Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA) has focused specifically on tracking where the money goes in the Social Sectors, following the labyrinth from budget promises in the Union budgets down to funding flows to state and districts level. Its understanding of the complexity of India’s fiscal architecture - combining detailed, tedious painstaking work on following the numbers and the practice of procedures - is done by no-one else. It is seen to have a unique role in deepening understanding of government finances in India and in the words of Jean Dreze, a long-term collaborator with Amartya Sen, CBGA “is saying things that no one else is saying”.

The Evaluation Team will not use these four factors as an explicit baseline against which to trace developments during Phase Two, but will, in the case studies of research programs, use these as analytical

lenses with which to understand how ‘space’ and ‘positioning’ are being used to enhance relevance.

3.2.3 Internal systems for ensuring research quality

Systems and their application

Over 70% of the FC grantees report that they have procedures in place for monitoring and ensuring scientific research quality. However, the diverse perspectives on the determinants of quality among grantees suggest that these systems differ widely. In the SC, all sample grantees report procedures for internal and (sometimes external) peer review of research proposals, design and analysis. Among six it appears that certain flagship publications receive particular attention. In its own (admittedly limited) perusal of grantee publications the Evaluation Team notes varying quality despite these procedures, including most notably mixed efforts to tailor research to primary audiences (e.g., policy briefs that summarize reports rather than drawing out key messages). Despite these caveats, a range of SC findings suggest that at the beginning of Phase Two *many grantees are in the process of strengthening their internal quality control processes. Some have formal procedures that need to be implemented. Others are still defining these procedures.*

During Phase One a pilot study on peer review mechanisms to improve research quality was carried out in Latin America. Several think tanks participated and the review mechanism was tested with 18 reviews. Following academic peer review standards, the pilot study used a double-blind method, focusing on research products at the start of the project, manuscript stage and final publications. The research products examined were research protocols or plans, working papers, book chapters and policy briefs. The pilot study concluded that such a system may be useful, but that a pool of experienced paid reviewers is likely to be necessary, that the voluntary character of the review process posed participation challenges, that a continued mentoring and review process would be most useful for young researchers, and that establishing working groups may also help to strengthen the review process. Significantly missing in the pilot study were considerations of policy relevance and influence. (Ordóñez Llanos 2014).

Overall it has been difficult to assess the validity of grantee claims about the actual application of research quality control procedures, as interviews sometimes generated contradictory views, and research outputs are often of uneven quality. The Evaluation Team judges that the actual application of these procedures is variable. In some SC cases (four) the individual research teams within the think tanks have considerable independence, and the extent to which central systems or procedures are embraced throughout the organizations may be limited.

The approach to research quality control sometimes varies with the nature and sponsorship of the assignment: e.g., with consultancies and contracted research there were some anecdotal mentions that it is ultimately the client who assesses whether research adheres to desired standards.

The grantees tend to strongly emphasize activities such as informal in-house seminars (sometimes with invited outside researchers) as the main way that researchers (especially younger researchers) obtain feedback on the quality of their work. This can also have the important benefit of creating a more intellectually stimulating environment.

Among five of the SC, TTI resources have been used to employ a research coordinator (or similar position) to take overall responsibility for processes and procedures and to promote institution-wide re-

search cultures. It appears that informal and collegial coaching processes between senior and junior researchers and from the research coordinator are the most important quality assurance and improvement mechanisms. Sometimes support from external senior researchers is being arranged to mentor younger researchers and to build links with other actors (e.g., in the university system). In the FC data, it is difficult to assess the extent to which such coaching is undertaken, but rich individual examples have emerged in the SC data (six grantees). There are also arrangements in some grantees for linking younger researchers to international visiting researchers and other fellows. Among all of the SC it is clear that open dialogue about the quality of research underway within the organizations is increasingly part of their 'organizational culture'. The importance of changing organizational culture was emphasized in findings of the TTI Organisational Capacity Building action research project (Sang-E-Meel Publications 2015).

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

Data quality

Six of the SC grantees have used TTI support to establish or strengthen units for statistical data collection and analysis or to obtain income from undertaking contracts for data collection. The dedicated units have been important for positioning the think tanks concerned to address weaknesses in government statistical analyses, in filling overall gaps and sometimes in providing a basis for deeper analysis. The FC evidence confirms that this is a significant factor among some of the grantees with 27.9% of grantees having strengthened databases and data collection systems, and 7% having plans to do so. Seven SC grantees emphasise the quality of their data sets as an indication of how quality can be best maintained.

3.2.4 Enhanced attention to gender as a touchstone of research relevance and quality

Sharp variations

The Evaluation Team judges that attention and depth of analysis in relation to gender is now a central aspect of relevance, and with that key to achieving enhanced quality of policy research. The *level of activity and commitment to research relevant to and focusing on gender issues is one of the areas of widest variation among the SC, clearly heavily influenced by their different societal contexts and the influence or absence of aware and committed leadership*.

For grantees midway along the spectrum, some positive influence can be attributed to TTI's awareness-raising and support (as in Latin America), whereas at one end of the spectrum some grantee's were already well advanced in this respect, and therefore unlikely to benefit from TTI activities. At the other

end of the spectrum some appear completely disengaged.²⁷ In the SC, most of the sample were able to describe processes of reflecting on research plans and outputs in order to ensure that gender issues are taken into consideration, but the depth and consistency of these reflective processes in most cases appear to be variable. In the same group, there is a broad spread of responses regarding expectations of how significant TTI support may be in strengthening gender in research during Phase Two (Figure sixteen below).

Figure 16: Importance of TTI for gender awareness in SC



It is difficult to discern the full extent to which TTI has contributed to a stronger and more relevant focus on gender, but so far it appears to be limited in most cases. In some instances TTI has financed employing and/or training gender focal points, but the extent to which this is an effective way to drive broader change is uncertain. The FC analysis has yielded little data. Isolated cases show – superficially – that TTI support contributed to develop gender-focused initiatives and research. However, the degree to which TTI support has actually helped in generating awareness or developing research plans is not measurable. With 25% of the FC there are indications that they prioritize gender equality as a key research focus. In the SC, all respond that they apply some form of gender mainstreaming, while two grantees acknowledge that this is limited and one actually rejects the claim that special efforts are required. Six of the grantees emphasized that they already had strong attention to gender in their research efforts.

Example: FUSADES, gender and TTI

FUSADES was one of the first independent think tanks in El Salvador that focused on the use of empirical evidence for policy design. It also pioneered the preparation of policy briefs on economic subjects, conducted field surveys on various economic and social issues, and analyzed statistical data generated by government agencies. Its areas of concentration have varied gradually over the years, and FUSADES is now placing greater emphasis on issues such as the impact of violence on development, family life, economic opportunities and related subjects.

²⁷ Examples of all three categories have been encountered in the SC, but for the FC, lack of data makes further quantification impossible.

While it is not possible to attribute an increased focus on gender at FUSADES directly to TTI support, it is clear that the institution became more aware of gender issues through its involvement in Phase One. TTI resources provided to FUSADES financed the participation of a senior researcher in a meeting of the International Association for Feminist Economics. Following this meeting and the exchange of ideas with participants, the researcher worked on a joint project with a Nicaraguan think tank with support from a gender expert. In this way, TTI Phase One core support helped FUSADES researchers to become aware of and learn how to incorporate gender issues in their research. Together with the renewed interest in the gender dimensions of research promoted by the Vice-President of FUSADES, this led to the creation of a committee of women researchers who have actively promoted mainstreaming gender issues into the various FUSADES research areas. When the FUSADES board was renewed at the beginning of Phase Two, the number of women board members increased to 40%, and it selected its first female vice-president of the board. An informal working group was established in 2015 to give more visibility to FUSADES' work on gender, and the institution has decided to conduct more gender-focused research, for example on Women's economic empowerment, and to include gender as a cross cutting issue. This has helped to uncover important issues such as the high level of harassment suffered by women using public transport.

FUSADES is also beginning to conduct research aimed at dispelling misconceptions about gender. For example, the idea that "women are less prone to corruption" has been prevalent in El Salvador for quite some time, but this may be due to women having less access to power positions with opportunities to engage in illicit behaviour. A senior board member expressed the view that research was needed to test this hypothesis and gather evidence.

Some SC views have been expressed implying that TTI pressures in terms of gender in research are not contributing to depth, but rather reflect a somewhat annoying pressure to 'tick boxes'. This is particularly notable where a grantee had strong gender capacities and commitments prior to TTI input. For example, one grantee noted that they are looking for ways to promote a *feminist* research approach and that calls for a 'gender perspective' would therefore represent a step backwards to a less ambitious agenda.

