ON THINK TANKS – 2016

annual report

On Think Tanks
INDEPENDENT RESEARCH, IDEAS AND ADVICE

Evolving Think Tanks

No two think tanks are the same.

Every think tank faces different political contexts and funding landscapes, increasingly shifting media, varying traditions of academia and civil society, and unique economic and social challenges. In response, they seek out different governance arrangements, develop a range of research agendas and use a fantastically diverse and inventive set of communication strategies and tactics. We find this diversity even within countries –which makes our talk of regional or national traditions rather unconvincing.

Across the world and within countries, think tanks emerge from different origins: academia, civil society, government, the private sector and, even, international cooperation projects. They attract different profiles of thinktankers. From academic researchers with an interest in policy, to analysts and technocrats preparing themselves for a career in policymaking. From activists and advocates in search for evidence based arguments, to former policymakers wishing to contribute to the formation and development of new democratic institutions. The choices they make in relation to their organisations' objectives and how they deal with their context, determines the emergence of multiple development pathways and histories.

Over the last six and a half years, On Think Tanks (OTT) has documented many of these histories. We have written about think tanks and thinktankers alike, listened to the various challenges they face and debated the strategies they could follow to address them. OTT has also looked at the strategies followed by think tanks' funders, foreign and domestic, as well as public and private.

These pathways keep growing – On Think Tanks' most read article is a step by step guide to setting up a think tank.

We have captured the ideas, experiences and recommendations of think tank scholars and practitioners, including executive directors, researchers, communicators, managers and funders. OTT has paid special attention to the experience of women, young researchers, and leaders, recognising that theirs are not only unique accounts of life and work in a think tank but also difficult to place into neatly defined categories.

We have witnessed the growth of think tanks across the world and the ever-changing boundaries of the think tank label and community –globally, regionally and nationally. It is increasingly difficult to compare organisations using a pre-defined set of criteria and failing to consider the central role that circumstance plays in their development and performance.

Enrique Mendizabal
Director, OTT

Our main take away is that think tanks must evolve to thrive.

Our main take away is that think tanks must evolve to thrive. The most successful in the long-run are not necessarily the most popular. They are those that have designed effective and flexible governance structures. Those that have scoped and delivered the most relevant and robust research agendas. Those that have told a compelling story about why their evidence matters to the key people they want to reach. The On Think Tanks School (OTT School) and the recently launched OTT Fellowship Programme have an explicit focus on the capacity of think tanks and thinktankers to grow and mature.

These *thinking* think tanks are always ahead of the rest when it comes to trying out new research methods and new communications channels, tools and technologies. They are proactive in reaching out to new funders or sources of income and exploring new business models, acutely aware that one-size-fits-all-approaches to funding cannot work in this environment. At the same time, funders and supporters must explore equally diverse approaches when it comes to promoting high quality research and greater capacity across think tank communities.

At OTT, we try to encourage all think tanks and thinktankers, as well as their funders and supporters, to reflect on what they do, why they do it and whether it works or could be improved upon. Without this kind of critical thinking, think tanks can only expect to be left behind, blindly copying what seems to work for others with little consideration of what may work for them. Failure to take stock and reposition themselves also results in think tanks setting unrealistic expectations or aiming for entirely inconsequential objectives and not raising funds sustainably. Perhaps most importantly, they often find it impossible to attract the best young researchers and new audiences, whose contribution to think tanks' capacity to evolve is unparalleled.

This OTT 2016 Annual Report provides an account of our work over the last year. It is also a chance to offer a window into the wealth of research, ideas, advice and initiatives on think tanks that can help these important institutions to reshape themselves.

The report covers OTT's own work as well as the opinions, research and interventions of others in the field. In coming years, we will also incorporate greater insights into the sector using data and lessons from new projects and partnerships.

We want to welcome you to join us in this effort by becoming part of the conversation, submitting your opinions and research, registering for our courses and fellowship scheme and spreading the word.

On Think Tanks

We believe that think tanks and policy research institutes can serve several important public good purposes. Even if they are sometimes dismissed as ideological pawns or interest driven, they play key roles in any modern society that values the contribution that knowledge can make to the world.

OTT focuses on a range of issues of relevance and interest to think tanks. Through our initiatives and the articles and the resources we publish, we aim to support think tanks to be more strategic in the ways they make short and long term decisions. Ultimately, we hope this will result in better policy advice and policy outcomes for all.

SUPPORT AND FUNDING

We run OTT as a not-for-profit initiative with the assistance of several contributors who generate content for our platform.

There are two main vehicles of funding and management for OTT: Universidad del Pacífico (Peru) and Mendizabal Ltd (UK).

Between 2015–2018, OTT is being supported by a grant from the Hewlett Foundation, provided through Universidad del Pacífico in Perú. The grant made it possible to achieve a more balanced global coverage, focus on a few themes in greater detail, and encourage the participation of new contributors.

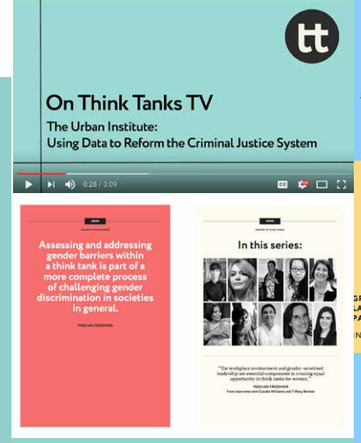
Universidad del Pacífico, too, provides a solid platform from which to reach out to new audiences, develop new services, and involve new southern-based institutions in the sector.

Other funders contribute, indirectly, to OTT through their support of specific projects led by members of the team. In some cases, we are able to support our work through individual-led collaborations. Sometimes, we link up with others initiatives and try to support them as best as we can. Transparify is a great example of this.

Before the Hewlett Foundation grant, OTT relied on project funding channeled through Mendizabal Ltd. Today, this vehicle mostly manages the income generated by the OTT School. All profits from the courses are reinvested in the School.

OTT IS GUIDED BY THESE 'PRINCIPLES':

- Be inclusive and global
- Take the initiative
- Rock the boat
- Be an honest source of ideas and advice



OPINION

North-South Collaboration: Eight tips for working with local think tanks

BY AJOY DATTA, SHAILENDRA SIGDEL

INTERVIEW

Euphrasia Mapulanga on think tank communications and policy influence in Zambia

BY WILL PAXTON

OPINION

Lessons from Latin America's First Evidence Week

BY ENRIQUE MENDIZABAL

JOB POSTING

Web Developer

SOAPBOX
LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM

DATE ADDED: AUGUST 15, 2016
APPLICATION DEADLINE: SEPTEMBER 30, 2016

RESEARCH

Think tank business models: The business of academia and politics

BY GERARD RALPHS

OPINION

UK think tanks are transparent, but they need to show leadership during Brexit

BY TOM JEFFERY

PART 16 OF THINK TANKS AND TRANSPARENCY

OPINION

Are think tanks in Asia unique?

BY PASCAL ABB

INITIATIVE

Transparify

Transparify provides the first-ever global rating of the financial transparency of 200+ major think tanks. Its aim is to improve the impact and the credibility of policy research, by making it more accountable.

JOB POSTING

Consultor: Incidencia de redes de think tanks

GRUPO FARO, INICIATIVA LATINOAMERICANA DE INVESTIGACIÓN PARA LAS POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS (ILAIPP)
INTERNACIONAL

DATE ADDED: SEPTEMBER 7, 2016
APPLICATION DEADLINE: NOVEMBER 30, 2016

INITIATIVE

The On Think Tanks School

The On Think Tanks School offers a range of capacity building opportunities for thinktankers and think tanks alike to develop their personas and organisational competences.

JOB POSTING

Consultor: Incidencia de redes de think tanks

GRUPO FARO, INICIATIVA LATINOAMERICANA DE INVESTIGACIÓN PARA LAS POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS (ILAIPP)
INTERNACIONAL

DATE ADDED: SEPTEMBER 7, 2016
APPLICATION DEADLINE: NOVEMBER 30, 2016

OPINION

Crafting policy relevant research: thinking strategically about research

BY ANDREA ORDOÑEZ, LEANDRO ECHT

PART 1 OF DOING POLICY RELEVANT RESEARCH

CASE STUDY

Monitoring, evaluation and learning in a South African think tank

BY TRACEY PHILLIPS

CASE STUDY

Long-form: Choosing a digital platform for policy organisations

BY ANYA PEARSON, STUART BROCKWELL

Work for a think tank

Working for a think tank is an exciting prospect. If you are interested in policy research, research communications, policy influence, or managing the development of new great ideas then have a look at the jobs on offer.

Are you a think tank or a think tank funder looking for great talent? Get in touch and advertise your job opportunities with us.

OPINION

Finding the Stories Behind the Numbers

BY MICHAEL KLEIMAN

PART 12 OF THINK TANKS AND VIDEO

OPINION

Think tanks and videos: are they an effective tool to communicate research?

BY ERIKA PEREZ-LEON

PART 1 OF THINK TANKS AND VIDEO

RESEARCH

Spanish and African think tanks: thinking about Africa

BY RICARDO LÓPEZ-ARANDA

OPINION

How to avoid an all-male panel? Just try harder

BY ENRIQUE MENDIZABAL

INTERVIEW

The New Philanthropists: Rohini Nilekani, Founder and Chairperson of Arghyam

BY ANNAPOORNA RAVICHANDER, ENRIQUE MENDIZABAL

INTERVIEW

Assefa Admassie, Principal Research Fellow at the Ethiopian Economic Association

BY JAIME GONZALEZ-CAPITEL

PART 14 OF THINK TANKS AND TRANSPARENCY

RESEARCH

Book Review: Improving Think Tank Management by Raymond Struyk

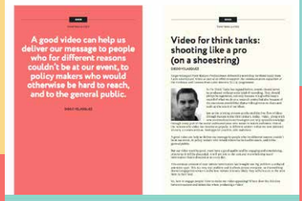
BY VANESA WEYRAUCH

OPINION

Linking research and policy: thinktankers as boundary workers

BY ENRIQUE MENDIZABAL

PART 8 OF THINK TANKS: DEFINITION AND TERMINOLOGY



OPINION

On Think Tanks End of Year 2016

BY ENRIQUE MENDIZABAL

EVENT

Evolving Think Tanks Short Course Series

ON THINK TANKS
ONLINE

START DATE: APRIL 5, 2016
END DATE: NOVEMBER 29, 2016

OPINION

Female Leadership at Think Tanks

BY SHANNON SUTTON

JOB POSTING

Strategic Communications Consultant

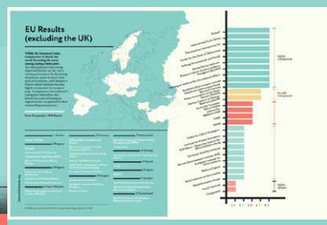
WELL TOLD STORY CONSULTING
NAIROBI, KENYA

DATE ADDED: SEPTEMBER 19, 2016
APPLICATION DEADLINE: OCTOBER 3, 2016

CASE STUDY

Setting up a communications team for a Think Tank: The case of CSTEP

BY ANNAPOORNA RAVICHANDER



OPINION

Setting up a think tank: step by step

BY ENRIQUE MENDIZABAL

JOB POSTING

Research Fellow (Migration)

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE (ODI)
LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM

DATE ADDED: JULY 16, 2016
APPLICATION DEADLINE: AUGUST 4, 2016

OPINION

Think Tanks in China: A Golden Age?

BY ENRIQUE MENDIZABAL

SERIES

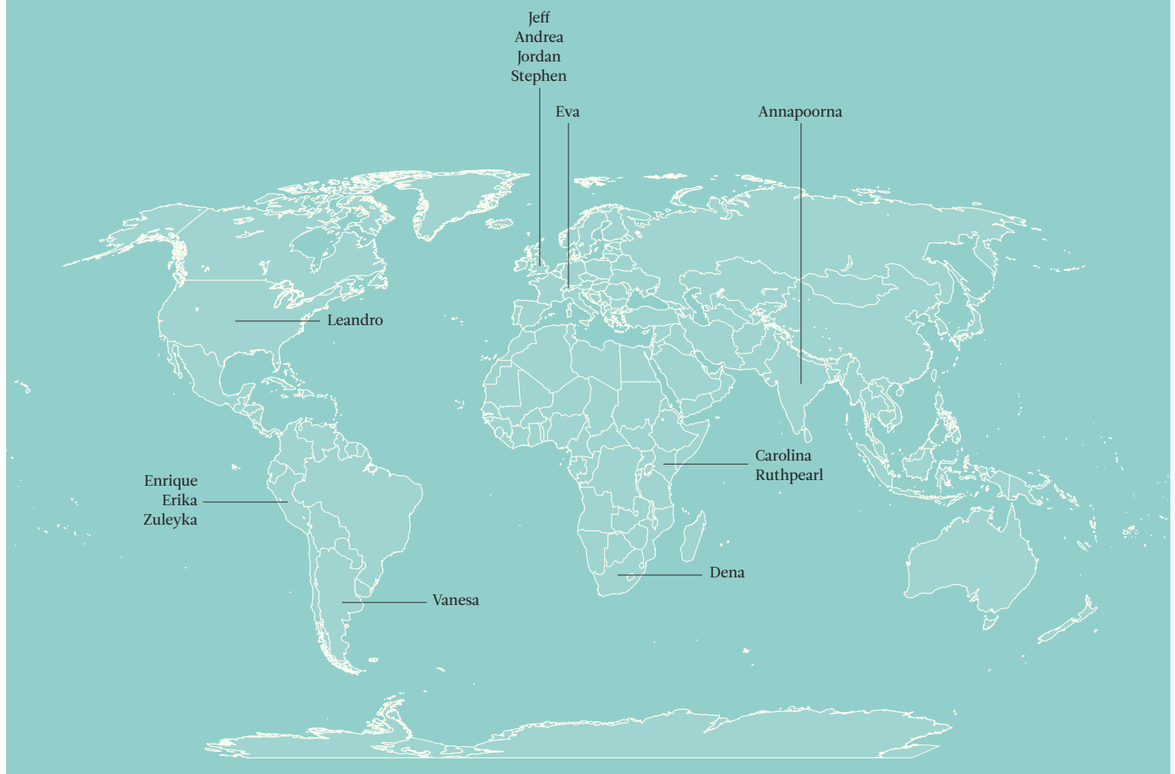
Think Tanks' Governance and Management

The Governance and Management of think tanks and policy research organisations is not an easy subject to discuss. It is full of complexities, and the discussion has to take into consideration the different contexts in which think tanks operate. There is not a cookie cut model for effective governance, but there are certainly some guidelines that organisations in all contexts would benefit from following. What is the best governance and management structure for a think tank? How does it affect its work and how can it drive research? Who is at the heart of our work - our outputs or our people? This series compiles sixteen opinion pieces, case studies, interviews, and shared experiences intended to give an overview of the discussion on the topic.

the team

In 2016, OTT began a process to strengthen its governance and management. This involved establishing and recognising key roles among OTT's main collaborators, many of whom carried out these roles entirely voluntarily.

