Resource persons:

- Orazio Bellettini (GRUPO Faro, Ecuador)
- Priyanthi Fernando (CEPA, Sri Lanka)
- Romeshun Kulasabanthan (CEPA, Sri Lanka)
- Jean Mensa (IEA, Ghana)
- Antonia Mutoro (IPAR-Rwanda)
- Vaqar Ahmed (SDPI, Pakistan)
- Peter Taylor (IDRC, Canada)

Report of proceedings

Peter Taylor of TTI introduced the session, outlining the objectives as mentioned in the TTI Exchange program.

The workshop was run by a small action research program within TTI called the Organizational Capacity Building (OCB) group. The program is made up of 5 think tanks, Grupo FARO from Ecuador, CEPA from Sri Lanka, IEA from Ghana, IPAR-Rwanda and SDPI from Pakistan. The program is an attempt to understand how think tanks are building capacity in their own communities using action research.

Action research is a process through which a group identifies a problem or challenge, finds out how to address the issue, chooses a question they intend to answer by the end of the project and then addresses the issue whilst making sure to "think and do". The focal question for the OCB was how to build organizational capacity for quality research, and how to incentivize researchers to do quality work. The workshop was a means by which the group could engage other think tanks on the work they've done.

Jean Mensa (IEA, Ghana) began by stating that the success of a think tank was dependent on its ability to respond timeously to issues in the country and that this ability is dependent on the quality of its researchers. She then went on to define a quality researcher as someone who is not necessarily an academic, but someone who has qualifications such as a PhD, or high-level qualifications that help to improve the credibility of the think tank. A good researcher is also someone who has a track record of publications, excellent writing and communication skills; inter personal skills that allow for collaboration with a large number of stakeholders, managerial and capacity building skills as well as the tenacity to push forward policy reform are also key attributes.

She then went on to ask the audience what skills they believe define a quality researcher. The answers were summed up as follows:

- The ability to connect research output with policies
- Passion about a specific topic or issue

- The ability to cope in an interdisciplinary context regardless of academic background
- The ability to listen to different opinions

This broadened the discussion to the personal characteristics of a good researcher which included:

- A moral seeking person who is good in and of themselves
- Being open and generous with their ideas
- Attention to detail
- Fundraising skills
- The ability to re-think given norms and focus on what is good for the team and what is good for success.

The floor was then asked to consider whether qualifications were more important than qualities, and it was decided what whilst qualifications were important, there was a need for balance between qualifications, qualities and experience.

The next question focused on whether there was a difference between academic and policy researchers, and whilst the initial statements alluded to major differences, it was concluded that the main difference between academic and policy research was its packaging.

Antonia Mutoro (IPAR-Rwanda) then began the next discussion by asking how organizations attracted quality researchers. The main findings of discussion was the fact that quality researchers are attracted to quality institutions and that the technical details that attracted quality researchers were market related pay, flexible hours and long term job assurance.

There needed to be a difference in the way organizations approached young researchers and older management. Young researchers needed to be actively pursued through programs such as internships targeted at various groups, such as university students in the Diaspora. Providing younger researchers with sufficient responsibility, opportunities for publication, as well as freedom to leave the organization are key considerations. Other attempts to attract researchers could include fellowship programs, as well as providing support for independent research in areas young researchers are interested in. Furthermore, a key factor in recruitment processes should always be gender balance and thinking about ways to attract female researchers.

An interesting aspect of attracting quality researchers is that whilst the demand is high, the supply is limited and think tanks need to be talking to universities and funding masters programs in order to change this limited supply.

Michael Ofori-Mensah (IEA, Ghana) then went on to lead the discussion relating to how retain quality researchers once they'd been attracted to the organization. Points that came from the discussion were that some think tanks receive a lot of unsolicited applications for jobs. One of the things that had worked was giving those applications due respect and using them as a signal to enhance internships and create a clearer path of what researchers can expect when working within an organization. Holding

research competitions for young students and finding out where they saw themselves in the future helped organizations to identify young people with passion.

