FIT FOR THE FUTURE
ENHANCING THE CAPACITY, QUALITY, AND SUSTAINABILITY OF AFRICA'S THINK TANKS

2017 AFRICA'S THINK TANK SUSTAINABILITY FORUM REPORT
“Helping to bridge the gap between knowledge and policy”

Researching the trends and challenges facing think tanks, policymakers, and policy-oriented civil society groups...

Sustaining, strengthening, and building capacity for think tanks around the world...

Maintaining the largest, most comprehensive database of over 7,000 think tanks...

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2017 AFRICA’S THINK TANK SUSTAINABILITY FORUM

FIT FOR THE FUTURE: ENHANCING THE CAPACITY, QUALITY, AND SUSTAINABILITY OF AFRICA’S THINK TANKS

WASHINGTON, DC, USA
NOVEMBER 3-4, 2017
INTRODUCTION

The rise of Africa’s think tanks can be attributed to a better understanding of what is needed to bring about successful growth and development, moving away from the “one-size-fits-all” formula of the previous years to a recognition that appropriate solutions are unique for each country’s situation. The new environment is fruitful territory for national level think tanks who can explore, in depth, the customized policy options needed in their country’s environment. A recent article pointed out that: “Such organizations (think tanks) can play a key role by serving as catalysts for ideas and proposing practical solutions for policy problems. They can also act as bridges between governments, business and civil society. They tend to form partnerships with global think tanks and organizations, sharing in the experience of others and applying this to their own unique, locally focused research.”

In the face of major shifts both in private and public-sector support for think tanks in Africa, as well as the organizational challenges they face, an urgent effort is needed to raise awareness of the think tank sustainability crisis in Africa and to assist think tanks in the region with resources and capacity building that will enable them to meet these critical challenges. At the first Africa Think Tank Summit in 2014 in South Africa, Dr. Frannie Leautier, the then Executive Secretary of ACBF, reported that 30% of Africa’s think tanks may close or be in serious crisis. Since that time, the TTCSP has been working to raise the sustainability question and support the think tank community in the region through research, summits and networking. Our fear is that we will only realize the full magnitude of this crisis after a large number of think tanks have disappeared from the fragile think tank eco-system in Africa.

Understanding the gravity of the situation, The Brookings Institution, The Wilson Center, Fundação Getulio Vargas, Getúlio Vargas Foundation- FGV (Brazil), the Carnegie Corporation of New York, and the Think Tank and Civil Societies Program, University of Pennsylvania joined together to convene a group of the leading think tanks in Africa, public and private donors and policymakers to identity strategies and programs to address the think tank sustainability crisis in Africa. The Fit for Purpose: Enhancing the Capacity, Quality and Sustainability of Africa’s Think Tanks Forum took place in Washington, DC on November 3 and 4, 2017. The Forum explored how to strengthen the capacity and sustainability of think tanks so that they can continue to support Africa’s development.

However, while many will agree that think tanks have a substantive role to play in this regard, their effectiveness in carrying out this task will depend on the appropriateness and relevance of their own internal structures and capacities. Hence, this Forum not only focused on the substantive areas of support that think tanks can offer to governments and policymakers, but it also explored options to strengthen think tanks and make them fit for the purpose of supporting the implementation of key economic, social and good governance policies and programs.

Coherent implementation of both agendas will pose a challenge for policymakers in Africa. Despite over a decade-long history of development planning, several African countries continue to experience challenges in designing, implementing and monitoring their development planning frameworks. Think tanks have and will continue to play an important role in supporting the roll out of SDGs, Agenda 2063 in Africa, public-private partnerships and good governance initiatives by providing technical assistance to governments in all aspects of the implementation process. Specifically, implementation of the global and regional agendas will require: advocacy and sensitization about the details of such frameworks; strengthened capacities to integrate such initiatives in national planning frameworks; evidence-based policymaking; and the requisite institutional architecture and skills to monitor or follow-up on implementation outcomes.

In this context, discussions were organized around the following three key themes and were designed to feature some of the best practices and innovation strategies, products and programs that have been developed in Africa and other regions of the world:

1. Enhancing the Capacity and Quality of Think Tank Research and Public Engagement: The national and regional development requires finely tuned research, analysis and engagements capacities. Think tanks can only contribute to the development of effective and responsive policies by conducting evidence based research and effectively engaging both policymakers and the public in policy issues that are key to Africa’s development.

2. Making Africa’s Think-Tanks Fit for Purpose: Think tanks can only carry out the above tasks if they have the requisite internal capacities and resources to undertake these tasks. What are the best strategies and structures (i.e. institutional architecture) for the policy and funding environment in Africa? Specifically what structures, staffing patterns and strategies, products, methods are best suited for the policy and funding environment in Africa?

3. Creating a Sustainable Future for Think Tanks in Africa: The Forum featured some of the best practices and innovative strategies, products and programs that have been developed in Africa and other regions of the world.
BUILDING A STRATEGIC PLAN

The most pressing recommendation that came out of the 2017 Africa Think Tank Sustainability Forum was the call for each African think tank to create a strategic plan. The strategic plan, as discussed, would cover: what are the goals and means for achievement for each African think tank? How does each think tank position itself to fulfill its self-positioned role? What does each think tank count as “impact” and how can they measure it? What is the landscape within which a specific African think tank is operating? The strategic plan “tool kit,” as discussed at the forum, includes recommendations for long-term planning in relation to overarching goals. It was heavily stressed that these strategic plans take much care, focus, and time, but are worth the effort, since, as one participant remarked, “if you don’t have a destination, any road will take you there.”