The current team is comprised of 14 collaborators based in eight countries. The first annual team meeting will take place in February 2017 in London.



Eva Cardoso | *Programme Manager*
Eva is a project manager with solid experience coordinating various international research projects including taking care of contractual management; budget monitoring; setting up/improving structures and processes; and arranging the content and logistics of international events and trainings. She was programme administrator for the Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) Programme at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and has supported OTT on several projects. Eva lives in Rauris.

Leandro Echt | *Editor at Large (Latin America) and Coordinator, OTT School*
Leandro is an independent consultant, and a member of Politics & Ideas and OTT. He works on research and policy, focusing on developing the capacity of think tanks and civil society organisations to influence policy. Leandro worked for more than five years at the Centre for the Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Equity and Growth (CIPPEC) coordinating the Influence, Monitoring and Evaluation Programme. Leandro lives in Tallahassee.

Carolina Kern | *Trainer, OTT School*
Carolina has more than 10 years of experience working for development and humanitarian organisations, helping them to design, manage, coordinate and raise the profile of projects and programmes. She has worked in programme management, monitoring, research and communications for bilateral donors, the UN and think tanks. Her particular areas of interest include health systems strengthening, food and nutrition security and translating research into practice. Carolina lives in Nairobi.

Jeff Knezovich | *Editor at Large (Communications)*
Jeff manages the digital communication activities of the Nuffield Trust. Before then, he worked at IDS as the Policy Influence and Research Uptake Manager for the Future Health Systems Research Programme Consortium. Previously, he worked in the RAPID Programme at ODI where he was in charge of programme communication activities. Jeff lives in London.

Dena Lomofsky | *Trainer, OTT School*
Dena is the co-founder of Southern Hemisphere. She is a development sociologist with 20 years' experience in the field. She has a special interest in participatory processes and building learning organisations, and has been working in the area of policy influence since 2010. She compliments her work with think tanks by working with community development organisations and governments. Dena lives in Cape Town.

Enrique Mendizabal | *Founder and Director*
Enrique is an independent policy entrepreneur and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (FRSA). Until December 2010, he worked for ODI where he headed the RAPID Programme. Enrique is the co-founder of Politics & Ideas, the Peruvian Alliance for the Use of Evidence, and the Premio PODER al Think Tank Peruano del Año. In 2016, he organised an Evidence Week in Latin America. This is now set to be an annual event. Enrique lives in Lima.

Annapoorna Ravichander | *Editor at Large (South Asia)*
Annapoorna is an independent consultant. She holds a PhD in History and has over 25 years of experience in training, writing and communication. She has published articles in journals, newspapers and newsletters, and has participated in publishing books as an associate editor and coordinator. Until 2016, she was the Head of the Communication and Policy Engagement Team at the Center for Study, Technology and Policy in India. Annapoorna lives in Bangalore.

Ruthpearl Ng'ang'a | *Editor at Large (Africa)*
Ruthpearl is a strategic communicator with 10 years hands-on experience working in over 20 countries across Africa. She has worked with the African Population and Health Research Center, Wetlands International Africa, and ACORD building innovative knowledge management practices geared toward use of evidence to influence policy and practice. Ruthpearl lives in Nairobi.

Jordan Tchilingirian | *Research Director*
Jordan is a sociologist and lecturer in the Department of Social and Policy Sciences at the University of Bath. His research focuses on think tanks and policy research institutes and explores issues related to evidence, expertise, the role of social science in public life, and professions. Jordan also has an interest in social network analysis. Jordan lives in Bath.

Andrea Ordóñez | *Trainer, OTT School*
Andrea is Research and Partnership Coordinator of the Southern Voice Initiative on the Sustainable Development Goals, where her role involves supporting think tanks from the global South to engage with international debates. As an Associate of Politics & Ideas, she supports think tanks to develop research agendas and design the mechanisms for quality assurance. Andrea lives in Liverpool.

Vanesa Weyrauch | *Director, OTT School*
Vanesa is co-founder of Politics & Ideas and an Associate Researcher at CIPPEC, Argentina. She has worked in the policy and research field for the past 12 years.Vanesa has created several online courses on topics like policy influence planning, designing policy-relevant research agendas, funding models, research communications, and monitoring and evaluating policy influence aimed at think tanks in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Vanesa lives in Buenos Aires.

Erika Pérez-León | *Digital Content Editor*
Erika has over 10 years of experience delivering communication and marketing campaigns for NGO, charity and for-profit clients. Her work includes brand development and implementation; creating information, education and communication materials; behaviour change campaigns; and branding for urban and rural community programmes. In 2015, she worked on the Ebola crisis response in Sierra Leone as part of the International Rescue Committee's communications team. Erika lives in Lima.

Stephen Yeo | *Adviser at Large*
Stephen has had extensive involvement in building capacity for policy research and analysis in Sub-Saharan Africa, along with experience in monitoring and evaluation, in particular of policy research networks and policy influencing projects. He is currently involved in the evaluation of the International Growth Centre. Stephen lives in London.

Zuleyka Ramos Tavara | *Programme Manager*
Zuleyka has six years of experience managing externally funded projects at the Centro de Investigación de la Universidad del Pacífico. Her professional experience includes contract management, budget monitoring, coordinating and improving project management, and monitoring the logistics of events linked to external project, such as OTT. Zuleyka lives in Lima.

the advisory board

Part of the effort to strengthen our governance and management included establishing an Advisory Board. The Board is comprised of nine individuals from different professional backgrounds and encompasing, as a group, the themes of focus at OTT.

Norma Correa
Professor, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú

Norma is an anthropologist specialising in public policy and development with 15 years of professional experience in rural and urban research, management and senior management, technical consultancy and university teaching. Her research interests include: social innovation, economic inclusion, inequalities and gender.

Priyanthi Fernando
Executive Director, International Women's Rights Action Watch–Asia Pacific

Priyanthi is a social development and communications professional with over 30 years of experience in Sri Lanka and overseas. She has worked in the areas of technology, infrastructure and poverty and has led several organisations: the Centre for Poverty Analysis; the International Forum for Rural Transport and Development; and the Intermediate Technology Development Group's Sri Lanka programme.

Ruth Levine
Programme Director, Global Development and Population, Hewlett Foundation

Ruth is a development economist and expert in global health, education and evaluation. Since 2011, she has led the foundation's team responsible for grantmaking to improve living conditions in low and middle-income countries, and to advance reproductive health and rights in developing countries and in the United States. Ruth is the author of scores of books and publications on global health policy, including *Millions Saved: Proven Successes in Global Health*.

Lawrence MacDonald
Vice President, World Resources Institute

Lawrence leads the design and implementation of strategic communications plans and activities that help to make the World Resources Institute's big ideas happen. A development policy communications expert and former foreign correspondent, he works to increase the influence and impact of the Institute's research and analysis by leading an integrated communications programme that includes online engagement, media relations, events, and government and NGO outreach.

Simon Maxwell
Senior Research Associate, Overseas Development Institute

Simon is a development economist, who has worked internationally since 1970. He worked for ten years overseas, then for fifteen years at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex. In 1997, Simon became Director of the Overseas Development Institute, the UK's leading independent think-tank on international development and humanitarian issues. In 2007, he was made a CBE, for services to international development.

Jill Rutter
Programme Director, Institute for Government

Jill leads the Institute for Government's work on better policy making and arm's length government. She is an experienced former senior civil servant, having worked for HM Treasury, Number 10 and the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs. Her work includes studies on how governments make policy, general civil service issues including minister-Civil Service relations, governments and sustainable development, and government and business.

John Schwartz
Founder and Managing Director, Soapbox

Having built Soapbox up from a freelance design practice to a thriving communications agency, John divides his time between running the business, checking the quality of its outputs and keeping his hand in as a designer. John began his career in publishing, running Politico's bookshop and imprint before becoming publishing manager and designer at the Institute for Public Policy Research, where he began developing his approach to policy communications. He studied philosophy and politics at the University of Warwick.

Stephen Yeo
Independent Consultant and OTT Adviser at Large

Stephen has had extensive involvement in building capacity for policy research and analysis in Sub-Saharan Africa. He also has experience of monitoring and evaluation, in particular of policy research networks and policy influencing projects. He is currently involved in the evaluation of the International Growth Centre.

Xufeng Zhu
Professor, Tsinghua University

Xufeng Zhu is currently Professor and Associate Dean at the School of Public Policy and Management, Tsinghua University. His research interests include the policy process; think tank and expert involvement; science and technology policy; environment and climate policy; and public governance in transitional China. He is the author of *The Rise of Think Tanks in China*, *Expert Involvement in Policy Changes*, and *China's Think Tanks: Their Influences in the Policy Process*. He serves as Regional Editor of the Asian Journal of Political Sciences.

our offer

In 2016, we published more than 70 articles and more than 15 resources. Since our foundation, we have published more than 60 interviews, including a series on Latin American Leaders and African Executive Directors; with one on South Asian Directors to be launched in 2017.

Following the launch of the new website in February 2016, OTT has produced a number of series, including *Communications as an orchestra*, *Doing policy relevant research*, and *Think tanks: definition and terminology*. Some of the series were repackaged into digital publications, including *Think tanks and elections*, *Women in think tanks*, and *A different look at Transparify's results*.

In 2016, we also published the results of the two-year OTT Exchange Programme, which saw thinktankers from Latin America, Europe and Indonesia work on three collaborative projects: communications for difficult policy issues; self-assessment approaches; and business models.

This year we launched OTT TV with five double videos of US-based think tanks. The videos provide a template to extend these videos to other countries and regions.

OUR 2016 OFFER

INITIATIVES

Initiatives are efforts to bring together research, communications and capacity development to address challenges faced by think tanks and their supporters.

The OTT School delivered six short courses and two long courses as part of their *Evolving think tanks series*. Through the courses, the OTT School reached 169 participants. The courses were delivered by seven trainers based in different parts of the world.

Applications for the first OTT Fellowship Programme started in November 2016. The Fellowship Programme will give young thinktankers a chance to develop their leadership skills further and contribute to supporting new generations of think tank leaders.

OTT partnered with Media Tank to produce a series of short videos. *You can read more about OTT TV on page 28 of this report.*

OTT continued to support Transparify. Transparify provides the first-ever global rating of the financial transparency of 200+ major think tanks. Its aim is to improve the impact and the credibility of policy research, by making it more accountable. The 2016 report was published in June.

OTT has continued to support the PODER Think Tank of the Year Awards in 2016, which in 2017 will reach its 5th year

In 2016, OTT supported a new initiative in Latin America: Evidence Week 2016. More than 1,200 participants joined 40 organisations, 110 speakers, and 30 events across Perú to learn about, strengthen and celebrate the use of evidence in policymaking.

EVENTS

In 2016, we advertised 32 events, including those organised by think tanks across the world.

Travel and outreach in 2015 and 2016 focused on Africa (Kenya), South Asia (India) and East Asia (China). This provided the opportunity to explore new connections in these regions, strengthen links with key think tanks there, and establish new links with think tank funders. Read more about the events we attended.

JOBSBOARD

In 2016, we advertised 83 job opportunities in 12 different countries from a wide range of institutions.

OTT INTERVIEWS

We have interviewed thinktankers and executive directors in more than 20 countries. Their account of life in think tanks provide an invaluable resource to understand the challenges they face and how they have managed to address them.

THEMES

Our content is centered around five main themes, all which concern think tanks across the world.

- Governance and management
- Research
- Communications and impact
- Funding and supporting think tanks
- Understanding think tanks

RESOURCES

Our resources include manuals, videos, and publications. These resources are developed around themes.

- Governance and management
- Research
- Communications and impact
- Funding and supporting think tanks

SERIES

We have edited one series a month. Read the series:

- Think tanks and data visualisation
- Think tanks and video
- Think tanks' governance and management
- Think tanks: definition and terminology
- Women in think tanks

a year in review

OTT launched a new website in early 2016. The site, developed by Soapbox, has transformed the OTT blog into a portal, which offers a range of services to its users including a jobsboard, an events calendar, and a newsletter. It also organises our content into various categories, such as themes, resources and series.

The new website has boosted OTT's visibility: Between January and December 2016, the site received 390,000 page views, and our Newsletters reach over 3,300 people every two weeks.