The main exception to this critical view is in Latin America, where it appears that Phase One support for integrating gender perspectives into research has been important and has led to greater and deeper inclusion of gender into research (see example above). Elsewhere, some of the grantees remain quite weak in integrating gender into their research, particularly in West Africa. In the SC some gender officers and researchers committed to a stronger gender perspective (notably in Africa) express considerable frustration that they have not been able to effectively promote a more profound agenda among their colleagues that goes further than relatively shallow data-disaggregation efforts. Some anecdotal SC findings revealed conflicting claims between male and female interviewees regarding the strength of colleagues' commitments to gender in research. From comments such as these, the Evaluation Team judges that this may relate to how different research groups tend to have considerable latitude in selecting research approaches, and also to limited diffusion of ideas from the individuals who have attended gender related training, with the apparent exception of Latin American grantees.

Baseline Ten: Depth of focus on gender in research	Broad variation in commitments to (and depth of) gender perspectives in research within grantees (see figure seventeen below). Some indications that TTI support during Phase One has encouraged and created space for enhancements.
Measurement:	Over the course of the Evaluation a structured questionnaire for both gender officers and key researchers promoting integration of gender and feminist perspectives will be used to trace progress across the SC. However, some grantees clearly resist what they tend to see as donor-imposed emphasis on gender, so the use of this questionnaire may be selective.

Figure 17: Depth of gender research focus

	Minimal				Main-streaming (incl. data disaggregation)				Empowerment/ transformative/ rights-based	
Ways in which gender is consistently brought into the grantee's research	0	0	1	1	2	2	1	3	2	1

3.2.5 Conclusions: Varying dimensions of quality in policy research

Defining and assessing quality

Research quality is judged and weighted in varying ways among the grantees. The SC presents a variety of grantee goals and expectations regarding 'quality'. *Some grantees see having highly qualified researchers itself as an indication of quality. Others emphasize rigorous research methods and data sets. Some (but few) view peer-reviewed publications as evidence of quality and even as evidence to ensure that policy makers recognize the quality of their work.* Across the FC, while it is difficult to assess the relative frequency, there are examples that emphasize developing review and evaluation systems as processes to improve the quality of their research. This includes formal and informal research quality control systems.

SC findings suggest that the policy community does not perceive peer-reviewed publications to be an indication of research quality, but emphasis is more varied within the grantees themselves. In four of the SC, peer-reviewed publication is seen as the most important and impartial way to judge staff performance. By contrast, in the Latin America SC peer reviewed publications are not seen as important or relevant as an indicator of quality. Strikingly, one East African grantee with an impressive publication record does not even monitor the peer review publications from their researchers, and even those that do choose not to publicize these outputs on their websites (two).

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

3.2.6 Research quality: Possible lessons for improvements in TTI or for wider learning

1. The quality-enhancing benefits of TTI to date - freeing up grantees to build the capacities of their researchers, attract and retain qualified staff, and strengthen data resources and research coordination - should be well-documented and disseminated by TTI for the remaining years of the program and more widely as valuable lessons for all concerned with think tanks' research quality, including potential financial supporters. This should build on the experience of TTIX 2015. A more nuanced

understanding of how to support ‘research quality’ in a way that reflects diverse grantee capacity development trajectories could be an important legacy of TTI.

2. The grantees are experimenting with a variety of ways to mentor younger researchers, including engagement with university-based research associates, involvement of Board members and arrangements with senior international researchers. Some involve modest investments of TTI resources and some have no cost implications. Information about these practices could be more proactively shared among the grantees as a way of promoting mentoring among the grantees (regionally, and where demand exist, more broadly) about ways to enhance research quality after the end of TTI support. It is recognized that the readiness to engage in such sharing of experience will vary among the regions due to factors such as competition and general levels of interest in sharing experience.
3. Going beyond the traditional standards of academic research, TTI could play a unique catalytic role in promoting agreement and progress around the particular parameters and standards of quality in *policy research* (taking account of policy relevance, engagement and impact). TTI should take further steps to build on the outcomes of TTI 2015 in the form of a publication for broad distribution summarizing the categories of ‘quality’ that emerged in the discussions there and raising challenging questions about what steps think tanks could take to monitor and address their efforts to maintain these alternative ‘quality standards’.
4. Since the wide variation among grantees in their activity and commitment to research on gender issues - reflecting their different societal contexts and internal dynamics – has so strongly determined their response to TTI’s efforts to date, a more differentiated approach should be considered. It would focus on carefully tailored inputs, undertaken in close coordination with regional program officers and ensuring that the capacities of the stronger grantees are mobilized for peer mentoring.

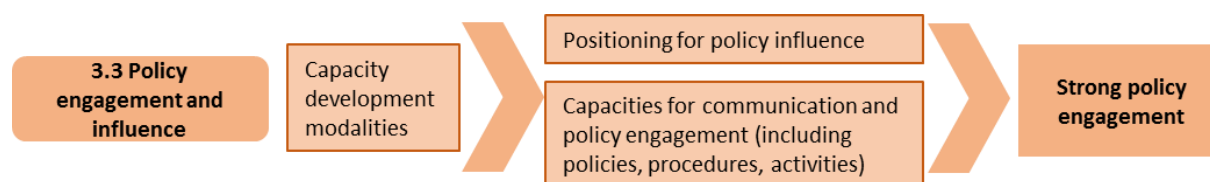
3.3 POLICY ENGAGEMENT AND INFLUENCE

Evaluation Question Two: *To what extent do stronger and more sustainable think tanks lead to changes in policy and practice? How has this been achieved? If evidence does not exist that strong, sustainable think tanks lead to changes in policy and practice, what are the reasons? What is the evidence of TTI contributions?*

Sub-questions focused on: *Strengthening and adapting roles in demanding and changing contexts • Enhancing strategic relevance to policy stakeholders • Interplay between independence and credibility in relation to access and entry points to influence policy and inform debate • Strategies, policies and procedures for communications and policy engagement.*

This chapter presents emerging findings regarding how TTI capacity development support contributes to grantees’ policy engagement and influence. Reflecting the sub-questions from the Inception Report, the focus has been strongly on the context and positioning of the grantees, most notably on ways that independence supports credibility, but also the diverse characteristics of independence.

Figure 18: Policy engagement and influence



The significant contribution of *TTI core support to the grantees' ability to design their own research agendas independently has enhanced their credibility and self-confidence*. In the FC, 39.5% indicate that TTI support has been key for increasing/improving their credibility among third parties. This reputational strength has been further bolstered in some cases by their selection to participate in TTI, which may signify an important 'seal of approval'. In spite of major variations in free expression and receptivity to policy research – and some worrisome widespread trends of decline in these – the evidence shows that grantee capacities to produce strong evidence-based findings, maintain constructive dialogues with political leaders and manage the boundaries between research, advice and advocacy allow them considerable latitude for access and potential influence. TTI's catalytic role in Latin America in networking among think tanks has already helped contribute to the grantees' roles in regional and international policy discussions, while experience in other regions in international engagements is so far more limited.

Furthermore, *there is a two-way relationship between having a position and voice in the policy discourse and enhanced research quality and organizational sustainability* (noted in Struyk 2015:61). Researchers interviewed were proud that their role in respected think tanks gave them a voice in the political discourse. The Evaluation Team judges that this pride can be presumed to be a significant factor increasing the attractiveness of think tank employment for senior and proactive junior researchers.

3.3.1 Positioning for policy influence

It is widely recognized that the domestic policy environment is critical to framing what policy engagement and influence are possible and desirable for think tanks (Martin, undated). The Evaluation has found that the roles of the think tanks in influencing policy and the ways that TTI has contributed to this vary according to the following factors:

1. Independence from government and international actors
2. Closeness of relations with civil society and the broader research community
3. Demands from different policy actors for evidence
4. Freedom of expression

The Evaluation Team judges that these are largely contextual factors that will influence TTI's contributions, but that relatively little change is likely in the grantees themselves over the Phase Two period. Thus, apart from possible major shifts, the Evaluation Team will not directly assess changes in the grantees themselves, but will track positive and negative perceptions (both through stakeholder interviews and PCS data) regarding how the grantees have positioned themselves in relation to these four factors.

Independence

SC analysis has found that '*independence*' in various forms, usually including being non-partisan, is seen

by most grantees as a key factor generating respect and credibility. Almost all the SC grantees see their independence as important for their credibility,²⁸ and with that policy influence. *Core funding from TTI is seen as important for creating conditions for independence.* But at the same time it is important to stress that the grantees have a strikingly broad range of approaches to (and conceptualisations of) ‘independence’.

The Evaluation Team has found that even those grantees that are close to government have been able to engage in potentially controversial research into the major questions facing national development. In these cases, even if overall national policy objectives are not questioned, critical questions are being asked about the effectiveness and potential negative effects of the means by which policy goals are being pursued. This may include social or economic exclusion or distorted reporting or perverse incentives within the bureaucracy.

Experience in Latin America and South Asia highlights how, after changes in government, grantees that were previously seen to be ‘too close to government’ suddenly have to confront perceptions that they are aligned with the opposition. Some grantees describe how they manoeuvre in such a way that they are not associated with a specific political party either in power or in opposition. A reputation for research quality, sometimes paired with a focus on presumed ‘neutral’ econometric and other analyses, can be important for navigating in what can be treacherous waters. Being seen as giving space to public debate and airing diverse views can also contribute to this neutrality.