Dr Ofori-Mensah then went on to explore how nurturing in-house talent had helped to retain quality staff in his organization. One of the key factors to keeping young talent was identified as allowing them to pursue further education and maintaining links with them throughout their academic pursuits. Another key area was providing good salaries and opportunity to do consultancy work to supplement their incomes. Mentoring new researchers was also another way to help ensure good relations in the future.

The workshop then went into a more formal session entitled "Enabling the Organization's Capacity to Support Quality Research Staff- Culture Leadership & Incentive".

Romeshun Kulasabanthan (CEPA, Sri Lanka) identified the effect of organizational culture on staff retention by focusing on the aspects of organizational culture that foster quality research. He explained how organizational culture goes beyond the organizations' vision and mission statement to the day to practice of how the organization is run. The following aspects of organizational culture were identified as being important for allowing the creation of quality research:

• A culture where mistakes are seen and corrected quickly through a system of internal peer review. Where researchers (especially young researchers) are encouraged to do presentations so they can receive immediate feedback on their work.
• Culture of collegiality and institutional identity where people interact with others as members of the same team, as opposed to competing researchers. This can be promoted through team lunches and out of office activities.
• A work environment that balanced the tradeoff between a casual environment and productivity, providing both structure and freedom.
• A system that encouraged young researchers to feel part of the process by preventing the idea of working in silos
• An effective system of administration in order to prevent frustration from basic inefficiencies

Orazio Bellettini (Grupo FARO, Ecuador) took over the next section and explained that leaders create the conditions for people to flourish and that there is limited training available on how to manage a think tank. He then explained how FARO had used an anonymous survey in order to evaluate what employees thought of their leaders, the results of which showed that employees wanted better quality leadership from their leaders.

Some of the qualities of leadership that were identified as beneficial to think tanks were a mastery not only in one's own field, but sufficient knowledge of all fields of research under their leadership. A high level of emotional intelligence and the ability to constantly engage with staff and identify those members in need of extra motivation is also key ,as well as an understanding that leadership in think tanks is generally shared by several members and the ability to prevent dissent between the different leadership structures of the organization. Good leadership requires the ability to see the bigger picture and to improve the abilities of those within the organization.

Jean Mensa returned to the floor to wrap up the formal discussion by looking at the role of incentives in retaining and encouraging quality research. She divided incentives into the categories of monetary and non-monetary incentives. Monetary incentives include direct financial incentives such as salaries and performance bonuses, where as non-monetary incentives included public exposure and providing opportunities to publish outstanding work.

Various incentive models were suggested by the participants. Monetary incentives were highlighted for having perverse outcomes such as partiality and demands for monetary compensation before engaging in any work for the organization. However, with transparent policies that clearly delineated the transfer of monies, monetary incentives were thought to have positive implications. Various non-monetary incentives were suggested such as a free yearly medical check-ups, pension and gratuity funds, and financing for researchers to participate in international conferences.

Summary of the workshop

Vaqar Ahmed (SDPI, Pakistan) then came to provide a summary of the workshop proceedings in terms of objectives and recommendations for the various topics discussed above. These are outlined below.

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Some broad observations

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- Need to explore what works and what doesn't?
- Why is attracting and nurturing quality researchers important?
- Why is there a need for permanent in-house researchers?
- How is a quality researcher defined?
    - Should be able to connect research with policy
    - Need to be passionate about their thematic area
    - Able to pose relevant, interesting questions
    - Should have ability to think in multidisciplinary context
    - Should have ability to think with alternate views, and multiple perspectives
    - Open-minded, and "generous with ideas"
    - Strong analytical capabilities, capable of managing complex data
    - Should be a good mentor and manager of HR
    - Should be easy with multi-tasking, including fund-raising, attention to detail, able to rethink norms
    - Not necessarily be an "academic". Communication skills are important
    - Answer may differ across Think Tanks

Some questions were also raised for the group to consider on this point:

- How to enable quality researchers to "mature", in order to good research?
- Are academic qualifications all that is needed? (this was answered in that qualifications are viewed as necessary but not sufficient)
- What kinds of background/experience of researchers are most valuable for think tanks to do quality research?