In many ways, this virtual home reflects the consolidation of OTT's physical home. Since 2015, OTT has been hosted by Universidad del Pacifico, in Peru, and mainly supported by a grant from the Hewlett Foundation. The relationship with the university establishes OTT as a global effort with a very strong foot in the south.

A GROWING GLOBAL AND DIVERSE COMMUNITY OF ON THINKTANKERS

In 2016, we saw a significant rise in participation from contributors from different regions, specially women. The *Women in think tanks* series has received significant attention and has provided an attractive platform for future work. Since the publication of this series, OTT produced a digital publication and a number of short videos to reach new audiences.

OTT has also consolidated its team to include a balance between men and women: nine of the 14 team members are women, four of the nine members of the newly appointed advisory board are women, and four of the seven trainers in the OTT School are women.

CAPACITY BUILDING

In 2016, OTT launched the OTT School with a series of six short courses and two long courses. An important aspect of the OTT School is the support that OTT is offering regional think tank networks such as La Iniciativa Latinoamericana de Investigación para las Políticas Públicas (ILAIPP) and the South Asia Think Tank Initiative think tanks network.

Furthermore, OTT has launched a new OTT Fellowship Programme, through which up to 10 Fellows will be supported over a year-long programme to develop their leadership skills. The Winterschool for Thinktankers, partly funded by the Swiss Government and participants' contributions and in collaboration with the Swiss foreign policy think tank, *foraus*, was held in Geneva in January 2017. We will be looking for new cities to hold future schools.

It has been a year of great change at OTT. As we come together to plan more services and resources for think tanks in 2017, let us reflect on what 2016 brought us.

EVENTS AND ENGAGEMENT

OTT participated in meetings and workshops across the world. Visits to Kenya and India led to appointing an African editor and South Asia editor. OTT has also appointed a member of its new Advisory Board from China. Far from expecting think tanks to come to us, we have continued to make an effort to join them where they are already meeting and working.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Edited series and courses are effective ways to reach out to the OTT audience to achieve meaningful results. The OTT School in particular provides invaluable opportunities to engage with OTT's audiences directly.

OTT sought to increase the number of collaborators to the site over the last two years. As the team grows, relationships need to develop between all members of the team. Presence in various fora and engagement with think tanks communities around the world must take advantage of OTT's collaborators. We will work with regional editors in the short term and seek to build a network of new OTT Fellows to help us reach new spaces across the world.

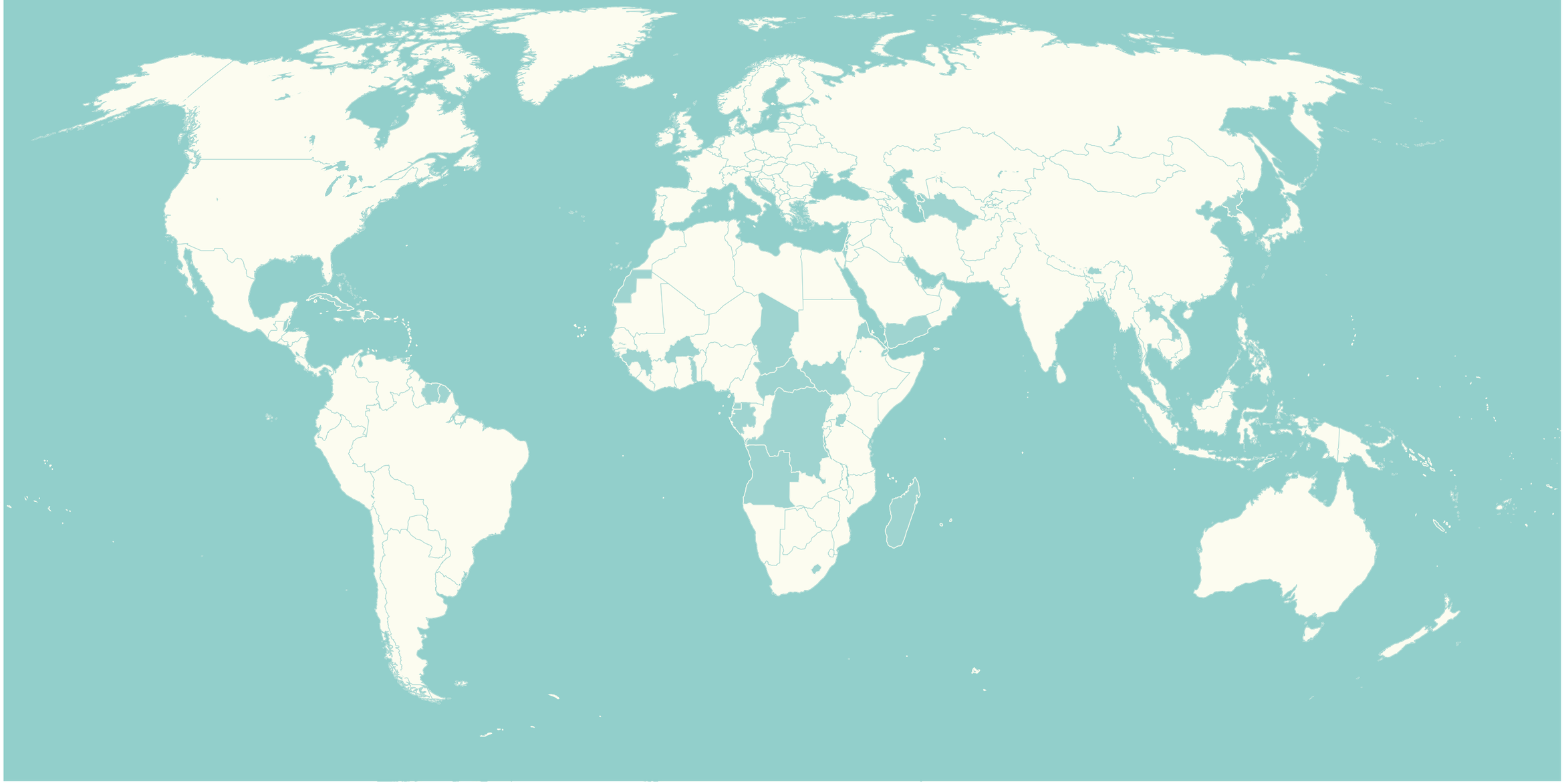
This is a summary of On Think Tanks end of year 2016 by Enrique Mendizabal. Read the full article.

a year in review

We are read in more than 160 countries across the world! These are the top 20 countries where we are read:

- United Kingdom
- United States
- India
- Canada
- Switzerland
- Peru
- Germany
- Australia
- Ukraine
- France
- South Africa
- Indonesia
- Pakistan
- Kenya
- Nigeria
- Belgium
- Spain
- Netherlands
- Mexico
- Philippines

● Where our readers come from



a year in review

OTT in numbers

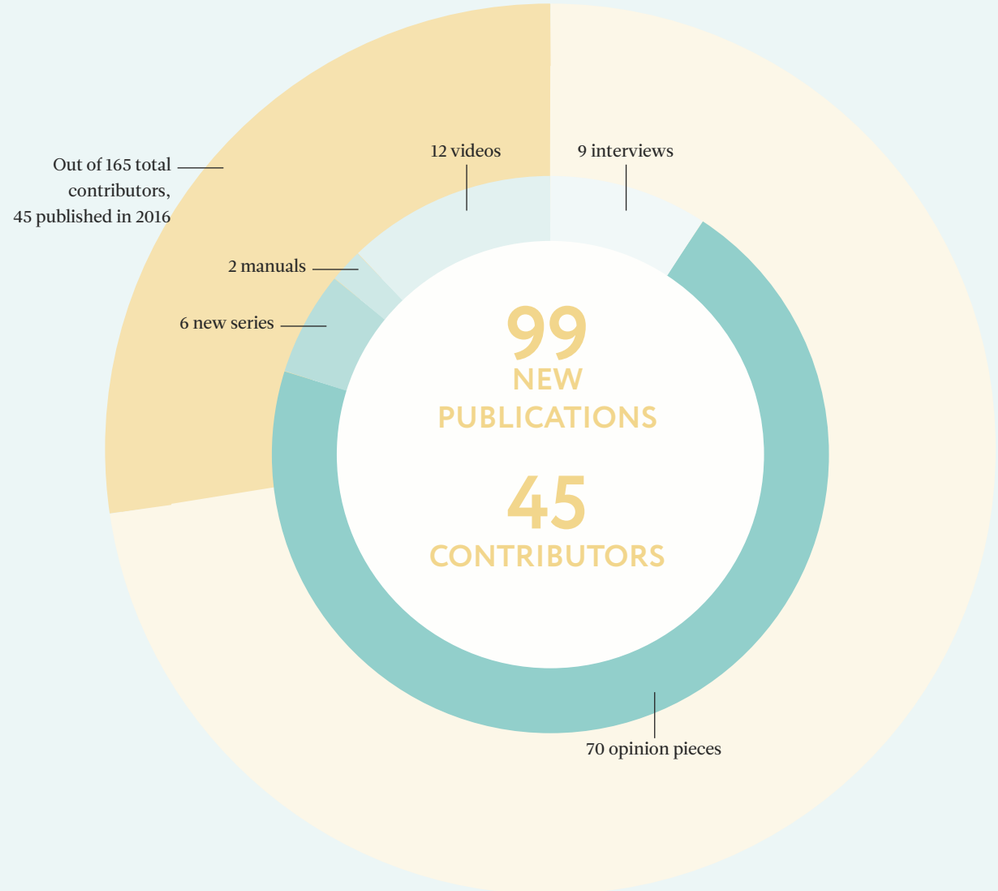
In 2016, we generated a wealth of new material, with which we were able to create new outputs. We picked up on external publications (i.e. Transparify's results) to create new content for followers, and launched OTT TV as a new platform for communication and outreach. Since March 2016, we have maintained a monthly newsletter featuring new content and advertising our new products and/or outputs. We have also used this newsletter to gather feedback from followers and to support the OTT School.

Between February and December 2016, OTT averaged over 9,000 sessions per month. In users, this represents an average of 6,617 and 15,778 unique page views.

On our busiest day, 30 Nov 2016, we had over 6,000 unique page views. Our jobsboard received almost 10% of traffic to our site. Articles were, naturally, nearly 75%.

Our most popular article for 2016 was *Setting up a think tank: step by step*, which was originally published in 2015 and was updated in June 2016 to take into account new resources and ideas. Our most popular article originally published in 2016 was: *Long-form: choosing a digital platform for policy organisations*.

In 2016, we published an average of two new posts a week. These came from a range of contributors based all over the world, from South Asia to Europe to Latin America. We published the results of the OTT Exchange, partnered with Media Tank to produce a set of think tank videos, and continued to package our content into series.



a year in review

TWITTER- OTT's presence on social media gained momentum in 2016. Social media is yet another platform for us to reach and engage with a wider audience of thinktankers around the world. On Twitter, we have over 4,500 followers, a number which has been on a steady increase since the start of the year. 94% of our followers are interested in politics and current events, and 55% of them are aged between 25 and 34 years.

Average monthly:

Tweets	105
Profile visits	2,000
Mentions	71

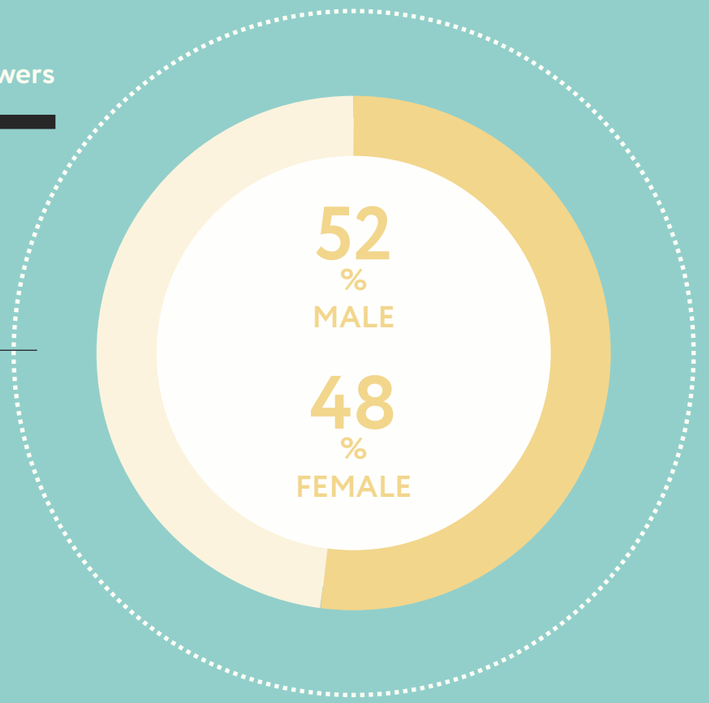
IMPRESSIONS:

63.5k

tweets linking to us

160

Our followers



2016 TOP TWEETS

Feb 2016 • 29 days
TWEET HIGHLIGHTS
Top Tweet earned 3,663 impressions
Think you can **#workforathinktank**? Find opportunities on our new jobs board > onthinktanks.org/jobs

Top media Tweet earned 2,571 impressions
Our new website is up in beta. Have a butchers and let us know what you think! onthinktanks.org pic.twitter.com/gVfWNDeBw

Apr 2016 • 30 days
TWEET HIGHLIGHTS
Top Tweet earned 3,646 impressions
.@IPPR are looking for a Head of News onthinktanks.org/jobs/head-of-n… **#workforathinktank**