Even in cases where think tanks are not entirely independent, the ‘good faith’ and access to ‘insider perspectives’ that can emerge from strong trust between the think tank and the government can also open doors for providing input into the government’s ongoing policy deliberations. There is evidence that flexible TTI resources and the human resource capacities enhanced through TTI support have generated the readiness and respect needed by grantees with close affiliations with government to engage on difficult issues. Some anecdotal statements were made by SC grantees that are close to government contrasting the quality and trust that characterize their own policy influence efforts with the advocacy efforts of many civil society organizations, which were seen as lacking essential channels for dialogue.

Some think tanks stress strongly that *independence from Northern agendas is at least as important as independence from government.* In interviews one grantee described how their credibility as a trusted advisor of government was related to their independence from donor pressures, which has been reinforced by no-strings-attached TTI core support. Notably, some grantees avoid relations with certain donors to avoid suspicions of being aligned with the donors’ interests. With cases such as these, TTI core funding is seen as standing out from most other donor support as enabling independence. The im-

²⁸ Credibility (anchored in independence) is an attribute in which research quality and policy influence come together.

portance of independence from aid donors is changing however. In Latin America and South Asia aid financing has shrunk to the extent that this is a minor concern, though it is still important in Africa.

Some SC grantees in particular see a capacity to refuse inappropriate consultancies and (to quote one grantee) “field hand” roles, and to select and set conditions for their partnerships with Northern institutions as vital for appropriately positioning themselves and retaining credibility in their national policy discussions. This, together with scattered comments in the Policy Community Survey, suggests that a credible role in the policy debate is positively related to the extent that a think tank is able to avoid being seen as ‘just consultants’ working for international actors. TTI core support is seen as important in contributing to a stronger stance in this regard, in contrast to the instrumental intentions of many donors in their engagements with think tanks.

Baseline Twelve: Independence	Significant Phase One progress in stemming financial pressures to assume roles that lead to grantees being <i>perceived as ‘just consultants’ or being tainted by Northern donor agendas.</i>
Measurement:	Positive and negative changes to be traced through interviews with the SC and RPOs with attention to possible dangers with the impending decline of core funding. The variety of perspectives on these issues among the different grantees suggests that these findings will provide an enhanced understanding of the role of core funding in promoting independence and the risks in relation to sustainability, but these findings will not be quantifiable.

Closeness of relations with different policy actors

TTI support has *enabled the grantees to maintain an appropriate stance vis-à-vis civil society, noting that the interpretations of ‘appropriate’ vary enormously.* Some SC grantees perceive themselves to be a part of civil society, most notably in Latin America. Others see civil society as an important ally and channel in using their research to influence policy. One grantee does not see civil society as having a significant role in the main policy discussions that are underway between research and government. Some (particularly in South Asia) have in some respects positioned themselves as ‘brokers’ in policy discussions between civil society and their governments.

Relations with policy actors are influenced by their approaches as both advisors and advocates of change. Even where the think tanks choose not to undertake advocacy themselves, the strength of the grantees, developed with TTI support, has often attracted interest in collaboration from both national and international civil society organizations as a way to strengthen their advocacy directed towards the government. In some instances roles are defined by more or less formal mandates, including where laws stipulate that an independent organization should be involved in monitoring policies.

Historical relations with universities are often cited by the SC as being important for defining their roles. Here again, there is a wide spectrum of how this manifests itself. In four cases think tanks emerged out of dissatisfaction with the (often declining or non-existent) roles of the universities in informing national policy and a desire to fill the resulting gaps. However, a significant number of think tanks have struggled to retain close links with key researchers within academia (e.g., through short-term research associate arrangements, often financed with TTI resources). A broader collaborative effort is seen to strengthen

overall credibility and broaden to national policy discourse, thus avoiding narrower ‘policy advice’ roles. SC data presents a variety of ways that TTI support has enabled the think tanks to retain an appropriate relationship with universities and other research institutions.

Some of the grantees attribute their role in *informing national policy to be related to a personal dialogue between their leadership and policy actors*. TTI has presumably not had significant direct influence in this regard, although in two cases independence from donor agendas has been noted as strengthening this personal trust. In five cases TTI support has been seen to provide a ‘seal of approval’ and showed they were highly regarded at the international level. This strengthened their position in relations with government agencies, civil society organizations and academic institutions.

Demands from different policy actors for evidence

Related to the factors above, the positioning of any think tank is inevitably contingent on the prevailing demand for evidence in policy making. Assessing such demand raises a complex set of issues and the Evaluation Team cannot at this stage claim systematic findings in this regard, particularly as the baseline visits included limited opportunities to interview the broader policy community. Findings at this point are divided, and sometimes seemingly contradictory. Some see the media as a channel to stimulate government interest in evidence, whereas others make no reference to this factor.

All SC grantees note that demand varies according to the type of issue. Some grantees mention that there is a strong demand for evidence to enhance service delivery as the rewards to government for good performance –and the risks associated with poor performance - are visible and pressing. Other examples mentioned include aspects of policy where there are concerns that incentives (e.g., for private investment) are not generating the expected results. TTI’s own research noted an inconclusive correlation between strong research quality control and positive perceptions of think tanks among policy makers (Martin, undated).

There are examples among almost all grantees regarding how they have felt able to pursue research that they see as strategically important. Some think tanks make a particular effort to explore new areas and policy framings where there is no demand as yet, but where there should be in the future. TTI support has been mentioned as important for supporting engaging in such ‘risky’ topics and transcending the more immediate instrumental focus of most support for policy research. Some describe using the ‘space’ provided by TTI support to explore topics that they consider relevant and important, not just responding to what policy makers are requesting, but by also creating new spaces for evidence-based research.

Freedom of expression

TTI provides support in countries with a range of levels of freedom of expression, a factor that obviously impinges on how grantees position themselves in the policy debate. This is a dynamic contextual factor that has major implications, with some countries experiencing severe deterioration of freedom of expression over recent years, whereas others (fewer) are experiencing improvements.

Some stress that of the substantiation of research quality expands the extent to which freedom of expression is accepted, i.e., even suspicious authorities are more ready to accept criticism if it is grounded in reliable data and rigorous methods. Some operate within a space that is somewhat ‘protected’ (e.g., a

university), whereas most grantees are more exposed. However, the Evaluation noted some comments indicating that freedom of expression is generally seen as greater for think tanks than for regular university departments, which is a reason that many think tank staff are ‘refugees from universities’, since they perceive their space for critical thinking and research to be greater in a think tank.

As noted above, trust based on closeness to government may provide greater space for pushing the limits to freedom of expression than would be the case if the think tank was perceived as being a strident part of civil society. In this light, limits to freedom of expression may be a more important factor for the (civil society) users than the (think tank) producers of the research.

Baseline Thirteen: Positioning for policy influence	Due to their in-depth knowledge of how to manoeuvre amid political sensitivities, and drawing on their credibility and foundational strengths, grantees have found ways to achieve their aims despite limits to freedom of expression and varying levels of demand for evidence in policy formation.
Measurement:	The Evaluation Team will look for opportunities to use SC case studies of the policy influence of research programs to explore how grantees manage the constraints and opportunities for policy influence amid limits to freedom of expression and varying levels of demand for evidence. Where evidence exists, the Evaluation will assess the ways that TTI support may have influenced grantee capacities to manage within these limits. It is recognized that publishing such analyses could be sensitive for the grantees, so caution will be exercised and a categorization, although perhaps feasible, is best avoided. Learning about the ways that grantees manage to influence policy and promote a more open and evidence-based policy discourse amid limits to freedom of expression will be particularly important.

3.3.2 Policies, procedures and activities for communications and policy engagement

More tracing needed

A greater attention to ‘strategic thinking’ by grantees to engage for policy influence has led to efforts to strengthen a range of procedures for this purpose, including both internal reflection and multi-stakeholder engagement through think tank governance structures and beyond. *TTI has highlighted and contributed to strengthening commitments to proactive engagement with policy communities.* Establishing communication strategies and funding communications units have been important components of this. While the wider and deeper issues of tracing policy engagement and policy influence (and applying lessons learned) have received little systematic and formal attention by grantees, the need to enhance efforts to trace policy influence is widely recognized as important and there is a desire by grantees for more support in this area.

It would perhaps seem self-evident that this should be developed as part of M&E systems to use the monitoring of policy influence to feed into strategic planning, but so far there is little indication that this is happening. Reporting demands emphasize outputs and there are limited incentives and capacities to critically assess outcomes. The TTI Stories of Influence (Sols) might be assumed to be part of such reporting. However, they have been intended for a more general audience and are not seen as a tool for M&E. Sols are therefore generally not perceived by SC grantees as an important contribution to efforts to critically trace policy influence. Feedback on Sols is that eight of the SC found them slightly effective or not at all, and only three found them to be moderately to very effective. Some were highly critical,

questioning the intellectual frameworks for claiming influence and describing the examples as “cherry-picking”. TTI reports that current efforts are not shying away from reporting on “stories of failure”, but the SC grantees are evidently not aware of this. Other interviewees were only vaguely aware of the Sols and seem to see these as part of publicizing TTI’s global work, rather than as a learning tool for themselves or even as potential inputs into the grantees’ own public relations. The confidence rating for this finding is judged to be moderate as it is recognized that other grantees in the FC have reported valuing this approach more highly. Assessed together these findings suggest that a degree of wariness exists regarding attempts to describe and measure policy influence that grantees often feel misses their more subtle, informal and undocumented processes. This reflects the importance and the difficulties faced by those trying to judge and explain how Southern think tanks influence policy.

