

AFRICAN POLITICS AND POLICY

APP

THREE SUGGESTIONS FOR THINK TANKS

In the developing World

Obviously I have never set up a think tank, I have never run a think tank, and it's quite likely that I will never set up one or run in the future. But I have seen plenty of think tanks, especially in developing countries, I have seen how the enabling environment in which think tanks operate has changed in the past few years, and I think I have a fairly clear idea of what kind of a think tank I'd set up I had the chance to do it.

A think tank has to be slim, with just enough personnel to do what it is supposed to do. Yes, the size of an organization often provides an indication of how successful it has been in the past. But larger organizations have high recurring costs and in a world in which donors are not willing or able to commit the kind of funds that they used to allocate, the size of an

organization may undermine its sustainability. Obviously small, micro organizations, with a staff of one (and sometimes less!), are also not a viable option as they are constrained, by their small size, in what they can realistically be expected to do. So think tanks need to be properly sized

THINK TANKS NEED TO BE PROPERLY SIZED AND AS SLIM AS POSSIBLE, SO THAT THEY CAN DELIVER AS MUCH OUTPUT AS POSSIBLE FOR AS LITTLE INPUT AS POSSIBLE.

and as slim as possible, so that they can deliver as much output as possible for as little input as possible.

Second, think tanks need to do real

research. They need to write policy briefs and working papers and reports to their donors, but in order to be and to remain credible institutions, they need to publish some of their research output in scientific journals that are respected by the scholarly community. While there is an obvious reason why think tanks produce policy briefs -they need

APP NEW LOOK

We are happy to report that the Newsletter of African Politics and Policy has finally a new look.

It's easier to read, and, hopefully, just as interesting as it used to be in the previous format.

This is the first issue with the new look, and the 34th overall.

And in many ways it represents a new beginning as we expect the look of the newsletter to be as crisp as its outlook.

We hope that our readers will see some merit in what we are trying to do.

to inform policy makers as quickly and efficiently as possible – there is also an obvious reason why they'd also publish proper scholarly research. In the absence of proper publications, in properly peer reviewed journals, it is hard to speculate about the quality of the scholarship that a think tank is able to produce.

Third, the research has to be original not only, most obviously, because it has to present original data, findings and results, but because it'd also offer new

perspectives on policy issues. Repeating old slogans, saying things that are believed to please the donors and donor community, believing that donors want to hear what you think they want to hear instead of what you have to say is not terrible useful. It is not useful for the research organization, it is not useful to the country in which the organization operates and it does not help donors to sharpen their understanding of what's actually going on the ground. There is no point repeating '*Tout va très bien,*

Madame la Marquise' if things are actually not going too well.

If think tanks in the developing world followed these few words of advice, they'd work better, they'd a better job, they'd have a greater impact on their countries' policy making process and development, and they'd be remarkably more credible recipients of the funds that donors, more or less generously, are willing to disburse.

Riccardo Pelizzo

THINK TANKS IN AFRICA

Think tanks may not be doing as well as they once did. Especially in Africa where nearly half of them are either fragile or in crisis or at the risk of closing down.

But in spite of what the future has in store for Africa's think tanks, one should keep in mind that Africa or, to be more precise Sub-Saharan Africa, has fewer think tanks than Central And South America, Asia, North America and Europe, even though Africa's population is larger than the European, North American, Central and Southern

American populations. That's possibly because while Africa needs think tanks more than any other continent, Africa is not as wealthy as the other continents.

That said, there is some variation in the distribution of think tanks within Africa, The number of think tanks varies from a minimum of 1 in Guinea Bissau to a maximum of 92 in South Africa.

In East Africa Rwanda has 8, Tanzania 18, Ethiopia 26, Uganda 32 and Kenya 57.

My friends at REPOA have many reasons to celebrate:

REPOA's the best think tank in Tanzania, and the 12th in Africa.

Congratulations.

But we hope that, in the coming years, the African Governance and Development Institute will also be able to climb to a top position. After all, Simplicé Asongu and his team are doing more and better research than many think tanks and universities in the continent. And the rankings should at some point start reflecting their unmatched research excellence.

Riccardo Pelizzo

African Politics and Policy, in addition to producing a monthly newsletter, is committed to providing in depth analyses and diagnostics to understand the politics of policy making in Sub-Saharan Africa

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