Jun 2016 • 30 days
TWEET HIGHLIGHTS
Top Tweet earned 2,198 impressions
What can Think Tanks do during election? **#Elecciones2016 #peru** onthinktanks.org/series/think-t…

Aug 2016 • 31 days
TWEET HIGHLIGHTS
Top Tweet earned 1,669 impressions
Not every policy problem can be addressed with the same research method onthinktanks.org/articles/metho… **@AOrdonez** pic.twitter.com/LEiM57Fne9

Oct 2016 • 31 days
TWEET HIGHLIGHTS
Top Tweet earned 3,269 impressions
Register Now to the School of Thinktankers in Geneva with **@oraus** and **@ThinkTankHub_CH #ottschool** onthinktanks.org/events/geneva2… pic.twitter.com/H8ZKfe3hTU

Dec 2016 • 31 days
TWEET HIGHLIGHTS
Top Tweet earned 1,393 impressions
Apply by January 10th for the On Think Tanks Fellowship Programme. Find out what you need to apply: onthinktanks.org/initiatives/sc… **#OTTfellows** pic.twitter.com/ZnFCWEY0xG

Jan 2016 • 31 days
TWEET HIGHLIGHTS
Top Tweet earned 1,085 impressions
Happy New Year... 2016 will bring new content, new features, new look and good old On Think Tanks... Be sure to join us

Mar 2016 • 31 days
TWEET HIGHLIGHTS
Top Tweet earned 6,712 impressions
.@jrf_uk is looking for a Policy & Research Manager **#workforathinktank** onthinktanks.org/jobs/policy-an… pic.twitter.com/Vxt5NCTFbb

May 2016 • 31 days
TWEET HIGHLIGHTS
Top Tweet earned 2,051 impressions
What Works Global Summit **#wwgs2016** in London September 2016 @C2update **@3ieNews @senseaboutsci** pic.twitter.com/11sxGiWR9e

Jul 2016 • 31 days
TWEET HIGHLIGHTS
Top Tweet earned 2,594 impressions
Great event on the evidence and politics of policymaking **@UniofBathIPR** onthinktanks.org/events/evidenc… **@politics_ideas**

Sep 2016 • 30 days
TWEET HIGHLIGHTS
Top Tweet earned 2,507 impressions
Great new **#wonkcomms** job available at **@NuffieldTrust** > Editorial Manager onthinktanks.org/jobs/editorial… pic.twitter.com/KX5JqpojiQ

Nov 2016 • 30 days
TWEET HIGHLIGHTS
Top Tweet earned 4,411 impressions
On Think Tanks Fellowship Programme - apply now onthinktanks.org/announcements/… **@IDRC_CRDI @IDRC_AFRIQUE @IDRCinAsia @IDRC_LAC** twitter.com/onthinktanks/s…

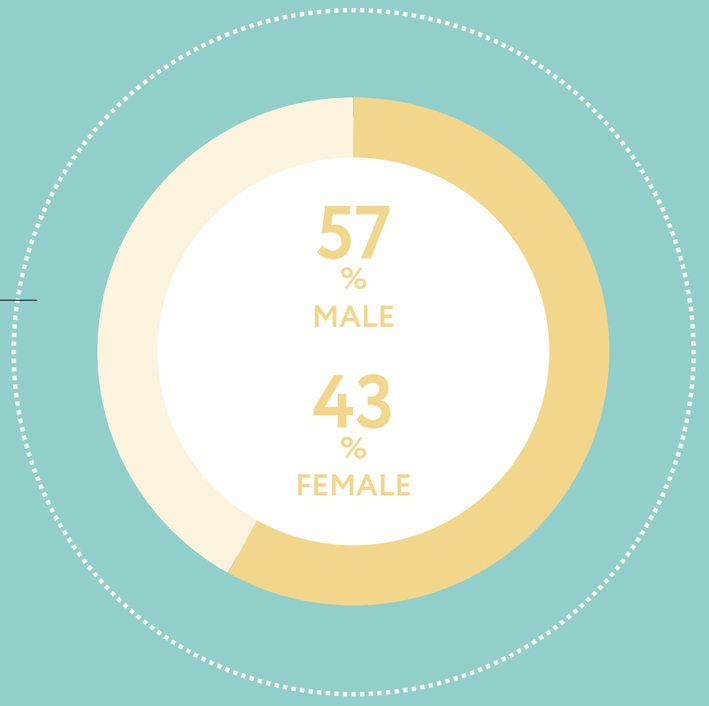
a year in review

NEWSLETTER- **The number of subscribers to OTT's newsletter increased significantly, starting with 1,408 in March and reaching 3,372 by the end of December.**

	Subscribers
March On Think Tanks Newsletter.	1,408
April New short courses, funding resources, a think tanks & transparency series and more.	1,362
May Lessons from China, OTT TV & the Century Foundation, and a new series on think tank definition and terminology.	1,388
June Transparify's 2016 report, the steps to set up a think tank, digital platforms for policy organisations, and a series on governance and management.	2,177
July Scholarships from the On Think Tanks School, rethinking the research output, a review of *Improving think tank management*, and a series on transparency.	2,123
August A new series on doing policy relevant research, a long course on funding models, and examples of how to be successful in the long-form.	2,108
September OTT's team, an interview with TTI programme specialist Samar Verma, three new OTT TV episodes and a series on data visualisation.	2,072
October New interviews, a new episode at OTT TV, learning opportunities, and more on OTT's team.	3,088
November Applications open for the OTT Fellowship Programme, the OTT Exchange publications, a new episode on OTT TV and a short survey.	3,312
December New articles and OTT TV episodes, our newly appointed Advisory Board and a reminder to apply for the Fellowship Programme.	3,372

FACEBOOK- **We reached 2,948 likes on our page. The *On Think Tanks end of year 2016* post reached 948 people via Facebook, and the OTT TV video *New America: integrating technology in early literacy* reached more than a thousand people. Facebook was a great platform to advertise courses and programmes for the OTT School. The Fellowship Programme campaign reached almost a thousand people.**

2,948 followers from 45 different countries



the interviews

Since 2015, OTT has interviewed more than 60 thinktankers and think tank experts from more than 20 countries.

The Initiatives

the on think tanks school (ott school)
on think tanks tv (ott tv)
the on think tanks exchange
transparify
premio poder
semana de la evidencia

Initiatives are programmes or projects that combine research and practice to strengthen think tanks and their supporters. They include local level, national, and international efforts often involving think tanks themselves as key partners.

2016 was the launch year for the OTT School. We collaborated with highly skilled professionals to deliver a series of short and long courses, reaching participants from around the world.

Likewise, in 2016 we launched OTT TV, which provided a new platform for thinktankers to share their work and experiences. This was done in collaboration with Media Tank, a New York based production company headed by Michael Kleiman. We look forward to continuing these productions with think tanks in other regions.

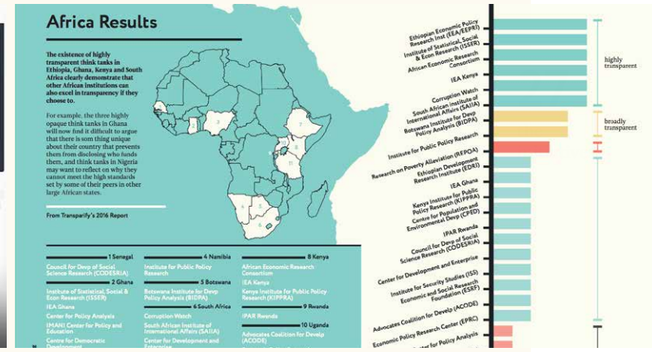
We have continued to promote the work of Transparify, helping to disseminate the 2016 results and creating a series on Think Tanks & Transparency.

OTT has continued to support and promote the Premio PODER al Think Tank del Año, an initiative that aims to recognise the work of think tanks in Perú. Going forward, our goal is to expand to other countries in the region. In 2016, the jury included the Vice-President of Peru.

In 2016, OTT supported a new initiative in Latin America: Evidence Week 2016. OTT played a leading role in shaping the design, approach and content of the week. More than 1,200 participants joined 40 organisations, 110 speakers, and 30 events across Peru to learn about, strengthen and celebrate the use of evidence in policymaking.

There are other initiatives that OTT has supported in the past and that offer inspiration for future efforts. The OTT Exchange and the OTT Data Visualisation Competition, for instance.

In 2017, OTT will launch a new Open Think Tank Directory, which will offer think tanks the opportunity to find possible partners across the world and academics the chace to study the spread and focus of think tanks in greater depth.



the on think tanks school

The OTT School aims to become a unique space to share cutting edge knowledge about how think tanks and their members can excel at what they do.

We believe that every think tank has developed and untapped capacities: we build on the former and fertilise the latter.

Our network of trainers is our most precious asset. We offer them a platform to become agents of change, to innovate and to learn from each other. In 2016, we worked with seven trainers from countries such as South Africa, Ecuador and Argentina. In 2017, we will work with a larger group of trainers to continuously find new ways to share what we know and help make change happen.

We believe that neither trainer nor mentor, even those with the utmost expertise and commitment, can make all the difference. We are just catalysers for positive changes that thinktankers around the world are aiming to achieve.

During its inaugural year, the OTT School offered the *Evolving think tanks* series, composed of six short online courses and two long ones. We attracted more than 160 participants from around the world and helped them reframe problems, identify new ways of operating, and work better with other team members.

Knowledge about think tanks is always evolving. Through questions and contributions from participants, we learned new things in 2016. For example, they pointed out opportunities to use forums better, they highlighted critical issues such as how to share more complex content, and topics of interest for upcoming capacity building activities were also identified. This feedback has played a key role in designing our offer for 2017.

A key value of OTT School is that we embrace critical thinking. Through our courses we also identified opportunities for thinktankers to re-visit implicit assumptions, evaluate how much of our knowledge and expertise is useful for their realities, and find others who are doing things better as a source of inspiration. In this sense, even when we understand the demand for practical advice and solutions, we strive to keep complexity on the table. Courses deal with challenges and unpack potential ways forward, but there are no cookie cutter approaches.

Finally, we are conscious of what we can and cannot do. We are just one player within a larger group of individuals and organisations working to build the capacity of think tanks, but we aspire to become the best we can be and to leverage what others are doing. With this in mind, we have interviewed capacity building experts and donors to gain awareness of their ideas and demands, and to make the OTT School available for more individuals and organisations.

We look forward to a fruitful 2017. Our series will add a new short course, we will launch a series of bite sized webinars, and we will create a new long online course on communication. We have also launched a Fellowship Programme, *Integral leaders for global challenges*, to help a new cadre of young leaders co-create a new approach to leadership that unites both heart and mind, feminine and masculine qualities, and acknowledge the interconnectedness of countries, people and the environment. We also successfully held the first Winterschool for Thinktankers, aimed at future think tank leaders. We look forward to having returning participants and open the door to new ones!

Vanesa Weyrauch
Director, OTT School

We are just catalysers for positive changes that thinktankers around the world are aiming to achieve.

on think tanks school

Working with think tanks on their monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems over the years, I have realised that they often tend to exceptionalise their experience; that the work they do is so different to anyone else and so complex that it must be almost impossible to do M&E and learn from others' experience. However, since we move around a lot as practitioners, we know this is not the case. There are often more commonalities than differences, particularly in terms of policy influence strategies and the ways these can be measured.

At the OTT School we have made a big effort to demystify Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) for think tanks. We have done this by breaking it down into simple processes and steps that any organisation can follow to develop a good MEL system. We also run the courses in a way that encourages shared learning through email exchanges and participatory webinars. This way, participants can see that they have common concerns, and can share solutions to their MEL problems. Besides trying to make the content more accessible, we also provided participants with ways to motivate their colleagues to participate in MEL efforts by making it appealing and interesting. For example, we encourage participants to find out what matters most to people, to encourage learning and to adopt participatory processes. We also provide some theory on why we do MEL and different ways of thinking about evaluating policy influence.

The courses have three main components: technical, process and theoretical. Through the exercises, we encourage participants to put into practice what they have learned through the course materials and webinars, so that by the end of the course they have a tangible output and experience they can build on in the future. This builds confidence, and provides momentum for improving their MEL effort. Courses like this are important because they provide a platform for people to share their challenges and gather ideas and tools to get started with improving their MEL efforts.

The online platform is vital for people who do not have ready access to technical assistance, either because of busy schedules, lack of funding or because they are in far-flung places. Although we cover a lot of content within the six modules, the course is structured to allow people to work at their own pace. In 2016, we improved our courses by making them more manageable to participate in, and by strengthening the process for doing practical exercises based on the lessons we learned from 2015 participant feedback.

Dena Lomosfky
Trainer, OTT School short course, *Monitoring, evaluation and learning about policy influence: how to get some certainty amidst all the complexity*

The dynamism of jobs nowadays poses a challenge for many careers. The pace of technological changes, along with globalisation of knowledge and competition, means that the skills we learn early in our lives will not be enough to carry us through our careers. We need a lifelong learning approach for both the core competencies of our field, and those that emerge from new domains.

In this context, the OTT School is a space to consolidate and share knowledge related to the wide-ranging efforts for effectively running policy research organisations. The School is critical for two reasons. First, there is a lack of spaces to learn about the challenges of think tanks as part of any formal degree. As a result, you run the risk of ending up with bright researchers who may have little or no interest in communicating their research to a wider audience; communication specialists without knowledge of interpreting research results; and administrative staff without the experience of running open, publicly accountable organisations. These are just a few of the challenges that different professionals may face when entering the world of think tanks. The second reason is how quickly policy environments change. Experienced thinktankers face the challenge of adapting to new knowledge and technologies. For example, among quantitative researchers, cutting-edge tools and techniques for analysing data mean that new skills are required. Knowing these techniques is essential to carry out research, and to review and assess the research of others.