Strategic thinking and strengthened governance for policy engagement

From the SC, it appears that policy engagements are rarely systematically monitored within the think tanks or used for structured strategic reflections. Across the FC, 53.5% indicate that stakeholder consultations are priorities for their strategic planning processes, but actions reported are too anecdotal to quantify. Nonetheless, SC interviews show a widespread feeling among the grantees that they ‘have their finger on the pulse’ of emerging policy issues (usually based on tacit knowledge). On this basis they may claim to make up with ‘opportunistic’ policy engagements for what they lack in ‘strategic planning’. Active Boards and consultative committees play a key role in this regard in Latin America and South Asia, with somewhat more mixed evidence in Africa. Examples from TTI Phase One support in Latin America include broadening the role of the Board and other advisors and rethinking governance practices. In Africa evidence tends to highlight the critical role of executive directors in leading dialogues with and beyond Boards on how to best influence policy. Overall the Evaluation Team judges that the *grantees are able to articulate very clearly how they (together with their governance structures) have selected strategically important policy issues, and even the steps they have then taken to drive policy engagement. They remain much weaker in tracking and measuring their subsequent contributions to changing policies and discourses.*

Communications

Across the FC, 57.3% of grantees appear to have communications strategies / action plans with significant signs of implementation. 35.7% have communications strategies / actions plans with rudimentary or sparse signs of implementation. Regarding TTI contributions to developing and implementing communications strategies, in the FC 72% report TTI support having contributed with resources to produce more communications outputs. Drawing on anecdotal evidence the Evaluation interprets this to suggest that communications efforts may remain strongly driven by the researchers’ own interests and projects. The SC data indicates that the extent of implementation of communications policies is more uneven than the FC data might imply. In the SC there are only a few grantees that are making significant progress in communications and only one example of a clear contribution to developing and applying communications strategies. One grantee expressed strong dissatisfaction with what was seen as somewhat mechanistic TTI support from a technical advisor for developing a communications strategy, and others generally had difficulty articulating if or how the (often draft) strategies developed with TTI support had contributed to changes in their actual procedures and activities for policy engagement. Figure nineteen below summarizes the Evaluation Team’s judgements regarding the nature of the communications plans

and policies developed with TTI support.

Figure 19: Scope and nature of grantee communication strategies

	Non-existent/ rudimentary		Active/ output focused						Active/ policy outcome oriented	
Grantees overall communication capacities	1	0	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	0

In both data sets it appears that using core resources to produce more research outputs and employ communications staff take priority. In the FC 51% use TTI support to employ more communications staff. Some SC examples also indicate that support for paying salaries of communications officers has been of primary importance. The Evaluation notes that some communications units, led by relatively junior staff (three in the SC) may have limited influence on the older senior researchers who are on the front lines of policy engagement activities.

On a more positive note, grantees suggest that TTI has been instrumental in “nudging” (to quote one grantee) towards taking more seriously policy influence in general and communications in particular. Expectations regarding the importance of TTI in Phase Two on policy influence vary; eight of the SC see this as moderately or very important, but with significant exceptions.

It has been widely recognized that think tank engagement with the policy community should not be equated solely with the elements conventionally associated with communications strategies (Martin, undated).²⁹ Findings also indicate that the grantees’ own views on the scope of ‘communications’ may be broader than how the term is conventionally interpreted. For example, some grantees stress that they see their libraries as an important part of their outreach and convening function, both in providing broader access to their research and also by constituting a welcoming environment for study and exchange.

Example: Libraries as a convening function for policy research

With the current focus on social media as the (assumed) main way of convening researchers and policy makers it is easy to forget that there may be more traditional but perhaps even more effective ‘platforms’ for this. Interviews in Rwanda and Uganda suggest that social media has yet to make the expected inroads towards bringing together policy researchers. However, both IPAR-Rwanda and MISR report that their libraries, renovated and equipped with

²⁹ Indeed, the communications strategies developed with support from TTI have tended to focus on such conventional elements as publications, websites, etc.

TTI support, have played an important role in providing an anchor for outreach and a meeting place for (especially) younger researchers, civil society actors and policy makers. These two institutes see having a well-stocked, attractive and comfortable library at their offices as a way of promoting research exchange and even contributing to a greater culture of research. They see their libraries as being extremely important for contributing to their legitimacy as research institutes. TTI support has been very important in establishing the IPAR library and re-establishing the MISR library.

The Evaluation judges that *TTI ‘money and conversations’, i.e., support to employ a communications officer, produce more reader-friendly outputs and gentle ‘nudging’ to pay more attention to outcomes in policy influence have led to greater results than the creation of formal policies and procedures.* To a significant degree, *grantee communications are anchored in their diverse and network-based relationships.* For this reason, human resource capacities, tools and reminders may have a greater influence on communication efforts than formal communications strategies. In the most of the SC, greater efforts are being invested in dissemination and diverse communication tools, but policy engagement remains strongly relationship- and network-based.

The baseline status of the grantees at the start of Phase Two (and even before receiving TTI support) was extremely varied. Sample Latin American think tanks, and most of the FC grantees in the region, have reasonably well developed communications capabilities. Websites and social media are extensively used. In all regions, most of the SC have extensive and close interactions with journalists, and make a point in cultivating them as users of their research outputs. Across regions, the quality of websites is variable, both in design and the extent to which they are regularly updated, have functioning links, etc. Most grantees produce ‘policy briefs’, but their quality is sometimes quite low, and the Evaluation Team judges that there are significant weaknesses in understanding how to draft an effective and high quality policy brief.

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

IT and social media

Across the FC, only 30% of TTs indicate having used TTI core support to give special attention to strengthening IT and social media interventions. As with improvements to grantee websites during Phase One, mixed progress has been made in most cases in the use of social media. While in some cases this slow progress may reflect the level of perceived importance of social media in the respective national policy discourse, it is likely that the importance of these mechanisms will generally grow. Some grantees in the SC highlight that their main target groups (e.g., senior government officials) do not access information through social media. In East Africa for example, informants noted that in Kenya social media plays a major role in the policy debate, whereas in neighbouring countries it was seen as “something for teenagers”. Some grantees were openly sceptical of the value of social media for their work. In others it appears that this is seen as a responsibility of the communications officer, but the content must come from the researchers themselves, where engagement is not always forthcoming. In one Latin American grantee the communications team appeared to be highly active in using social media, but without a real connection with the researchers, who were somewhat critical of the excessive use of Twitter with little content.

However, this stance varies significantly from country to country and grantee to grantee, with some grantees developing systems and tapping into national demands. The South Asian and West African grantees are progressing relatively strongly with social media. They also seem to be engaged since the staff as a whole are using social media and they engage so as to disseminate material into the public domain, without being dependent on the traditional media. Some grantees have a considerable number of young staff for whom social media is a daily routine part of their professional and private lives.

3.3.3 Conclusions: TTI support to practical action and tacit learning processes for policy engagement

Our findings and other TTI research (e.g., Brown et al, 2014) have highlighted *a considerable amount of tacit understanding among grantees of how, why and through whom policy influence occurs. Despite this, active and critical structured tracing of policy influence is weak.* Both the Evaluation and the grantees have recognized significant strengthening of engagements, but evidence is lacking regarding outcomes where engagement leads to resulting influence.

The base for policy engagement has improved through both traditional means, such as libraries, and new channels such as social media. Perhaps most importantly, the *will to proactively engage with the policy community has replaced what was in the past often a relatively passive mentality.* It remains uncertain how much this has been driven by internal commitments that will result in continued prioritization of communication efforts when resources are squeezed with the phasing out of TTI support. The Evaluation judges that some grantees have internalized such commitments. In others, there are signs that communications and proactive policy engagement efforts remain somewhat shallowly anchored in the organizations. Nonetheless, even where implementation of communications strategies remains rudimentary, the networks and relations used to bring evidence to the attention of stakeholders in the policy community are well entrenched.

Verifiable evidence regarding sustainable commitments to communications as an integral part of their work will only become apparent after the end of TTI support. The Evaluation Team judges that it will be possible to assess the likelihood of sustained attention to policy engagement, but evidence will be indic-

ative. Also, the Evaluation Team will be able to identify some examples of how research efforts are leading to greater policy engagement and some key conditions for effective engagement, but the extent to which verifiable data can be collected on the extent to which actual influence can be attributed to this engagement will be limited.