- What is the difference between an academic researcher and a policy researcher? On this question, the following responses were given:
- Ultimately strong evidence is needed in order to influence policy, but this must be accompanied by policy "savvy" – i.e. a good overview of the overall policy process, and the knowledge and skills needed to navigate the policy context
- We may need to shift our emphasis to understand how good academic researchers can communicate their work

Question: How do we attract quality researcher?

Observations	Recommendations/Strategies
- There is a high demand for quality researchers and there exists a lot of competition between employers - The usual methods of advertising are not rendering good candidates; different strategies may be needed to attract younger/less-experienced and more-experienced researchers - Gender balance needs to be observed in recruitment - Liaison with supervisors in universities is usually weak - Maybe it's not just about pay or salary but also the overall package - Need to focus on increasing local supply of researchers - Need to develop ways of identifying researchers who are truly passionate about their work	- Liaise with university supervisors and let them know about your intent to hire quality researchers - When your own researchers are away undertaking studies (e.g. PhDs), maintain contact with them to help them still feel part of the organization - Need for longer term contracts. Pay at least near to competing salaries in academia (i.e. universities) - Train researchers carefully and allow them space to carry out research on issues they are passionate about - Help young researchers in getting publicity for their work by ensuring they receive credit for their publications - Create passion for work on important issues, particularly work that leads to change - If a Think Tank can successfully brand itself then it will be easier to get quality researchers - Thank Tanks should regularly go to universities and give seminars, to increase awareness of their brand - Ensure that working conditions are known to be fair and equitable (e.g. having flexibility on working hours) - Attract Diaspora kids for summer internship programs - Allow and expand visiting researchers program and internships (physically and virtually), including longer stays such as 2-3 years to help grow expertise in specific topics; some visitors/interns may wish to stay with your organization - Headhunting should be a constant feature at a Think Tank's HR unit - The unsolicited applications that come through Think Tank's website queries can be valuable too - Use social media for attracting talent. LinkedIn and Twitter provide a good opportunity for getting the word out - When advertising note that vacancies are open to non-residents to attract those outside the country

Observations	Recommendations/Strategies
	• Also include positive attributes of the organization in adverts, e.g. that it is an equal opportunities employer, to help attract women applicants

Question: How to Nurture and Retain Quality Researcher?

Observations	Recommendations/Strategies
• Bring young researcher as interns and help them in mirroring senior researchers in the Think Tank • For Think Tanks who are successful at branding – researchers will prefer to stay on longer • Need to allow young researchers to move up the career ladder. Show them their future path trajectory, even if it lies outside the Think Tank; movement is a natural feature of career development, and researchers may move back in at a later date as well as moving out • Help young researchers in getting published	• Send young researchers for their PhDs. This can be a major attraction. Funds for PhD may be built in the commissioned projects. An alternative is to sign MoU with foreign universities for providing split PhD facility • Help young researchers to get shortlisted by giving them joint publications • Interact with them about their career prospects regularly – help them to understand that working for Think Tank is prestigious. Lunch time interactions are good way to do this • Need to have regular salary revisions. Keep overall package in line with academia (i.e. packages provided by universities) • Help young researchers to engage in processes of setting research questions, to enhance their sense of ownership and commitment/motivation

Question: How important is Organizational Capacity to Support Quality Research Staff?