While the need for a space like the OTT School is evident, the way to deliver such a programme is not obvious. This first year collaborating with the OTT School has involved figuring out what is the best way to promote lifelong learning among thinktankers. One of the challenges we noticed early on is that once thinktankers are at work, they all have limited time to learn new things. They also face very different contexts and come from different paths of life, making one-size-fits-all approaches inappropriate. Finally, while we seek to increase individual capacity, we also hope this will translate into stronger organisations, better able to cope with changing environments.

Facing these challenges is not easy, but we are on the path to overcoming them with the lessons we are learning from this process. We provide participants with various stepping stones for them to continue learning, opening doors for them to further explore issues by themselves or with their colleagues. This acknowledges the differences among think tanks and policy contexts, but requires strong commitment from participants. The OTT School is also a space for thinktankers to reflect on their work and use their personal experiences, and other resources, to answers to the problems they face. Furthermore, participants are encouraged to learn about themselves and their organisation. Understanding our current limitations is an essential step towards deciding which capacities to develop and where to focus our efforts.

It is early on in the OTT School's development, but we are confident we will continue to develop the strategies to promote life-long learning in the dynamic think tank sector.

Andrea Ordóñez
Trainer, OTT School short course, *Designing policy relevant research agendas*

on think tanks school

Publications are one of the most important products produced by think tanks. While communication techniques are evolving and many organisations now use a mix of social media, data visualisation, podcasts and events to help expose their research, it is often the existence of a solid and well-written research report that makes this possible.

Carolina Kern
Trainer, OTT School short course,
Writing to achieve policy impact

Besides being repositories of knowledge and an influencing vehicle, a publication is also a powerful branding tool. With this in mind, writing and presenting outputs well, and disseminating them effectively remains critical for organisations who want to be taken seriously in their particular sector.

Much has been written about writing clearly. From George Orwell's six rules, published back in 1946, to more contemporary and practical guidelines. Specific strategies for writing to achieve policy impact is also a common topic of discussion among researchers and communications professionals alike.

At its core, the emphasis on strong writing is not about becoming obsessed with grammar. Rather, it is about ensuring that you have a clear and well-structured message for the particular audience you are seeking to influence or interact with. As the acclaimed writer and twice Pulitzer Prize Winner, David McCullough, explains: "Writing is thinking. To write well is to think clearly. That's why it's so hard."

With all of this in mind, one of OTT School's flagship courses in 2016 put a strong focus on improving the writing and communications skills of thinktankers around the world. Though we focused on how to write policy briefs and background papers, our goal was to work with thinktankers to help them develop and refine skills to write more clearly and logically, regardless of the publication format.

While useful and powerful tools, publications must be seen in context and as part of a communications strategy. This demands a command of think tank communications channels and tools that is akin to the role of an Orchestra's conductor.

Recognising this, the course for writing to achieve policy impact included important sections on strategy and tactics. Our aim was to get research and communications staff to think through the specifics of how they might disseminate their work and clearly define what success could look like.

In practice, this involved work on defining key messages and on pinpointing target audiences. It covered issues like deciding where, when, and when not to, pitch your idea and get your key messages out there. Our key message was this clear: this is not a 'one-off' process – policy influence requires a consistent and multipronged approach.

on think tanks tv

In 2016, OTT partnered with MediaTank Productions to launch OTT TV, a web series profiling various think tanks across the United States. Aimed at OTT's audience of thinktankers, each of the five "webisodes" consists of two short videos. The first highlighted a recent piece of impactful research conducted by the think tank and the second highlighted a best practice that other think tanks could learn from.

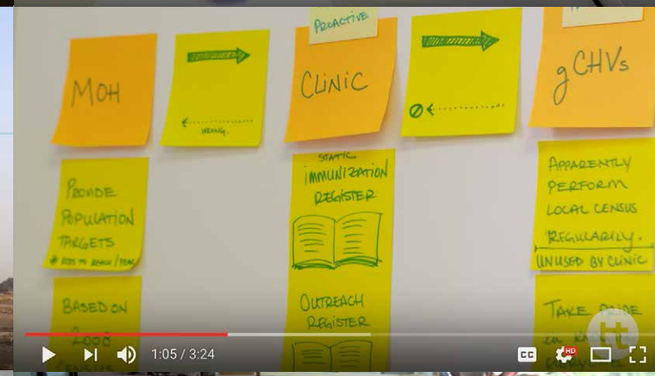
The inaugural season consisted of five episodes. Participating think tanks included The Urban Institute, New America, The Century Foundation, The Belfer Center and the International Rescue Committee. Research topics included a wide range of domestic and international policy issues, including criminal justice reform, incorporating technology in education, preventing nuclear terrorism, the benefit of diverse classrooms and innovative healthcare interventions in conflict zones. On the best practice side, viewers were privy to tips on creating integrated communications strategies, creating effective data visualisation tools, effectively targeting policy makers with new research, fostering innovation within organisations, and communicating across multiple audiences.

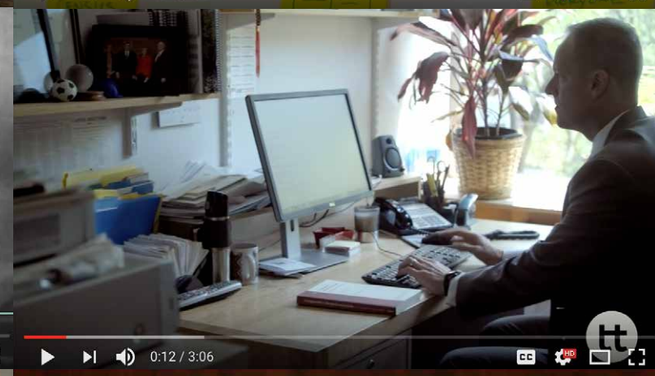
The finished videos were promoted on the OTT network as well as through our production partner and the participating think tanks themselves – on Twitter, Facebook, etc. In addition to serving as entertaining ways to learn more about their colleagues' work, the videos offered thinktankers examples of the use of video storytelling techniques in their communications. With more think tanks around the globe using video to communicate their work, we believe this will prove to be a great resource for our audience.

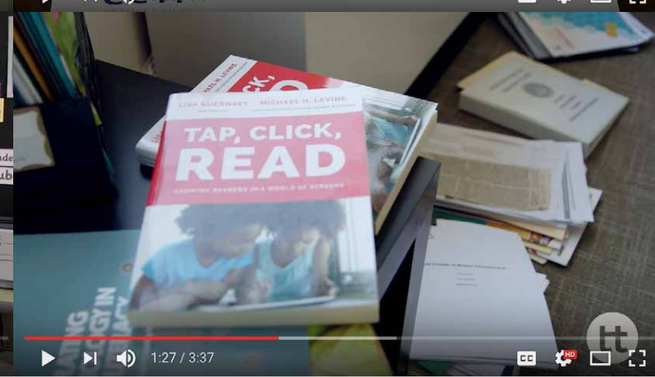
Michael Kleinman
Director, Media Tank

WATCH THE EPISODES

- *The Century Foundation: integrated communications strategy*
- *The Century Foundation: a new wave of school integration*
- *International Rescue Committee: combating malnutrition in south sudan*
- *International Rescue Committee: sparking organisational innovation*
- *The Belfer Center: preventing nuclear terrorism*
- *The Belfer Center: targeting a policymaker audience*
- *The Urban Institute: communicating research through data visualisation*
- *The Urban Institute: using data to reform the criminal justice system*
- *New America: integrating technology in early literacy*
- *New America: communicating across multiple audiences*







transparify

Transparify: working with OTT to strengthen think tank transparency and credibility

Transparify is not an initiative designed or led by OTT. However, OTT has supported Transparify since its launch and continues to advocate for greater transparency along side it.

In 2013, the Transparify initiative began to advocate for greater funding transparency among think tanks. We strongly believe that think tanks can make a strong contribution to strengthening democratic processes and improving policy outcomes in fields as diverse as public health and smallholder agriculture. At the same time, there are concerns in countries both rich and poor about powerful funders' potential ability to co-opt policy-relevant nonprofits and use them to manipulate democratic debates, policy formulation processes, and decision-making. Numerous sources have argued that funding from undisclosed sources is particularly problematic in this regard, as it leaves the public in the dark about the sponsors behind a given piece of research, policy prescription, or advocacy drive.

Opaqueness about a think tank's funding sources threatens to undermine democracy by skewing democratic deliberations and decision-making processes in line with funders' vested interests. At the same time, it undermines the credibility of all think tanks, including those with nothing to hide.

To improve think tanks' disclosure levels, Transparify used a low cost approach combining direct engagement, quantitative ratings, and advocacy to convince dozens of think tanks in 47 countries to voluntarily publish their funding sources. Using a 5-star system, we then assess the amount of information that each think tank provides about its funding on its website. By publicly disclosing who funds their work, think tanks can publicly signal their commitment to transparency and integrity in policy research and advocacy.

While Transparify is best known for publishing reports listing think tanks' transparency scores, we spend only a fraction of our time on the actual process of rating institutions. Most of Transparify's work takes place in the background.

In 2013, months before starting the first ratings process, Transparify individually emailed the executive directors of 169 think tanks in 47 countries, explaining the aims of the initiative and the forthcoming ratings, and inviting them to place more data online over the coming weeks. Think tanks that were willing to place more information online but were unable to do so at short notice had the option of committing to 'update' in future, an undertaking that would be positively highlighted in the report. OTT publicly supported our efforts, ran multiple blogs by our team, and later even used our assessment criteria to independently assess the transparency of additional cohorts of think tanks.

Till Bruckner
Advocacy Manager, Transparify

Opaqueness about a think tank's funding sources threatens to undermine democracy by skewing democratic deliberations and decision-making processes in line with funders' vested interests.

Crucially, Transparify invited all addressees to engage in a dialogue about the rating process. Dozens of think tanks responded with comments and questions, in many cases leading to protracted exchanges of emails and follow-up Skype calls. In addition, Transparify compiled four annotated bibliographies of media stories on think tanks to provide an overview of challenges and existing initiatives in the sector.

The first year's launch was an unqualified success, as evidenced by the fact that the New York Times ran a front page story on the report. In just four years, the initiative has catalysed a systemic shift towards transparency among think tanks in the United States and several European countries, with an increasing number of institutions achieving the top ratings of four and five stars.

In early 2017, Transparify released a new report on the financial transparency and funding of over two dozen of the UK's leading think tanks. We rated these institutions' funding transparency and track their progress against 2016 scores. In addition, we presented new data on think tanks' annual expenditure and staffing levels, providing a unique snapshot of Britain's policy research and advocacy scene. The report features a special section on highly opaque think tanks and their influence on UK politics and policy. Numerous national media outlets have already signalled their interest in covering the report. As usual, the ratings themselves were preceded by direct engagement with all think tanks covered by the report, including several face to face meetings in London.

This is Transparify's first purely national-level rating. The approach builds on our experience that advocacy with think tanks is most effective when targeting cohorts of institutions that see themselves as part of a community. In the future, we will conduct more national-level ratings, and also sector-level ratings of think tank cohorts working in a particular sector (e.g. energy or health). In addition, we plan to rate a wider range of policy-relevant nonprofits, such as grant-funded media platforms and advocacy NGOs.

Looking forward, Transparify will continue working closely with OTT to reach out to the think tank community, help policy research institutions worldwide to become more transparent, and to enable 5-star think tanks to publicly signal their commitment to excellence, intellectual independence and integrity to the public, the media, and policy makers.

the on think tanks exchange

It has been a year since the conclusion of the OTT Exchange – an initiative that lasted two amazing and inspiring years. Participants had the opportunity to visit Peru, Indonesia, Ecuador and Brazil. Although the opportunity to visit these four countries was undoubtedly an impressive aspect of the programme, it was meeting our professional counterparts that was the most valuable experience. Through this exchange, we witnessed what it is like to work in think tanks on the other side of the world.

At the start of the initiative, I was a junior research fellow with just a few years of experience working in the world of think tanks. Naturally, I was eager to learn more about the topic of my professional interest, but had also started thinking about the established institutional framework and whether it was really the way to achieve our goals in the most efficient and productive way. Regarding funding models, communication strategies or the internal governance of the small organisation I was working in, many things were understood as given. Due to the constant work overload of staff and their limited capacities, only a small amount of time, resources and attention were allocated to the institutional questions that concerned me. I started to look for answers to these questions elsewhere, and realised that the world of think tanks is a science in itself.

The biggest asset of the OTT Exchange was that it was not a formal educational event. There were no 'traditional' lectures. No experts telling us the best way of doing our work. In fact, it was precisely the opposite. The learning was left to us, the OTT Exchange participants, who came from different corners of the world. Given the wide variety of contexts in which we work, it turned out that it was far more important to know which questions to ask, than to try to find non-existent universal answers.

As a political scientist, I know that we can learn most from comparison of different cases and variables. This also applies to the institutional part of our job. Given the geographical limitations of the topics that we work on in our research or advocacy projects, our attention and inter-institutional collaboration is limited to our closest region. This, however, means that there can be patterns to our work that are simply taken for granted and we do not question them until we are forced to. Working with colleagues from Peru or Indonesia was eye-opening in many ways. I learned how institutions working in other contexts and with different historic legacies are coping with their own challenges, and also how we all face similar challenges. Lengthy and deep conversations over several months, along with reflection on our own experience, taught us this.