3.3.4 Policy influence: Possible lessons for improvements in TTI or for wider learning

1. The program should build its capacity development efforts related to policy influence on an explicit recognition of the demonstrated latitude for credible and confident grantees to gain access and potential policy influence—even in contexts with limited free expression and weak receptivity to policy research. TTI should go beyond the somewhat uneven efforts to date to stimulate formal and informal ‘strategic thinking’ on engaging for policy influence by more strongly emphasizing deliberative policy engagement as part of communication strategies and funding to communications units. This may involve a partial proportional shift of focus away from the more ‘technical’ aspects of communications activities.
2. While the wider and deeper issues of tracing policy engagement and policy influence have received little systematic attention by grantees, they are widely recognized as important and there is a desire for more support in this area. To the extent possible, monitoring of policy influences should be developed as part of TTI’s systems to feed into planning and learning, but this has so far proved difficult and alternative entry points for learning should be considered. The Evaluation case studies should generate insights through tracing actual cases of policy influence and, where there is interest, make a contribution to grantee reflection on how they can further develop their own skills in this regard. One way to move beyond the tendency to generalized discussion of policy influence would be to focus on the uses and effectiveness of particular instruments to promote policy influence³⁰ through an action research project with interested grantees. Another option would be a study on the potential for innovation in deliberative policy making practices. This could perhaps be done by building in explicit elements of reflection on how to reframe policy discourses within the current Opportunity Fund projects. This is of particular value around contentious policy issues where the promotion of a dialogue prior to research can help define the nature of the policy problem. Other suitable topics could be drawn from the commissioned study on Context completed at the end of Phase One (Brown et al, 2014). Here as well, the active involvement of grantees could be facilitated through the Opportunity Fund.

³⁰ As a possible example, by studying the uses of social media for think tanks, perhaps in comparison with engaging through personal networks,

4. Conclusions: What lessons can be drawn from the TTI experience regarding effective support to think tanks?³¹

In this first stage, the Evaluation has reached initial conclusions that TTI's support to the grantees has primarily resulted in progress towards the establishment or reinforcement of a critical mass in relation to:

- Well-functioning organizations
- Capacity to produce quality research
- Think tanks with the self-confidence to engage proactively and from a position of credibility in engaging with the policy community.

TTI's ultimate impact, and with that its legacy, will be determined by the grantees' abilities to sustain (and hopefully build upon) this critical mass. The Evaluation work to date suggests that this will be continue to be achieved through eight processes:

- Developing capacity and 'space' for thinking strategically
- Strengthening leadership and governance
- Contributing to various 'technical' aspects of capacity development
- Improving the physical and organizational working conditions in the grantees
- Helping the grantees expand/improve staffing on the assumption that these new staff will eventually attract the support needed to cover their costs
- Contributing to (and especially 'nudging' towards) greater capacities and commitments to engagement with the policy community
- More concerted reflection and action on the 'business models' that could sustain these achievements
- Creation of networks of think tanks to join forces in comparative studies, exchanges of experience, dissemination of best practices, etc.

The Evaluation has found significant examples of progress in all of these areas. Progress has varied in relation to the different ways that the grantees have needed TTI's support within their ongoing development trajectories and how they have taken advantage of the opportunities provided. Variance has also been noted in the quality and relevance of TTI support, with critical advantages and appropriateness demonstrated in the modality of core support.

³¹ This section of the report presents very initial responses to Evaluation Question Three, as this is the first Interim Report (focused on baseline measures) the responses to Evaluation Question Three will receive more prominence in future reports.

A major proportion of the factors of success and failure can be traced back to the situation of the grantees at the outset of TTI and the extent to which gains have been consolidated or made sustainable.

- In many cases TTI began by ‘picking winners’ in the sense of supporting think tanks that were already relatively strong. These grantees have been strengthened further with TTI support and the Evaluation judges that it is very likely that these gains will be consolidated further in the future.
- In some cases TTI took a significant risk in investing in think tanks that showed significant potential and (apparently primarily due to strong leadership) these grantees were able to leverage this support to make significant progress towards achieving the elements of a critical mass noted above. The Evaluation notes a range of likelihood that these gains will be sustained, but that with all in this category the ultimate capacity to maintain their critical mass will only be apparent after funding ceases.
- In a small number of cases, due often to circumstances in their national contexts, the support from TTI has primarily served to keep the grantees ‘afloat’. Among these grantees significant progress towards a more solid critical mass and with that a trajectory towards sustainability is difficult to discern, but naturally less likely.
- The TTI Phase Two Capacity Development Strategy refers to the grantees “readiness” for capacity development support. The three points above reflect varying degrees of “readiness” but perhaps not in the sense of the internal factors described in the strategy (willingness, interest, commitment, management buy-in, appropriate timing and resource allocation). In the coming years the Evaluation Team will test many aspects of the extent to which the *de facto* hypotheses about consolidation of a critical mass and sustainability described above has proven valid. It should be stressed again, however, that verifiable evidence of sustainability will only emerge after TTI support ends.

TTI also emphasizes the importance of strengthening grantee capacities to think critically about their own capacity development processes and break out of “business as usual”. The Phase Two Capacity Development Strategy states: “The most significant risk with respect to the demand-led side of the CD strategy is that think tanks may not innovate and conduct only minor changes potentially missing opportunities to test new ideas, pursue cross-learning and knowledge systemization...”³² Evaluation findings indicate that the *grantees are innovating in a variety of ways and are striving to think and act strategically*. TTI is making significant contributions to these processes, mostly by creating space for the grantees to focus on this reflection rather than just ‘hustling’ to find new projects and resource streams. *TTI’s capacity development planning processes are not as central to such processes as is perhaps implied by the Capacity Development Strategy, but the Evaluation Team judges that this is not a problem given the need for this to be an adaptive and endogenous process within each grantee organization, particularly as TTI moves into its final years*. This suggests emerging lessons regarding the importance of modest and

³² Think Tank Initiative Phase 2 Capacity Development Strategy. FINAL. March 15, 2015, page 13

appropriate ambitions for a global program supporting strategic capacity development among '43 categories of think tanks', rather than a critique of failure to achieve all of the aims in a strategic plan.

The Evaluation Team judges that the most important factor in enlarging the space for strategic thinking among the grantees has been *support to their own processes of strengthening independence and self-confidence*. Core support and measures to enable them to feel part of a broader think tank community have contributed greatly to this. A major question for the Evaluation in the coming years will be *whether TTI has given more than a temporary respite* in the think tanks' struggles with maintaining the independence and research quality that underpin self-confidence. These findings concur with the findings of TTI research more general which concluded that "Perhaps the biggest challenge facing think tanks described in the literature is the need for them to secure sustainable funding from a range of sources in order to retain independence from the encroaching interests of any one stakeholder, while being able to consistently produce high quality research." (Brown et al, 2014:10)

Research quality is central to TTI's work and the Evaluation Team has noted the skills with which the TTI Team has navigated between a relativistic 'anything goes' approach with the need to support grantees to reinforce various categories of 'rigor'. This was most notable at TTIX 2015, where the focus on research quality was framed in such a way as to be inclusive enough to keep all engaged, but where some participants later reported a degree of frustration regarding how to maintain a grasp on this slippery topic.³³

While emphasizing their interim and provisional character, early lessons have been set out in sections 3.1-3.3 of this first Interim Report where they are most relevant. Three major over-arching interim lessons are presented in this section, together with baseline findings for TTI's Phase Two approach for sharing its learning with a wide range of interested stakeholders.

- a. The need to marshal and apply TTI learning:** Although TTI has decided not to commission research studies in Phase Two, the Evaluation work to date has detected a number of areas where focused international studies or action research efforts (based on active engagement by interested grantees) could greatly foster learning and make a major impact. In pointing the way through

³³ For example, one participant writes "As said before, I would have liked the discussion to be more focused and centred in research quality. To accomplish this, it would have been useful to have preliminary research and think pieces to guide the conversations. This could have helped keeping us on track, and able to leave the conference with a much more concrete outcome. One of these concrete outcomes could have been a more formal document to guide us forward, such as a 'Declaration for Research Quality for Think Tanks' that could move think tanks as a community into a next level in the debate." <http://www.politicsandideas.org/?p=2473>).

some of the most intractable issues facing the program and the grantees, they could also greatly enhance the tangible legacy of the TTI program.

Lesson: *Rather than starting from ‘square one’, some of this agenda of study or action research could capitalize on and test the results of previously commissioned research in relation to how new ideas are being applied within the grantees’ own organizations, e.g., around how they are tracing policy influence within the range of contexts in which they operate. Similarly, the important outcomes of discussions at TTIX 2015 could be utilized in a more proactive manner to support grantees and think tanks more generally to bring together efforts to enhance research quality in a way that directly contributes to policy influence. Some examples of appropriate action research initiatives are highlighted throughout the Report.*

- b. Improving Sustainability:** As had been expected in Phase Two, the challenge for think tanks of building longer-term financial sustainability is a major strategic concern. This is due to the dwindling and redirection of established funding sources for think tank support, and limited apparent alternatives emerging as yet. This concern is made more critical for some by the impending end of TTI core support in 2019. As they have been encouraged to do, grantees are drawing on TTI contributions in direct and indirect ways to strengthen their base for the future. These contributions include: improving their human resources, strengthening the quality and relevance of their research, and focusing more on the credibility and communication of research. A significant number are also exploring a range of financing and ‘business model’ options in their different contexts. Often, however, the focus is on individual actions rather than a broad and integrated approach to building financially sustainable organizations. The possible options vary greatly over the different grantees and their country contexts, but the Evaluation has not yet seen significant evidence of comprehensive strategies for financial sustainability emerging.