i.   Organizational Culture

Observations	Recommendations/Strategies

• How can organizational culture attract staff?
• How can organizational culture motivate existing staff?
• How can shared beliefs, values and lessons learnt be inculcated?
• Collegiality is important
•
• There are trade-offs between a Think Tank's productivity, and freedom of researchers to manage their own time. These are not mutually exclusive, but it is a balancing act, and some basic structures and processes are needed to bring about the right balance for any organization
	• Encourage researchers to make in-house and external presentations
	• Promote democracy, participation and transparency in your organization. This should be an ongoing feature as the organization expands
	• Create a sense of openness where mistakes can be highlighted or needs for improvement identified without undermining the researcher's confidence or commitment
	• Avoid creating silos, or potential for researchers to feel isolated, for example by:
	   o Have daily lunch together to promote shared vision for the organization
	   o Monthly research group meetings and retreats should be encouraged. Senior researchers should attend these
	   o Get families to attend retreats in order to

	strengthen bonding with in the organization ○ Make young researchers part of important organizational decisions. This will encourage them to take ownership of those decisions • Have performance measures in place. Should incentivize those who are performing well • Cut through the red tape (within the Think Tank). Allow easy access to all. Flatter structures are often better

ii.   Leadership

During the interactive session it was highlighted that a potential head of a Think Tank should have a range of leadership capabilities. It is very likely that such qualities may not all exist in one person (a "mythical creature"). Whilst credibility in their field is seen as important in establishing a leader's authority, there was agreement that leaders of Think Tanks need to move beyond the "specialist mindset", and embrace a broader view and sets of ideas. Such a leader needs to achieve a balance in both organizational management and research excellence. Think Tanks will need to groom the mid-career professionals on the following lines.

- A leader should have the capacity to listen, mentor, help drive consensus, and enhance people's capabilities
- He/she needs to be multidisciplinary in his intellect and working
- Should be able to see issues through a cross-cutting lens
- The leader should encourage staff and fellow researchers to talk to him so that receiving and acting upon feedback becomes a norm in the organization
- Needs to display emotional intelligence
- Being the head of the organization he/she should command respect in his own field (nationally and internationally)
- Should have prior experience in balancing own research with managerial responsibilities
- Should have ability to motivate teams and individuals under him/her
- Establish regular dialogue and resolve organizational conflicts with staff, and with Board members, for example by establishing different fora where dialogue can take place
- Should remain flexible in the face of volatile circumstances and financial situation
- Should remain firm and be able to take tough decisions where needs be
- Always show the big picture to the subordinates in turn helping them to think clearly about their future
- Develop a clear succession plan for both the leader, and for the Board.

Note: these attributes were identified with a Think Tank's Director in mind, but many of these qualities will also relate to leadership demonstrated by staff throughout the organization, and by Board members

iii.   Incentives

Observations	Recommendations/Strategies
• Incentives may be monetary and non-monetary • One of the key incentives which Think Tanks provide is a platform for public exposure, such as enabling your researchers to present their work in national/international conferences • Non-monetary measures work for researchers particularly those starting their career. For example incentives such as co-authoring with senior researchers motivate the entry-level researchers, or celebrating shared successes together.	• HR should have a written strategy which should be reviewed annually • Provide annual bonus – to act as a performance incentive, linked to performance appraisal • Provide proposal development incentive – if the proposal is accepted. Helps keep researchers away from mainstream consulting • Non-salary monetary benefits such as medical insurance, gratuity, pension/provident fund are good measures • Always place young researchers under good senior researchers who can in turn keep the former motivated • Create opportunities for work flexibility where feasible; e.g. make it possible for researchers to supplement income through activities outside the organization, as long as such activities do not impinge on researcher's ability to fulfill their organizational obligations fully.

Question: Where do Think Tanks advertise for researchers?

Participants shared the following locations/outlets where they had experience of placing advertisements:

- Named journals:
    - African Economic Review
    - The Economist
- National policy journals
- Websites:
    - Job-search websites
    - Think Tank's website
- Notice boards of selected universities
- Emailing to networks, groups, etc. of potential interested researchers, either email or "e-briefs"
- Newspapers, including newspapers in other countries, especially for senior positions (not always successful)
- Facebook
- Mention vacancies during workshops or seminars (where time/relevance allows)
- From existing interns/research assistants
- Word of mouth through personal contacts

Note: Some Think Tanks do not advertise at all due to a scarcity of expertise, nationally. Instead they headhunt. However, the headhunter should really understand the nature of your organization, inside and outside.