Radka Vicenová
Co-founder, REACH institute, Slovakia

Given the wide variety of contexts in which we work, it turned out that it was far more important to know which questions to ask

Of course learning from others – however important – is not enough. The OTT Exchange was also about self-recognition and self-knowledge. As researchers and analysts, our main job is to study politics, society or economy.

Thinking about institutional frameworks does not always take priority. However, exploring *what* we are doing, as well as how we are doing it, and thinking about how can we do it better, is essential for our work if we really want to make an impact.

This two-year experience was particularly important on a personal level. It helped me find courage and determination to raise my voice and see the strengths and weakenesses of the established practices of the organisation I was working at the time – even if the criticism was not well received. After leaving my former organisation I launched a new organisation in partnership with a group of people with a shared interest in looking at ways to innovate. The OTT Exchange still has a substantial impact on my work – it makes me constantly ask myself questions that I did not think of asking before.

The OTT Exchange was an eye-opening experience in many ways and I hope it will continue with similar goals in the future – to motivate thinktankers to learn and look for inspiration all around the globe.

premio poder

**PODER[1] Think Tank of the Year Awards:
visibility, promotion and recognition**

this text was originally written by Carolina Trivelli in Spanish (see next page)

Giving awards to think tanks allows us to recognise the work of these institutions. By rewarding best practices, the award is also an opportunity to motivate local think tanks to innovate, learn and grow.

It is not easy to define what a think tank does. Some do applied research, while others promote spaces for dialogue and debate or advocate for public policies and private interventions. Still others seek to inform public opnion. Those who win the Premio PODER al Think Tank del Año (PODER Think Tank of the Year Awards) are usually organisations who have managed to combine all these elements. They have created new and solid knowledge based on research efforts, they have communicated it in an effective and creative manner, they have achieved changes in policies or actions of others (either from the public or private sector) and they have contributed to the public debate.

Accomplishing all of this is not easy, nor is it always achieved. It requires a diverse set of skills, as well as alliances with strategic partners and human and financial resources. Above all, it requires credibility, which depends on the prestige and trajectory of the organisation. This is also a role for Premio PODER: the Award helps consolidate this.

What is exciting is that through these first years of the Award, we have seen applications improve and diversify. Some think tanks always apply, whilst others only do so when they consider they have done an outstanding job on a particular theme.

There are not many think tanks in Perú, so the PODER Think Tank of the Year Awards try to do two things: encourage established organisations to become more confident, and inspire newer organisations to become more established. In addition, PODER is a vehicle to inspire those who are thinking of founding a think tank – be it within the public or the private sector – to do so. After all, organisations who do consulting also do 'think tank activities', so they are invited to participate as well. The ultimate goal is to increase the number of high-quality think tanks in the country.

Countries with plenty of think tanks tend to have higher critical capacites and are better able to make decisions that are informed by evidence. Their citizens also tend to be better informed, with a real understanding of social, political, cultural and institutional realities. This is supporting the establishment of think tanks must be supported. This Award of one of the ways we do it in Peru.

We have an ongoing agenda to establish and expand the community of think tanks in Perú. We need to increase the visiblity of their work, and help this work be appreciated by society. Think tanks need financial resources to pay for their research, publications, communication campaigns, support staff, office space and other expenses. These resources are scarce as there is limited appetite in investing in the generation of knowledge and public goods like the ones think tanks produce. Unlike other countries in the region, state support for think tanks is almost non-existent. As a country, we have an enormous hurdle to overcome.

Carolina Trivelli
Economist and Former Minister for Development and Social Inclusion

Juror, Premio Poder al Think Tank del Año 2016

We have an ongoing agenda to establish and expand the community of think tanks in Perú. We increase the visibility of their work, and help this work be appreciated by society.

Think tanks in Peru must also get better at attracting and retaining talent. These organisations rely on people, and whether they succeed or not depends on their ability to have solid and competitive team in place. These teams must also have a range of different skills – ranging from research to communication. After all, advocating, debating and placing topics on the agenda is complex and depends on expert teams.

The PODER Think Tank of the Year Awards increase the visibility of the actions of Peruvian think tanks. At the same time, they open the discussion on their role, composition, and contribution on the national level. Over the last few years of running the Award, we have seen that there is great potential for think tanks in the country.

1. PODER is a national political and economic affairs publication.

premio poder

Premio PODER al Think Tank del Año: visibilizar, promover y reconocer

Premiar *thinks tanks* permite reconocer y hacer visible el trabajo de estas entidades –y agradecer su trabajo– y visibilizarlos. Pero también el premio permite mostrar a los propios *think tanks* las mejores prácticas existentes en el medio local, en distintos temas y ámbitos de acción, para así fomentar también un proceso de innovación, aprendizaje y profesionalización en estas instituciones.

No es fácil definir lo que hace un think tank. Hace investigación aplicada, promueve espacios de diálogo y debate, hace incidencia en políticas públicas y en intervenciones privadas, genera corriente de opinión, etc. Quienes ganan el Premio Poder al Think Tank del Año suelen ser entidades que en su campo han logrado en el año anterior combinar todas esas acciones: han creado sólido conocimiento a partir de esfuerzos de investigación, lo han comunicado de manera efectiva (y creativa), han logrado cambios en políticas o acciones de terceros (del sector público o privado) como resultado de sus acciones y han logrado colocar sus aportes y el tema en cuestión en el debate público.

Lograr completar este proceso no es fácil, ni siempre se logra. Requiere capacidades diversas en el *think tank*, requiere alianzas de este con otros y de importantes recursos financieros y humanos. Pero sobre todo requiere credibilidad, y esta depende del prestigio y trayectoria del *think tank*. Aquí también hay un rol para el Premio PODER. El premio ayuda a consolidar este prestigio y trayectoria.

En estos primeros años del Premio PODER, hemos visto como cada año las postulaciones mejoran y se diversifican. Algunos *think tanks* postulan siempre, otros cuando consideran que han tenido una labora destacada en un tema o año determinado.

En el Perú tenemos pocos *think tanks* , así que el Premio también busca ayudar a los que están en camino a ser uno a seguir avanzando, y a mostrarles ejemplos a los que consideran fundar uno, dentro del sector público o privado. Muchas entidades dedicadas a la consultoría o a la promoción del desarrollo tienen también actividades de*think tank* y por ende también pueden participar. En todo caso se trata de tener más *think tanks* , eso sería mejor.

Lograr una comunidad de*think tanks* prestigiosos, con recursos, con presencia en los debates temáticos y sectoriales, se traduce en un país con mayor capacidad crítica, con mejor opción de tomar decisiones basadas en evidencia, en el conocimiento sobre los procesos, en miradas comprensivas sobre la realidad –social, económica, política, cultural e institucional–. Es por ello, que desde distintas entradas debemos apoya la consolidación de *think tanks* . Este premio es una de ellas.

Carolina Trivelli
Economist and Former Minister for Development and Social Inclusion

Juror, Premio Poder al Think Tank del Año 2016

La agenda pendiente para consolidar y expandir la comunidad de think tanks es extensa. Necesitamos no solo hacer visible su valioso trabajo, sino ayudar a que este trabajo sea valorado por la sociedad.

La agenda pendiente para consolidar y expandir la comunidad de *think tanks* es extensa. Necesitamos no solo hacer visible su valioso trabajo, sino ayudar a que este trabajo sea valorado por la sociedad. Los *think tanks* necesitan recursos, financieros por cierto para cubrir el costo de sus investigaciones, publicaciones, campañas de comunicación, su equipo de soporte, su local y demás gastos operativos. Estos recursos son escasos. Invertir en estas entidades no parece ser muy atractivo. Pocos quieren invertir en generar conocimiento y bienes públicos como los que producen estas entidades. Y, a diferencia de lo que sucede en otros países de la región, el apoyo estatal a los *think tanks* es prácticamente inexistente. Aquí tenemos, como país, un enorme desafío.

Pero lograr *think tanks* prestigiosos y valorados también permite atraer y retener talento. Estas entidades dependen de personas y por ello son un reflejo de su capacidad de reclutar y retener un equipo sólido, diverso y competitivo. Las capacidades requeridas para investigar, comunicar, incidir en políticas y programas, debatir y poner temas en agenda son complejas y dependen de equipos y de profesionales “expertos” en sus temas. La experiencia y especialización de sus equipos resultan clave para que los Think Tanks sean efectivos.

El Premio PODER entonces colabora en hacer visible las acciones efectivas de los *think tanks* peruanos, y a la vez permite discutir su rol, requerimientos y potencial en el contexto nacional. De estos primeros años del premio, podemos concluir que hay un enorme potencial, que los relativamente pocos *think tanks* que hay en Perú tienen impacto y sobre todo que necesitamos más. Más de lo que hacen, que hagan más, que sean más, que trabajen en más temas, que compitan más.

premio poder

Ideas for better policies

Think tanks and policy research institutes are organisations that conduct research and provide recommendations for better public policies. Those of us who work in think tanks support our ideas with academically rigorous evidence, addressing significant social issues such as education, health, security, and the environment, among many others. Our work the Group for Analysis of Development (GRADE) is driven by the desire to contribute to overcoming the serious problems that developing countries face–lack of equal opportunities, difficult living conditions for the majority of the population, weak institutions, and insufficient economic growth.

Through different dissemination activities, we try to build bridges between academic research and the public sector and civil society, sharing our findings not only with policy makers, but also with those potentially or actually affected by the policies. In line with the international trend to further evidence-based policies,we seek to support the consolidation of a community of researchers and policymakers, who come from diverse disciplines, perspectives and ideological positions, but who are nonetheless capable of discussing research findings and their policy implications. We believe that pluralism is an essential attribute of the community of think tanks in democratic societies. However, developing countries typically lack strong communities of this sort. This is the case of Peru, where there are not enough think tanks and, in addition, their role is poorly understood.

In order to develop a pluralistic community, initiatives such as Premio PODER play an important role. The annual PODER Think Tank of the Year Awards is a remarkable opportunity to both highlight the role that these organisations play in policy making and implementation and to make public opinion aware of this. It is important to stress the role that Revista PODER, a monthly media publication and one of the organisers of the awards, plays as an intermediary between think tanks and citizens. OTT provides the technical expertise to make this venture possible.

The positive economic growth and performance during the last decade has made it possible, both in Peru and in Latin America, to allocate additional resources to development policies. However, resources are still limited. Governments need more innovation to ensure quality. Empirical research can inform the process of policy making to achieve better use of resources. Over the years we have learned that good intentions often do not translate into significant and lasting impacts. Think tanks should be considered allies for understanding what works and what not in public policy.

Miguel Jaramillo
Executive Director, GRADE, winners of the Premio PODER, *Think tank of the year* category, 2016

We believe that pluralism is an essential attribute of the community of think tanks in democratic societies. However, developing countries typically lack strong communities of this sort.

In October 2016 we, GRADE, received two awards: best Peruvian think tank and best Peruvian think tank in social policy. It was quite an honor. We have been working for more than 36 years to get ideas based on independent and solid empirical research into the public debate. Our goal is to generate more relevant and more effective policies for the different development problems of the country and the region. We are pleased to be part of this initiative and we hope it continues to further its mission of highlighting the contributions of these institutes for building better policies and, indeed, better lives.

2016 winners and jurors

semana de la evidencia

First Latin American Evidence Week
October 2016, Lima, Perú

this text was originally written by Carlos Frías in Spanish (see next page)

The first Evidence Week 2016 (SE2016) was promoted by the Peruvian Alliance for the Use of Evidence (Alianza Peruana para el Uso de la Evidencia), the Universidad del Pacífico, the REDPERUME, and OTT, with the financial support of the UK Government. There were at least 1,200 participants, 35 partner organisations (both public and private) and 110 participants in panel discussions including government representatives, ministries, universities, NGOs, foundations, think tanks and the media. During the first Evidence Week, 30 events were held including panel discussions, workshops, presentations, and social events. All of these were held in various locations in Perú.

There are a number of important lessons learned on the use of evidence for public policy:

- Through the events, we had the chance to better understand the barriers and opportunities that decision-makers face when they try to use evidence to inform their policies, as well as the difficulties researchers face.
- We analysed successful cases of the use of research, such as initiatives that seek to institutionalise the use of evidence by the state and when responding to political emergencies.
- We learned that state institutions (at all levels), academia, the private sector, think tanks (traditional and non-traditional), and other actors must collaborate to generate evidence. They must also share data and existing knowledge in order to come up with solutions informed by evidence.
- It is clear that purely technocratic solutions do not work. What we need is better capacity to incorporate research into political decisions. This evidence must be used in every step of the design and implementation process of public policy. The capacity to incorporate pressing political matters into research agendas of universities, think tanks and research centres must also be improved across the country.
- The giant gap between Lima and the rest of the country has to be resolved. We must strengthen the ability of different players to generate and use evidence outside of Lima. Local problems need local answers.
- The media can and must play a new role in this effort by making use of evidence to inform the public policy debate, both at national and local levels.

Putting together this first Evidence Week was not without its challenges, but learning from these will help us prepare for the second Evidence Week in October 2017. For next year, we will endeavour to:

- Promote larger and better participation in the debate and activities from actors and policy makers at every level. This will allow the event to become a space of meeting and dialogue between those who produce evidence for public policy and potential users of this evidence. Likewise, we will continue to emphasise the participation of private companies and the media during the week of events.
- Make this type of exchange of opinions and knowledge available in other big cities in the country. This will promote the creation and use of locally produced evidence to inform solutions to local problems, which will be a more efficient political exercise to solve the demands of the citizens. We would like to create a week of events, which include activities in three other main cities in the country, all planned and promoted by local institutions.
- The problem with the use of evidence to inform public policy is not only a problem in Peru. This is why, in 2017, Evidence Week will encourage the exchange of experiences with other Latin American countries, through forums and debates of mutual interest. These will take place in other countries in the region and will be seen and commented on by the Peruvian audience. Likewise, some of the activities in Perú will be seen in other Latin American countries, encouraging a participatory exchange.
- The task of using scientific knowledge, and have results and research be increasingly used in public policy, is one that concerns all members of the private and public sectors in our society. This is why we will expand the team in charge of organising the events to include all organisations which have activities during the week.