Lesson: *While the priority of using TTI Phase Two resources to build for future sustainability has been widely recognized, and many efforts launched in that direction, it is not clear that this predominant objective for the program has yet taken a sufficiently coherent shape to help the grantees as much as it could. When they are informed of the 2015 results of the Onthinktanks project on ‘business models’ among six Latin American and Indonesian organizations, grantees express interest. But the full concept of a ‘business model’ and the additional dimensions beyond the inclusion of elements of a business model within strategic plans are not yet clear and this term can even cause some confusion or resistance. The importance of combining strategic planning with a more comprehensive approach to achieving longer-term financial viability is clear. Some of the Evaluation case studies being launched are directed to following efforts to test a wider approach to sustainability, but the question arises at this stage for TTI as to whether a well-defined approach should be elaborated as an integrated framework for take-up by those needing to enhance sustainability. In cases where the strategic plans of grantees are currently being reassessed or new plans being developed, or where there are ‘red flag’ issues regarding reliance on TTI funding for the salaries of key staff, a closer and more concerted effort could be particularly appropriate. Importantly as well, promoting such an integrated perspective could help catalyze greater attention and action on such key governance issues as the roles, functioning and composition of Boards as*

well as leadership succession planning and implementation. Here again, there would be no need to 'reinvent the wheel' since there are many examples, within and beyond the TTI network, of positive measures and useful training and exchanges of experience, e.g., among Board members.

- c. Realistic expectations and incentives for TTI's capacity development activities by diverse grantees:** Evaluation work so far has confirmed the wide diversity of needs and priorities among grantees in relation to TTI's different objectives and channels of support. As one interviewee put it, there are very different needs between the 'big beasts', reflecting their long history, size and often more academic inclination in comparison with the generally younger, sometime smaller and often more directly socially-engaged grantees. Receptivity and access for independent policy research in their respective contexts is hardly ever easy, but can range from merely challenging to extremely difficult. Grantees' funding environments also differ markedly, as do the degrees of their reliance on TTI funding. These variations crosscut the groups of grantees across all regions, although there may be some greater concentrations in particular respects.

Lesson: *The above finding on diversities among grantee needs and interests confirms the wisdom of TTI's primary reliance in Phase Two on core funding directed to individual grantees to support their particular strategic objectives, combined with an intended responsive, tailored support for additional capacity development activities, events and supplementary funding (e.g. through solicitation of interest and Opportunity Fund calls). To date, however, the Evaluation judges there to have been a lesser level of knowledge and engagement by grantees in many of these aspects of the program than might have been expected. This suggests important lessons for future programming about realistic expectations and incentives for participation by different sets of grantees, new approaches to needs identification and activity design, and/or perhaps a more selective strategy to focus resources on those grantees with the greatest demonstrated need and interest in receiving support. Such directions have been proposed in the current Capacity Development Strategy and steps are already being undertaken to address these issues. The Evaluation Team suggests particular attention to the respective time frames for achieving influence and costs of different capacity development modalities as part of selecting possible alternative uses of the limited TTI resources still uncommitted.*

4.1 THE BASE FOR EVALUATION OF TTI'S HIGH-LEVEL LEARNING

TTI's Objective 3, aimed at marshalling and sharing high level learning from TTI's experience, is mainly focused at the whole program level, and hinged to the part to be played by TTI's program communication and engagement led by the Ottawa office. Recognizing this difference from the grantee-focused evaluation around other questions, this part of the Evaluation has been launched on a parallel track in Ottawa. The approach was based on the evaluation tasks specified in the Terms of Reference and then the tasks, timelines and learning uses and users specified in the Inception Report.

In early August the Learning Coordinator, who also has responsibility for this track, consulted with TTI Ottawa staff, received the newly-approved Phase Two Communications and Engagement Strategy, and extensive briefing and documentation. He then mapped out the implementation steps for the Evalua-

tion in this area. As part of a 'division of labour' it was agreed that the more planning and monitoring of communications the Program itself does the better, so that the Evaluation can build on that work as it assesses performance, once having assured itself of the quality and validity of that foundation. At this stage, it was also agreed that the Evaluation Team would provide an initial assessment of the new Strategy, against good practice in the field. It would then design its own 'light touch' approach to a program communications review to be discussed with the TTI Team and then to serve as a basis for periodic assessments and learning inputs. The Team recruited a specialized Research Assistant to support this work.

The Team's Initial draft Assessment of the Communications and Engagement Strategy and supporting 'communications audit' analytics report - both based on recognized models adapted to this program - were submitted to the Program staff. The Assessment of the Strategy was found helpful and resulted in some adjustments in January 2016, and the revised version will now serve as the Evaluation baseline in this area. The Program staff's planned work on communications analytics, and the Evaluation Team's own further efforts are now being clarified.

With respect to the internal learning uses of the Evaluation, as noted at the outset the discussion around the outline, draft and final versions of this Report are serving as the first major infusion of "periodic, timely and actionable feedback to allow for the adaptive management of the Initiative, as well as providing rigorously documented and validated learning about the program." The first major structured learning contribution of lessons is found in the "potential lessons" accompanying the relevant findings in this Interim Report.

These feedback functions over the course of the evaluation are primarily intended to furnish lessons to improve TTI's management by the Program Staff and decision-making by the Executive Committee. But they are also expected to contribute to the understanding and effective use of the Program by grantees, and to TTI's wider sharing of its learning about strategies for building and managing successful and sustainable think tanks, where they will connect with the evaluation of the TTI's program communications.

As TTI confirms its plans for suitable events or platforms, the Team will be prepared, within its resources, to contribute to focused learning efforts at further key points throughout the evaluation process, particularly around reporting milestones and dedicated learning events, as envisaged in the Inception Report.

5. Recommendations on future steps in the Evaluation

The following challenges, with implications for future steps in the Evaluation, have been uncovered in the baseline analysis:

1. The limited extent to which existing monitoring data can be used to track the areas relevant to the evaluation questions and sub-questions agreed in the Inception Phase of the Evaluation.
2. The Evaluation Team judges it unlikely that significant additional information can be generated from the existing TTI monitoring systems through minor adjustments without significantly increasing the burdens of the RPOs and grantees.
3. Although the Evaluation expected a high degree of diversity in the FC, it is even greater than expected. This limits the possibilities for meaningful and rigorous clustering and deriving quantifiable findings. This underlines the importance of an approach emphasizing the use of case studies.
4. The different scope and progress of the regional initiatives in TTI have meant that it is not possible to use data emerging from these events in a consistent manner.
5. The time, effort (and expenditure in Canadian dollars) required to respond to the above challenges have been greater than initially planned.

In order to address these issues the Evaluation Team recommends that data collection be concentrated on the following:

1. FC analysis using existing monitoring data will be focused on a much more limited number of key issues where confidence levels in the data are high.
2. The Evaluation Team will undertake brief teleconferences (and where possible make short visits in conjunction with other travels) with the FC using a standardized questionnaire format focused on key issues where monitoring data is insufficient.
3. The next round of visits to the SC will focus on (a) the issues in the designated baselines (Annex One), which will be partially addressed through the selected case studies (Annex Two), and (b) semi-structured interviews with approximately ten stakeholders in the policy community per grantee, which will be triangulated with PCS data where appropriate.
4. Further case studies may be developed to address gaps in data collection and the baselines found from the analysis of findings in this first Interim Report.
5. The second Interim Report will consist of a limited progress review of emerging findings focused primarily on direct follow-up on the identified baseline factors. This will serve to husband Evaluation resources and ensure that there are sufficient resources saved for the Final Report.
6. In relation to the internal learning agenda of the Evaluation, it will be important to receive the feedback of the TTI Program Staff and Executive Committee on the value and uses of this Interim Report as a vehicle for learning, and indications as to how the Evaluation's learning contributions can most usefully be harnessed and deployed through the subsequent stages.