We know that the challenges and the effort necessary to reach our objectives during the second Evidence Week seem big, but we also know that the enthusiasm and interest for the subject matter is great at every level. With this, we invite everyone to be part of this initiative and share lessons learned and knowledge which will help the development of our societies.

Carlos Frías
Manager, Soluciones Prácticas

What we need is better capacity to incorporate research into political decisions. This evidence must be used in every step of the design and implementation process of public policy.

semana de la evidencia

Primera Semana de la Evidencia para Políticas Públicas
Octubre 2016, Lima, Perú

La Primera Semana de la Evidencia 2016 (SE2016) fue promovida por la Alianza Peruana para el Uso de la Evidencia, la Universidad del Pacífico, la REDPERUME y OTT, con el apoyo financiero del Gobierno de Gran Bretaña. Contó con 35 organizaciones socias (entre organizaciones públicas y privadas), 110 panelistas entre representantes del Congreso de la República, Ministerios, Universidades, ONGs, Fundaciones, think tanks, medios de comunicación y por lo menos 1,200 participantes (sin contar aquellos que lo hicieron vía las transmisiones en vivo). Durante la Primera Semana de la Evidencia se realizaron 30 eventos entre paneles, talleres, plenarias y eventos sociales de menara descentralizada en diversos lugares de Lima.

Este esfuerzo ha generado importantes lecciones sobre el uso de la evidencia en la política pública que pueden ser resumidas de la siguiente manera:

- En estos días a través de los eventos realizados tuvimos la oportunidad de entender mejor las barreras y oportunidades que enfrentan los funcionarios públicos al intentar usar más evidencia en la toma de decisiones, las dificultades que enfrentan investigadores e investigadoras en su labor.
- Analizamos casos exitosos de uso de evidencia, iniciativas que buscan institucionalizar su uso en el estado y cómo responder ante urgencias de políticas para las cuales debemos usar evidencias de otras realidades sin perder rigurosidad en este esfuerzo.
- Aprendimos que es urgente la colaboración entre instituciones del estado (a todos los niveles) con la academia, el sector privado, los Think Tanks (tradicionales y no tradicionales) y otros actores para co-generar evidencia, compartir la data y el conocimiento existente y buscar soluciones informadas en evidencia a los problemas que enfrenta el país.
- Quedó claro, que no existen soluciones únicamente tecnocráticas. Lo que se necesita es una mejor capacidad para incorporar evidencia a decisiones políticas y utilizarla en todos y cada paso del proceso de diseño e implementación de una política pública; y mejorar la capacidad de incorporar imperativos políticos en las agendas de investigación de universidades, de think tanks y centros de investigación en todo el país.
- Es urgente resolver la brecha enorme que existe entre Lima y el resto del país. No podemos perder la oportunidad de fortalecer la capacidad de generación y uso de evidencia fuera de Lima, la ciudad capital del país. Los problemas locales necesitan respuestas locales.
- En este marco los medios de comunicación pueden y deben jugar un rol nuevo en este esfuerzo: informarse para informar el debate de políticas públicas, tanto a nivel nacional como local.

Carlos Frías
Manager, Soluciones Prácticas

Lo que se necesita es una mejor capacidad para incorporar evidencia a decisiones políticas y utilizarla en todos y cada paso del proceso de diseño e implementación de una política pública

Al mismo tiempo ha dejado varios importantes desafíos y retos a ser enfrentados en la segunda Semana de la Evidencia, que se realizará en Octubre del 2017. Los principales desafíos se pueden resumir en:

- Promover una mayor y mejor participación de los actores y hacedores de políticas a todo nivel en los debates y actividades de la Segunda Semana de la Evidencia, lo que permitirá que efectivamente sea un espacio de encuentro y dialogo entre los que producen la evidencia para las políticas públicas informadas y los potenciales usuarios principales de estas evidencias. Igualmente seguiremos enfatizando la participación de empresas privadas y medios de comunicación en las actividades de la Semana.
- Lograr que este tipo de encuentros e intercambio de opiniones y conocimiento se realice en otras ciudades importantes del país y no sólo en Lima. Lo que facilitará la creación y uso de evidencias producidas localmente para la solución de problemas locales y subnacionales, que permitirá un ejercicio político más eficiente frente a las demandas ciudadanas en estos ámbitos. Una organización de eventos efectivamente descentralizada y que incluya actividades promovidas y ejecutadas por instituciones locales en otras 3 ciudades importantes del país además de Lima, será otro de los desafíos que queremos enfrentar este año.
- El problema del uso de evidencias para informar políticas públicas no es un problema sólo del Perú, por eso en el 2017 la Semana de la Evidencia promoverá el intercambio de experiencia con otros países latinoamericanos, a través de foros y debates en temas de mutuo interés que se realizarán en otros países de la región en días especiales de la Semana de la Evidencia y que serán vistos y comentados por el público peruano y de manera complementaria algunas actividades en Perú serán vistas en otros países latinoamericanos, promoviendo la participación de actores de estos países en los debates alrededor de los temas planteados.
- La tarea de hacer que el conocimiento científico y que los resultados de estudios e investigaciones sea cada vez más usado en los políticas públicas de nuestros países es una tarea que compete a todos los actores públicos y privados de nuestra sociedad, por eso en el 2017 ampliaremos el grupo organizador de la misma, buscando involucrar a todas las organizaciones que realizarán alguna actividad durante esta Semana. Para lo cual en el 2017 tendremos acordadas con tres meses de anticipación que instituciones van a participar de la Segunda Semana de la Evidencia y tendremos reuniones previas de coordinación, organización y apoyo mutuo para las actividades a ser implementadas, así como reuniones de evaluación de la Semana una vez concluida.

Sabemos que los desafíos y el esfuerzo necesario para conseguir los objetivos de la segunda Semana de la Evidencia son grandes y difíciles, pero también que el entusiasmo e interés por la temática que la semana aborda es amplio a todo nivel. Con este convencimiento invitamos a todos a ser parte de esta iniciativa e intercambiar lecciones y aprendizajes que aportaran al desarrollo de nuestras sociedades.

The State of the Sector

survey results
featured content
from our regional editors

OTT's regional editors, Leandro (Latin America), Annapoorna (South Asia) and Ruthpearl (Sub–Saharan Africa), offer different views on the state of think tanks around the world. This reflects different regional experiences as well as diverse fundraising and communications perspectives. While Leandro focuses on the challenges to the business models of think tanks in Latin America, Annapoorna and RuthPearl focus on changing communication approaches in South Asia and Sub–Saharan Africa. Leandro sees serious difficulties ahead for Latin American think tanks, while Annapoorna and Ruthpearl paint a more optimistic picture.

In his report on developments in Latin America, Leandro draws attention to what might be thought of as a paradox of prosperity – where developing countries that are approaching middle income status find donors switching their attention (and funding) to other, less successful, countries. Latin America is a case in point, with development assistance from bilateral and multilateral donors declining sharply. Think tanks have found it particularly hard to adapt to this changes donor funding, which has sustained the sector for years, suddenly looks precarious.

Where else might think tanks turn for funding? Philanthropy, either international or domestic, is one option. The problem with international foundations, however, is that they are also shifting their focus away from more prosperous countries, for the same reasons as other donors. This leaves domestic philanthropy. As Leandro notes, this is an active and important source of funding in Argentina and Brazil, but less developed elsewhere in the region. The tax system may play a role here: philanthropic support for think tanks in the US is driven in large part by the system of tax exemptions as well as special regulations governing the not–for–profit sector. These may evolve in ways that create a more favourable environment for think tanks, but change is likely to be slow, while the decline in donor funding is already evident.

As Leandro notes, this leaves governments as the only plausible source of funding for think tanks. However, it seems unlikely that they will provide core funding to think tanks, not least in a neutral and non–partisan way. Support from governments is likely to involve payment for services rendered. While this is not unheard of – the RAND Corporation relied almost exclusively on contract work from the US Government in its early years – heavy reliance on government funding obviously poses a threat to think tank independence. One way to mitigate this risk is for think tanks to insist that their work for governments be in the public domain.

Still, reliance on government funding raises a number of other potential problems. First, it seems unlikely that a think tank relying on contract work will have much free time or energy to undertake 'blue sky' thinking aimed at influencing the government's policy agenda. For that, other sources of funding will be necessary. Second, the more a think tank relies on project work, the more it resembles a consulting firm. Consulting firms are great, but they rarely replenish their human capital (i.e. the skills and ideas of their researchers and analysts). If think tanks can draw on a strong local university sector for skilled researchers, it may be able to avoid this trap.

Stephen Yeo
Adviser at Large

Transparency about funding sources will help. Every think tank should be as open and honest about this as possible.

In contrast to the difficult funding landscape facing Latin American think tanks, the reports from South Asia and Sub–Saharan African are more upbeat and optimistic. Both Annapoorna and Ruthpearl report increasing use of social media in think tank communications. In India, this is apparently partly driven by a growing government interest in social media; in Sub–Saharan Africa, the use of social media "has potential to spur learning, mentoring and accountability amongst researchers while providing opportunities for discussion, debate and mutual learning with non–academia." These are clearly very welcome developments since effective communication is one of the most important elements of think tank success.

The growing importance of social media, welcome though it may be in Asia and Africa, has raised much bigger and more troubling issues elsewhere – in particular in the United States and the United Kingdom.

The appeal of social media is understandable: quick and easy to use, with results that appear almost immediately. This has prompted some academics to use social media as a way of communicating with a wider public. Instead of waiting years for a journal article to be published, and then more years for citations to accumulate, social media activity offers the enticing prospect of accelerating both the impact of research and the measurement of its impact. Think tanks with a strong communication focus have embraced social media as well.

While there are clear advantages of using social media, there is a cost, or at least a very great risk attached to its widespread use in politics and public policy. The underlying justification for using and relying on social media is that they allow "the public" to "vote with their tweets". But it is now apparent that most of the public does not participate in this voting process, and many that do are quickly driven away by online trolling – abuse, intimidation or worse. More ominous still is the astonishing growth of 'fake' news sites, which aim to foster cynicism and distrust of all news and the media that provide it. Given how much think tank communication strategies rely on media coverage, the advent of fake news is a serious issue, which needs to be monitored.

There is worse: 'fake think tanks', well described in a recent issue of *Wired* by Emma Ellis (2017). But fake research is not new. The tobacco and the oil industries have long histories of sponsoring researchers to create confusion about the link between smoking and cancer about human activity and climate change. There was no golden age of think tanks of course, where organisations free of any pressure from their funders debated policy issues in a sober, restrained and dispassionate way. However, the growth of fake think tanks seems to have accelerated, and the frauds have become better at coordinating their efforts. This is potentially very bad news for honest think tanks. Their work will be much more difficult as they must first convince the media and the public that they are honest, and only then will their ideas have a chance of receiving a hearing.

Transparency about funding sources will help. Every think tank should be as open and honest about this as possible. A 'reputation' system, in which think tanks earn a reputation from their peers might be a useful supplement to transparency, but would involve a serious burden on those who participate. It will be worth exploring the ways in which organisations like Google and Facebook, with their huge resources and access to big data, can do about the growing issue of 'fake news'. Think tanks also have a role to play in educating the public about data and evidence, even though a significant proportion of the public are indifferent or even hostile to such initiatives.

This is not a problem that can be tackled by an individual think tank – collective action is needed. More work for OTT in 2017.

survey results

We conducted an online survey to gather insights from thinktankers around the world. We received 39 responses from 23 different countries. Respondents came from organisations varying in size from one person to 650 employees, although the average range was between 20 and 50 staff.

When asked how they consider the reception of the government for research intended to inform policy in their countries, 55% of respondents said "Welcoming," while 13% said "Very welcoming," another 13% said "Indifferent." 16% of respondents consider the environment "Unfriendly," and 3% "Very unwelcoming."

Other questions include:

- If you work for a think tank, how could it be best described?, and
- What are the biggest challenges that think tanks in your country have to overcome?

We know the sample here is far from representative. However, we have left the survey open and will continue to collect responses. This is an ongoing effort to inform our work and that of others interested in think tanks.

If you work for a think tank, how could it be best described?

What are the biggest challenges that think tanks in your country have to overcome?

featured content

With over 70 articles published in 2016,OTT offers a big picture of what the state of the sector is today. Here is a small sample of our outstanding content.

RESEARCH
The 7 biggest problems facing scientists (in think tanks)
by Enrique Mendizabal

The 7 problems they identified were:
- Academia has a huge money problem
- Too many studies are poorly designed
- Replicating results is crucial — and rare
- Peer review is broken
- Too much science is locked behind paywalls
- Science is poorly communicated
- Life as a young academic is incredibly stressful

UNDERSTANDING THINK TANKS
Think tanks in China: a golden age?
by Enrique Mendizabal

The question in everyone's mind was: how is this possible? 200 think tanks in three years is a large number –even for China.

COMMUNICATIONS
Communications for policymaking organisations: an interview with Anya Pearson, Sophie Hall, and Tom Hampson from Soapbox
by Erika Perez-Leon

In policymaking organisations, the communications are taking place in the context of an ongoing debate, conversation and interaction with audiences. You're often making a case for a particular point of view, but within an area that is really up for grabs or is yet to be decided.