Annex 1 – Baseline overview

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

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

	ly) the extent to which SC grantees perceive their organizations to have achieved -and expect to maintain- a critical mass over the course of Phase Two.	
Research quality		
8. Sustaining a critical mass of researchers Approximately two thirds of SC grantees can be judged to have established a critical mass of senior and rising junior researchers prior to or during the course of Phase One.	<i>Changes to the sustainability of Phase One achievements in attaining a critical mass of research staff and the steps being taken to ensure continued research capacity and future strengthening after the end of TTI support.</i> The focus will be on: (a) how the grantees are leveraging opportunities to develop staff research capacities in the course of undertaking major research programs –e.g., inclusion of doctoral fellowships, mentoring from senior international researchers, etc., (b) building partnerships with local and international research institutions so as to draw on outside capacities, and (c) encouraging a shift in thinking among donors and other key stakeholders away from instrumentalist perspectives regarding the ‘use’ of think tanks to a recognition of the importance of building national policy research capacities as a goal in itself.	Case studies, SC interviews, FC interviews, interviews with outside observers
9. Formal research quality assurance measures As described above, the actual implementation of formal research quality assurance measures is uncertain, whereas it is clear that an ‘organizational culture’ of critical discussion on research quality is firmly established.	<i>Actions by grantees that demonstrate what research quality means to them, what steps they are taking to assure the quality of their work, and if/how TTI is contributing the their internal efforts to ensure research quality.</i> This will be particularly important if growing financial pressures impinge on efforts to foster a critical organizational culture or if new forms of partnerships or other changing trends provide ways to reinforce this ‘culture’.	Case studies, SC interviews
10. Depth of focus on gender in research Broad variation in commitments to (and depth of) gender perspectives in research within grantees (see figure seventeen below). Some indications that TTI support during Phase One has encouraged and created space for enhancements.	<i>Impressions of gender officers and key researchers regarding integration of gender and feminist perspectives.</i> As some grantees clearly resist what they tend to see as donor-imposed emphasis on gender, interviews will be selective.	Targeted SC interviews
11. Overall improvements in research quality The Evaluation Team judges that the determinants of research quality as perceived among the grantees fall into a range of categories (described above) and that there has also been a range of ways that TTI support during	<i>The extent to which the grantees assess that their quality has improved in relation to categories they themselves define, and identify whether and how TTI may have contributed to these advances.</i>	Case studies

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

Annex 2 – Purposes and brief summaries of case studies

Grantee	Case	Type	Brief summary
IPAR Rwanda	Coffee research	Research and policy influence	Tracing of a new research program that will highlight efforts to influence private sector led development and also collaboration with an international research institute
MISR	A feminist focus on land research	Research and policy influence	Tracing of an effort to transform an existing research program and reframe and deepen the policy discourse
EDRI	Industrial park development	Research and policy influence	Tracing of a new research program that seeks to inform government policy related to potential negative effects of prevailing policies
MISR	Developing a vision within a governance vacuum	Governance and strategic planning	Tracing of efforts to re-establish a governance function in conjunction with overall structural reform in the university and a major evaluation exercise
CSEA	Economic Intelligence Unit	Research and policy influence	Tracing the EIU's capacities to increase attention to its research and provide additional commercialized services to potential interested parties.
SPDC	Development of the Annual Review of Social Development in Pakistan	Research and policy influence	Tracing the development of the 2016-17 Annual Review on Regional Inequalities
SPDC	TBD	Research and policy influence	Not yet identified
CPR	Big Data Project	Research capacity development and policy influence	Tracing new TTI funded work with larger data sets
CPR	Urban Studies programme	Research capacity development and policy influence	Possible link to the government's policy priority on Smart Cities
CGBA	Funding of School Education	Research capacity development and policy influence	Tracing a collaborative study on differences between state governments' budget allocations and how these link with policy priorities.
CGBA	Safety for Women in Public Places	Research capacity development and policy influence	Tracing a collaborative study on why legislative frameworks have not been very effective in supporting the safety of women.
IPS	State of the Economy Report	Research Capacity development and policy influence	Tracing the implementation of a new communications strategy around the State of the Economy Report
IPS	Low Skilled Labour Migration: Value Chain Analysis of Migration Costs (World Bank Funded)	Research Capacity Development and policy influence	Development of a methodological framework for assessing & measuring migration costs

IPAR Rwanda	Development and implementation of the IPAR Resource Mobilization Strategy	Business models and governance	Tracing of the development, approval and implementation of a resource mobilization strategy
IEA	Monitoring Electoral Reform	Tracking policy influence	Tracing the extent to which IEA has contributed to electoral reform leading to changes in laws and procedures
CSEA	Labour /Unemployment analysis	Research and policy influence	Tracing how CSEA engages with and provides research to policy makers, enabling them to reform the Nigerian labor market.
FUSADES, CADEP, Grupo FARO	Business models	Business models and governance	Tracing and comparing the emergence of business models in the three Latin American SC grantees

Annex 3 – Evaluation sub-questions

Sub-questions	Location of findings in first Interim Report
<i>General</i> 1.1 How robust and relevant are TTI's internal standards and indicators of research quality and organizational performance?	various
<i>Organizational performance</i> 1.2 How much change can be observed in TTI-grantees in overall human resource management and (in particular) recruitment and support to the career development of female researchers; and to what extent has TTI support contributed to these changes?	3.1.1-3.1.2
<i>Organizational performance</i> 1.3 To what extent has each of the program's three channels of capacity development delivery –mentoring, learning events, and matching/opportunity funds – reflected the principles adopted for this work and has this generated expected outcomes? What are the implications?	3.1.2
<i>Organizational performance</i> 1.4 What capacities have emerged within the grantees' organizations to act as 'learning organizations' and find ways to better achieve their intended objectives? How has TTI contributed to these changes and what improvements might be suggested?	3.1.3-3.1.4
<i>Organizational performance</i> 1.5 To what extent has core funding increased organizations' ability to adjust and be proactive to changing and often volatile circumstances, and enhanced their financial sustainability and capacity to engage in sustained research on strategic issues? How do these compare with other funding mechanisms? What improvements might be suggested?	3.1.5-3.1.6
<i>Research quality</i> 1.6 To what extent has the scientific quality of the grantees research outputs been enhanced through TTI support?	3.2
<i>Research quality</i> 1.7 What changes can be observed in TTI-grantees' procedures to monitor and ensure scientific research quality in comparison to the TTI Phase 2, year 1 baseline and to what extent has TTI support contributed to these changes?	3.2.1, 3.2.3
<i>Research quality</i> 1.8 What changes can be observed in grantees' procedures to ensure research relevance in comparison to the Phase 2, year 1 baseline and to what extent has TTI support contributed to these changes?	3.2.2
<i>Research quality</i> 1.9 What changes can be observed in grantees in research relevant to and focusing on gender issues and to what extent has TTI support contributed to these changes?	3.2.4
<i>Policy engagement</i> 2.1 In what ways has TTI support enabled grantees to enter into and develop distinctive and respected roles in national (and where relevant in regional and global) policy discourses?	3.3.1
<i>Policy engagement</i> 2.2 To what extent have TTI grantees positioned themselves in the policy discourse so as to enhance their strategic relevance to policy stakeholders with regard to national policy issues, and how has TTI	3.3.1

contributed to this?	
<i>Policy engagement</i> 2.2 How much change can be observed in grantees' policies, procedures and activities for policy engagement in comparison to the TTI Phase 2, year 1 baseline and to what extent has TTI support contributed to these changes?	3.3.2
<i>Policy engagement</i> 2.3 To what extent has TTI support contributed to strengthening grantee capacities to effectively utilize electronic and social media in communications and dissemination in order to reach selected audiences, and has this led to increased dissemination/ influence with regard to selected audiences?	3.3.2
<i>Policy engagement</i> 2.4 How and to what extent has the perceived credibility of grantee research among policy actors increased, and what factors impinge on this, e.g., ability to maintain an open dialogue with both government and civil society, data quality and transparency, etc.? What has been the TTI contribution to these changes?	3.3.3
<i>Policy engagement</i> 2.5 How has TTI contributed to the grantees' abilities to adapt to trends of growing or diminishing space, receptivity, entry points and ways of influencing public policy and/or stimulating informed public debate?	3.3.1
<i>Policy engagement</i> 2.6 What patterns can be observed in how think tank influence is achieved, including, for example, the points in the policy cycle where different types of think tanks seem best positioned to inform and improve policy?	4.3.1
<i>Overall learning</i> 3.1 To what extent has TTI shared its learning (and prepared for further sharing) about strategies for building and managing successful and sustainable think tanks with a wide range of interested stakeholders and how could it do this better?	4.1
<i>Overall learning</i> 3.2 What effective ways have been found to support think tanks to overcome common and/or distinctive operational / contextual challenges?	to be primarily addressed in Final Report
<i>Overall learning</i> 3.3 What unintended consequences have there been from TTI support?	to be primarily addressed in Final Report
<i>Overall learning</i> 3.4 Are there additional/alternative ways and means in which think tanks could be supported? Can more appropriate support interventions or instruments be identified?	to be primarily addressed in Final Report
<i>Organizational performance</i> 3.5 What key think tank characteristics (e.g., leadership, maturity, size, place on research/advocacy spectrum, sector, etc.) and key contextual factors proved to be significant for achieving the targeted/expected organizational change, and which characteristics seem not to be significant?	to be primarily addressed in Final Report
<i>Organization performance</i> 3.6 In what ways can organizational and financial sustainability among think tanks best be fostered?	to be primarily addressed in Final Report
<i>Organizational performance</i> 3.7 What modalities contribute to think tank capacities to attract and	to be primarily addressed in Final Report

retain a gender balanced critical mass of researchers of sufficient stature to undertake research in a rigorous and credible manner?	
<i>Organizational performance</i> 3.8 Given prevailing trends related to core and other funding, how can core funding best strengthen think tanks to undertake independent and credible research, and how do the results compare with other funding mechanisms?	to be primarily addressed in Final Report
<i>Research quality</i> 3.9 What factors contribute to think tanks' ability to combine and balance engagement with independent/objective analyses, and scientific quality with usability?	to be primarily addressed in Final Report
<i>Research quality</i> 3.10 How can external support to think tanks enable them to institutionalize commitments to high scientific quality while retaining commitments to research into issues that are relevant to national policymakers and civil society?	to be primarily addressed in Final Report
<i>Research quality</i> 3.11 What factors make think tank research credible among policymakers and other policy stakeholders, and how can external support contribute to capacities to maintain and retain such credibility?	to be primarily addressed in Final Report
<i>Policy engagement</i> 3.12 What aspects of TTI support contributed to changes in policy and (where measurable) practice at the regional and global levels?	to be primarily addressed in Final Report