GOVERNANCE
Female leadership at think tanks
by Shannon Sutton

According to the latest data from the TTI (for 2014) of 5,033 think tank staff, 2,123 are female (42%), and during this same period 6 of 43 think tanks (or 14%) had female Executive Directors.

FUNDING
The value of transparency in 21st century think tanks: the stimson center approach
by Brian Finlay

The only equity the modern think tank can claim is its integrity, and in an environment of hyper-partisanship and a more competitive and rapidly shrinking resource base, the industry must be constantly vigilant against the reality or — even the impression — of fee-for-service findings. Building transparency into our business models is therefore essential to long term success as an industry.

SERIES
Think tanks: definition and terminology

There has been a lot of writing on what think tanks are and what their roles in society are. The definition of the label has changed over time, as scholars and experts identify boundaries and interactions with the different fields working with or within public policy influence. Is it important to define the label? Would a precise definition be beneficial to think tanks, or is the risk of excluding non-conventional organisations too high? Is it a matter of function vs. form? Has this ongoing debate had a positive influence on the role of think tanks in society? This series brings together articles from various experts in the field, proposing different viewpoints on the definition of think tanks and what the label means today.

Women in think tanks

Are there barriers to women succeeding in think tanks? If so, what are they? Are women funnelled into certain policy issues or do they themselves choose to work on different topics than men? Does gender shape the way discourse and research is developed? Do men and women apply different methodologies? These were some of the questions that this series on Women in Think Tanks seeks to answer. You can also follow the discussion on Twitter: #womeninthinktanks

ADVICE
Long-form: choosing a digital platform for policy organisations
by Anya Pearson, Stuart Brockwell

Five ways to be successful in long-form: examples to inspire think tanks and research organisations
by Anya Pearson, Sophie Hall

Setting up a think tank: step by step
by Enrique Mendizabal

INTERVIEWS
The new philanthropists: Rohini Nilekani, founder and chairperson of Arghyam
by Annapoorna Ravichander, Enrique Mendizabal

Women in think tanks: the interviews

from our regional editors

Think tanks in Latin America- an overview of 2016

Leandro Echt
Editor at Large (Latin America)

While it is always a challenge to talk about Latin America as a homogenous place, from a think tanks' perspective, 2016 was another step towards the increasing withdrawal of international cooperation in the region. At the same time, the region shows low investment in science and research compared to developed countries, largely because governments do not have strong policies in place to fund social science research.

This scenario puts a lot of pressure on Latin American think tanks. To make substantial contributions to policy debates in their countries, they must secure funds to produce cutting edge knowledge, asking hard questions such as: why is Latin America still the most unequal region in the world? Moreover, funds are also needed to support organisational structures, especially to attract and retain the best researchers and offer them stable places from where to conduct policy relevant studies.

Aware of these challenges, think tanks in the region have started to move away from their 'comfort zones' to explore alternative support in a more systematic way.

On the one hand, governments at the national and local level face increasingly complex policy challenges, and think tanks can become strategic partners through the commission of studies that bring solutions to growing problems. However, the willingness of governments in the region to work with think tanks and civil society organisations varies from country to country. Peru and Chile, for instance, are friendlier environments for think tanks than Ecuador and Bolivia.

On the other hand, a more strategic approach to local philanthropy (by both companies and individuals) is being explored by many think tanks. Getting new support is neither a linear nor a simple task: trust, autonomy and legal regulations are some of the barriers they face. Countries like Brazil and Argentina present a more developed culture of philanthropy than others, but think tanks in all of Latin America have to re-think their funding schemes and innovate.

From a political standpoint, recent changes in the global political economy also pose new questions for the research agendas of think tanks. Crutially, a shift in the relationship between the United States and Latin American countries is anticipated. How will governments in the region react to this new scenario in 2017? What role can think tanks play in a region that has to re-think its links and be prepared for new policy challenges? More relevant policy knowledge is needed, as well as more bridges between this found knowledge and decision making. This is not only a concern for think tanks, but a call for the entire policy community- especially stakeholders who want public decisions to be informed by the best evidence available.

Think tanks in Africa- an overview of 2016

Ruthpearl Ng'ang'a
Editor at Large (Africa)

Think tanks in sub-Saharan Africa are communicating more than they ever did before. While certainly not in the majority, there are a few thinktankers that are talking more about their *completed-ongoing-planned* research. You can see their bylines on opinion editorials and published blogs. You can follow them for social media updates on face-to-face interactions with political and opinion leaders, and keep up with what they are reading on their Twitter/Facebook feeds. This openness has potential to spur learning, mentoring and accountability amongst researchers while providing opportunities for discussion, debate and mutual learning with non-academia.

Perhaps as a consequence, the rhetoric of public discussions has taken its cue. The media, particularly print news, is making use of research data to strengthen argumentation. Citizen and leadership engagement with distilled research is also growing, as the pros and cons of government decisions play out more in the public arena. In part, this can be linked to more focused efforts by think tanks to build relationships with journalists and media houses, as well as the positive uptake of infographics and other tools that visually distill data stories. In the face of everyday challenges of reliable power and internet access in many regions, this shift is worthy of applause.

2016 has also seen many thinktankers realign strategies and work plans to be relevant to both international goals (e.g the Sustainable Development Goals) and local realities. It will be interesting to see what this means for funding and sustainability in 2017. While responding to funding requirements, African think tanks are now mastering the power of partnerships, collaboration and synergy in working towards common goals; yet still reflecting a diversity in countries, culture, thematic interest and experiences. Greater numbers of researchers, academia, civil society, government, community and private institutions are making deliberate efforts to work together to identify, prioritise and address the pressing challenges facing Africa's societies today.

from our regional editors

Think tanks in South Asia- an overview of 2016

Annapoorna Ravichander
Editor at Large (South Asia)

An overview of South Asian Think Tanks in South Asia in 2016 can be broadly categorised as:

- **Became more relevant in social media platforms**
- **Began to work in consortiums, which has enhanced our approachability to government in a small way**

The former has worked well in India, especially since the Government reacted well to social media and has established several platforms for various issues. Some have even created websites to have online dialogues with the general public.

The latter is growing to become important and popular. Firstly, talents and resources are joined to address a major issue in the nation. Second, since several think tanks are working on common issues, coming together strengthens the knowledge output. Some donor agencies also encouraged think tanks to work in groups by providing appropriate funds and opportunities. This had the great effect of getting think tanks working in teams, which in turn got them to look at one issue from a variety of angles. The evidence based analysis that resulted served as a sound backing in decision-making processes within the Government. This helped several think tanks strengthen internal processes such as review cyles and communication through capacity building training and activities.

The mandate of several think tanks in South Asia was to increase research quality, ensure that communication and policy engagement activities bring visibility to the organisation, and ensure sustainability.[1]

2016 also saw think tanks in the region face some major challenges. These include limited funding and lack of appropriate human capital. In India, the introduction of the Corporate Social Responsibility initiative has led to several think tanks approaching corporations for funds. While this has yet to yield results, small steps have been taken, both by think tanks and corporations, to make this happen.

Managing and maintaining human capital is another on-going challenge. Think tanks have tried to overcome the issue by addressing it at the recruitment stage and identifying roles and responsibilities for staff, which helps to focus performance. Initiatives like appraisals, capacity building activities, encouragement in project management, and providing platforms to interact with stakeholders have given a sense of security and responsibility to young researchers.

1. The interim report published by the Think Tank Initiative (TTI) has clearly summed up these factors.

external content

We follow closely how the sector is evolving and what is being written by think tank experts. Here are a few examples to help illustrate the state of the sector in 2016:

The Think Tanks Inc series:
How think tanks amplify corporate America's influence

Think tanks are seen as independent, but their scholars often push donors' agendas, amplifying a culture of corporate influence in Washington.
By Eric Lipton and Brooke Williams
Published on August 7, 2016

Think tank scholar or corporate consultant? it depends on the day

Acting as independent arbiters to shape government policy, many researchers also have corporate roles that are sometimes undisclosed.
By Eric Lipton, Nicholas Confessore and Brooke Williams
Published on August 8, 2016

On the IFS:
The British umpire: how the IFS became the most influential voice in the economic debate

When the media sizes up tomorrow's budget, one verdict will matter more than all the others. What's the secret behind the Institute for Fiscal Studies' extraordinary power?
By Simon Akam
Published on March 15, 2016

On Chinese Think Tanks:
Beijing establishes a D.C. think tank, and no one notices

China is trying, and mostly failing, to build a U.S. support for its claims in the South China Sea.
By Isaac Stone Fish
Published on July 7, 2016

On Global Development:
Think tanks and the global development agenda

In many developing countries, think tanks effectively engage with development actors to provide evidence-based contributions to processes that aim to achieve national, regional and international goals and visions.
By John Okidi
Published on April 19, 2016

2017 and Onwards

The Open Think Tank Directory will be launched in February 2017. So far, OTT has developed a basic database of over 2,300 think tanks and we are in the process of populating the database with information related to size, themes, funding, etc. and validating it. Supported by the Think Tank Fund, it will be launched with the intention of:

- **Helping think tanks to find possible partners and collaborators; and**
- **Supporting research on think tanks by providing a reliable and open data base.**

OTT is holding its first OTT Conference in London in February 2017. This will bring together the entire OTT Team (plus trainers) and some of its Advisory Board members as well as a group of partners and collaborators. We will seek to organise similar gatherings on an annual basis.

The conference will provide an opportunity to share lessons and work together on new projects. Do keep an eye out for the OTT School, the Fellowship Programme, more videos of think tanks and the Open Think Tank Directory.

The OTT School will grow in 2017 and introduce new topics and approaches to learning in 2018. The Fellowship Programme, too, will contribute to the development of new approaches to creating a new generation of think tank leaders.

The Winterschool for Thinktankers Geneva (2017) will be followed by similar efforts in other key cities (most likely London) to encourage a new cadre of think tank leaders and new think tank start-ups.

The OTT TV, too, will receive greater attention and we will seek to cover more think tanks, their research and innovations.

Finally, we will continue to support a greater and more nuanced discussion, at the local and global levels, about the roles of think tanks and their potential for good.

We hope you will join us in supporting policy research across the world.

Thank you

This report has been made possible thanks to the generous support of our donor, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

THE WILLIAM AND FLORA HEWLETT FOUNDATION

Special thanks to the Think Tank Fund (TTF), the Think Tank Initiative (TTI) and to the Universidad del Pacífico.

Setting up a think tank: step-by-step

This was our most popular article in 2016. Make sure to read the full article.

This is not a definitive list of steps (they might not even be in the right order) to set up a think tank. Instead, this is advice on what should be considered when trying to set up a think tank.

We need more think tanks. Few developing countries have enough policy research institutes to help address the challenges they face. Instead, and because of this small think tank community, they have to rely on policy ideas coming from abroad –often from the think tanks, research centres and consultancies set up in developed countries to lobby and influence international aid agencies.

Also, with only a handful of policy research organisations to produce research and policy advice, policymakers and the public cannot be expected to be well-informed.

The few think tanks that some very poor countries have follow very traditional business models that make them expensive and inflexible. Recent funding cuts from the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) have placed many economic policy think tanks in jeopardy.

Even when new think tanks are set up, they tend to follow the same model and therefore are hard to 'sell' to existing or new funders. Who would want to finance a new think tank if the bill is close to a million US dollars? If it means renting or buying an office, furnishing it, staffing it with lots of administrative staff (as well as cleaners and chauffeurs), hiring expensive senior researchers with lots of demands, and then wait for months or years before the first outputs start coming out of the think tank, who would have the patience?

It is time to think of a new model for think tanks. This model must take full advantage of new digital tools and resources and some of the best practice from more established think tanks across the world.

This goes beyond new tools to do old things. It means thinking of entirely new business models: new ways of delivering the same (or more) value to society.

1 Get advice	Every organisation has its own history of successes and failures. Learn from these.	**2** Is it a think tank you want to set up?	Do you want a think tank? A research centre? An NGO? A consultancy? Determine what kind of organisation is most adequate for your intentions.
3 Find a leader (or leaders)	You will need to find someone (or a small group of individuals) to take the lead.	**4** Define the think tank's scope	You can plan for a think tank that covers all aspects of public policy, but you may have to start with two or three issues to begin with.
5 Define the think tank's political space	Think tanks need a polity. This may be local, sub-national, national, regional, or even global. Each will demand different governance arrangement, skills, and strategy.	**6** What are your values?	Define, ex-ante, your core values. These do not need to be too specific but should offer a sense of where you might fall across the political spectrum.
7 Don't forget 3 key lists	Board members Researchers Funders	**8** Find your approach	Your think tank's approach should try to get it into the spotlight and stay there for a very long time.
9 People, people, people	Find the right people, but be creative because a new think tanks should try to keep costs low and flexible	**10** Governance arrangement	All arrangements should consider: A board or governing body, executive direction. 'senior' managers or researchers. But don't set it in stone! Be flexible.
11 Go digital	Invest in people. People are always more important than offices. Use free venues, shared office space. Use free digital tools to share files and documents.	**12** Get started before you need to seek big funding	Do not wait until you have funds to start: Publish while you read Share other people's ideas Produce events Use research you have done before
13 Don't be afraid to publish	Your outputs may not be perfectly diagrammed and they may have typos but you can always publish new versions. By repeating the process, you will get better soon.	**14** Develop a strategy but do not overdo it	Have a clear vision and mission, define a few lines of action, and get on with it. A short strategy or plan will do.
15 Keep learning!			

On Think Tanks

INDEPENDENT RESEARCH, IDEAS AND ADVICE