Annex 4 – Steps leading to the first Interim Evaluation Report

Period	Steps
7 July 2015	Team meeting in Lille to review the questions and develop an overall conceptualisation of how to approach each question.
14 July	TTI approval of Inception Report.
Since August	Monthly (+/-) skype meetings among Evaluation Team to discuss progress, methods and emerging findings. Several progress meetings and discussions with TTI Ottawa Team.
August 2015	Development of data sheets for each sub-question with expected data sources, possible relevant indicators, etc.
7 August	Learning Coordinator meets with TTI Ottawa Team to elaborate approach to evaluating TTI's communications and engagement (including Objective 3), the Evaluation's contributions to lesson-sharing, and thoughts on analysing context.
August-September	Initial contact with sample grantees to discuss approach, begin to prepare for missions.
September-November 2015.	Review of the full cohort data focused partially on the phase 2 applications but also supplementary sifting of other monitoring data to identify relevant information. Adjust focus of some questions to reflect available data and better understanding of the processes.
September-November	Review of initial full cohort findings in data collection fiches completed by research assistants.
September-November	Review of available data and publications from sample grantees through data collection fiches completed by research assistants.
September-October 2015	Development of interview format/guide for visits to sample grantees.
September 2015- January 2016	Visits (2-3 days each) to sample grantees focused on structured interviews around the evaluation questions and initial ideas about case studies. Three visits to Latin American sample in September, October and December; West Africa in October; East Africa in December 2015 and January 2016, and South Asia in September-October and November-December.
9 November, 2015	Evaluation Team submits Initial draft Assessment of the C&E Strategy and supporting analytics.
November 2015.	Development of case study approach to reflect emerging need/opportunities for case studies.
Since November	Further development of case studies with grantees by email (ongoing).
November 2015 – April 2016.	Attendance at regional meetings to familiarize with grantees outside the sample (South Asia in November, West Africa meeting at end February and Latin America early April).
November 2015.	Development of web based data input structure for both full cohort and sample.
December 2015 -January 2016.	Uploading of both full cohort and sample data into the web-based format for analysis.
January 2016.	First review of full cohort and sample data in relation to evaluation questions and distillation of very preliminary main findings.

27 January 2016.	TTI Program staff responds to Initial Assessment of the Communications and Engagement Strategy, making some adjustments and confirming baseline in this area.
January – February.	Review of first distillation of findings among the team. First QA review.
End January 2016.	Preparation of indicative annotated outline of Interim Report for circulation to TTI Program staff, review by Team Members.
February 2016.	Preparation by Learning Coordinator of first draft lessons paper, review by Team Leader, validation with Team members. Circulation of preview draft to TTI Program staff on 23 February.
25-26 Feb.	Progress workshop with TTI Ottawa Team.
February – March 2016	Deeper analysis of full cohort and sample data linking data sources to findings and lessons in structured matrix working paper format. Further QA review and refinement of draft lessons paper.
February – March 2016	Consideration of options regarding future regional reports and initial test drafting.
March	Drafting of Report, including further work on case studies.
March	Full QA Review applying Indevelop checklist format.
1 April	Interim Report submitted.
19-20 April	Discussions on Interim Report with TTI and Executive Committee
20 April- 23 May	Continued work on finalizing the first Interim Report.
23 May	Submission of final draft of Interim Report

Annex 5 – Quality assurance of the Interim Report

Roles and responsibilities: Applying Indevelop QA system calls on the distinct and cross-checking roles and responsibilities specified for the Team Leader, Project Manager, Quality Assurance Advisor and Project Manager in the Inception Report. The main QA roles are spelled out in Annex 3 of that Report.

In order to safeguard the necessary separation of functions, the Quality Assurance Advisor, based in Ottawa rather than Stockholm, is also kept at one step removed from the mainstream work of the Team around evaluating against Objectives 1 and 2, and is not involved in the related data-gathering analysis and synthesis until it reaches a QA stage.

His methodological inputs at preparatory stages and separate role as Learning Coordinator have provided complementary opportunities for quality testing and assurance throughout the evaluation cycle. In order to minimize any potential conflict, he is accountable to the Project Manager, and his quality assurance reports will provide transparent, rated assessments against the specified QA criteria rather than simple acceptance, rejection or comments. In relation to his distinct responsibility for coordinating the evaluation against Objective 3, the Program Manager and Team Leader serve to assure quality on the process and products.

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

Specific Criteria for Quality Assurance of the draft Interim Report: The Quality Control Checklist is based closely on the DAC Evaluation Quality Standards, has been the main instrument for QA assessment and reporting relating to the Interim Report. It encompasses not only the Report itself but also the Evaluation processes to date. The special character and roles of this early, learning-directed Report are recognized.

The completed checklist for the Interim Report will be provided as a separate document upon request.

Annex 6 – Documents reviewed

Documents referring to specific findings are not referenced in the findings of this Report in order to preserve anonymity as much as possible and as the findings are based on triangulation of a range of sources. Also, many draft documents were shared on the understanding that they would not be directly referenced.

Full cohort document overview

Full cohort data collection has drawn on the following documents:

- Annual reports
- Strategic plans
- Resource mobilization plans (and similar, where available)
- Human resource and gender guidelines (where available)
- Communications strategies
- Monitoring questionnaires
- Phase Two grantee application forms
- Primary Reviews (TTI application for Phase Two)
- External Assessments (TTI application for Phase Two)
- Stories of influence
- M&E guidelines and plans (where available)
- Legal documentation
- Research outputs (research guidelines, policy briefs, working papers, studies, articles; where available)
- PCS reports

Sample cohort document overview

Sample cohort data collection has drawn on the following documents:

- Annual reports
- Strategic plans
- Resource mobilization plans (and similar, where available)
- Phase Two grantee application forms
- Primary Reviews (TTI application for Phase Two)
- External Assessments (TTI application for Phase Two)
- Stories of influence
- M&E guidelines and plans (where available)
- Research quality assurance guidelines
- Communications strategies
- Minutes of Board meetings and other governance communications (where available)
- Human resource and gender guidelines (where available)
- Flagship publications
- Policy briefs
- Selected research reports and working papers

- Selected peer reviewed publications
- Books
- PCS reports

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Annex 7 – Interviews

South Asia					
Interviewees and numbers	CBGA	CPR	IPS	SPDC	Total
Senior management	1	1	2	2	6
Researchers senior	6	Group (10+)	2	7	25
Researchers junior	2	Group (15+)	2		19
M&E staff					
Communications / Publications staff	2	2	1	1	6
Administrative staff, including finance and human resources	2	2	2	2	8
Support staff					
Board members / Chair	2	1	0	1	4
External	2		1		3
Total interviews					102 (including groups)
East Africa					
Interviewees and numbers	EDRI	IPAR	MISR		
Senior management	3	2	2		7
Researchers senior	4	2	2		8
Researchers junior	1	1	7		9
M&E staff		1			1
Communications / Publications staff	1	2	1		4
Administrative staff, including finance and human resources	3	1	3		7
Support staff			2		2
Board members / Chair	2	1			3
External		2	5		7
Total interviews					48
West Africa					
Interviewees and numbers	CRES	CSEA	IEA		
Senior management	2	1	1		4
Researchers senior	3	1	3		7
Researchers junior	0	0	2		2
M&E staff	1	0	0		1
Communications / Publications staff	2	1	1		4
Administrative staff, including finance and human resources	1	1	1		3
Total interviews					22
Latin America					

Interviewees and numbers	CADEP	FARO	FUSADES	
Board members / Chair	2	1	1	4
Researchers senior	6	4	3	13
Researchers junior		2	4	6
M&E staff			1	1
Communications / publications staff		2		2
Administrative staff, including finance and human resources		2	2	4
External observers	6	6	6	18
Total interviews				48