The strategic plan “tool kit,” as discussed, included: focusing on enhancing strategic communications, creating and maintaining financial sustainability; finding mutual benefit with donors; increasing quality of research; improving staff retention; analyzing and deciding who is the target audience for each think tank; and creating an African think tank network. Each of these pieces are separated and recapped in more length throughout the rest of the report.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

In terms of strategic communications, it was emphasized that think tanks may focus on issues of technology and trends monitoring to adapt to the best ways to communicate. The best means to communicate may differ across time periods, audiences and locations within Africa and abroad, ranging from printed publications to social media to website articles or PDFs to radio shows and TV programming. If possible, time and money should be dedicated to strategic communications and marketing in order to increase impact. Tracking website hits and social media following can also be utilized to track this impact.

In order to further increase the breadth and depth of an African think tank’s impact, it is advantageous to analyze big upcoming issues and to plan ahead to research and address that issue. It is also largely advantageous to publish both in English and in French. Website contact pages should have relevant and often-checked email addresses and an updated “about page.” And, finally, to increase publicity, it was suggested that there is an effort made to invite media to launch events and to ask them to share it.

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

During the 2017 Africa Think Tank Sustainability Forum, the problem of funding, especially as it pertains to an African think tank’s sustainability, was another topic of frequent discussion. During the first panel discussion titled “Understanding the Think Tank Sustainability Crisis in Africa and Its Potential Impact,” the issues of emerging project-based funding, insufficient financial support, and overdependence on government and international financial support were discussed.

Several Forum attendees remarked on the positive aspects of project-based funding, or funding acquired by think tanks from project to project, as a means to acquire more funding, especially if a mutual benefit can be obtained. However, in the past, this form of funding has largely required a think tank to fit certain interests or agendas of grant issuers or risk not receiving substantial funding, even if they are not in the think tank’s interest. Project-based funding also creates issues with insufficient funding for operational and staffing costs.

The issue of insufficient financial support was also discussed as a hindrance to the operation of African think tanks. Few African think tanks are able to fund and manage staffing with current available funding. This lack of operational funding can make it hard for lesser-funded think tanks to maintain the same quality of work product as those with sufficient funding for these operational and project costs. Many attendees mentioned the importance
of being able to invest in data and facts to produce reliable, respectable work.

The sustainability and dependency of African think tanks as it relates to funding sources was also a topic of major discussion. Whether from government sources or from international sources, both create conflicts that limit the effectiveness of African think tanks. Dependence on government funding has the potential to produce biased research, or research that is viewed as biased. This can bring into question the role and efficacy of think tanks. Meanwhile, it was also brought up that in the eyes of the African Union, a think tank is not African if it receives more than ten percent of its funding from an international source.

In this light, it was suggested that in order for African think tanks to both find financial stability as well as credibility, it is integral for African think tanks to achieve financial independence from government and international funding. This can increase the ability to critique governments and donors if needed and provide some protection for a think tank. In this regard, it was stated that back end operations should be a thought-out piece of the strategic plan, but not the forefront of a think tank’s time, which should instead be going towards its research. To address this, it was suggested that there could be roles created within think tanks specifically for back-end operations.

This mutual benefit would therefore require negotiating with partners and not taking handouts; instead, it asks think tanks to find a shared vision and then assess how an African think tank can be a valuable piece of that vision. Often, it was discussed that African think tanks have a large potential to be the local expertise (even more so than is occurring right now), with a global quality and deep Africa perspective. Think tanks should aim to provide that local expertise, and should also be sure to communicate fully with donors the crisis that African think tanks are facing and, specifically, the consequences for donor interests if African think tanks were gone.

As an alternative to finding full financial independence, which poses a large challenge for many African think tanks, leaders at the 2017 African Sustainability Forum suggested that there is some “mutual benefit” to be found between donors and think tanks which would create a more fair and productive relationship in which both donors and African think tanks are advancing in their goals. This phrase was specifically coined in reaction to the impression that donor interests are not always in the think tank’s best interest, as well as the sense of distrust between Northern donors and African think tanks, in which there is a notion that a Northern model works and Africans are often trying to cheat. To counteract this, it is important for African think tanks to communicate their needs to their donors, shift money from evaluation to things like communication and research, and to set an agenda instead of responding to it.

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**Quality of Research**

Another barrier for an African think tank’s success in terms of funding and impact is the quality of its research.
Maintaining a quick turn-around time for research and reports is key when it comes to gaining the support of affiliates and a think tank’s research being utilized. While keeping research challenging to relevant policies and political climates is important, maintaining objectivity and quality is essential to international recognition and achieving success as well as strengthening African agency in international spheres.

There are a few significant factors that are vital to improving quality in research. The first is a rigorous attention to methodology and quality of writing. Significant capacity building is needed in early career researchers who are new to think tanks and do not have the skills needed to produce quality research (as expanded upon in “Staff Retention”). In addition, it is recommended that African think tanks check and counter each other’s work through a process similar to peer review. This review is helpful in checking facts and numbers, and holding the continent to a higher standard. In order to do this, however, African think tanks must overcome the challenges of translating reports. Think tanks must find ways to translate information into both English and French as well as other relevant languages, in addition to emphasizing data usage and increasing its capacity to be translated and utilized by other countries.

It should be noted that one of the challenges to producing quality research is the need for think tanks to devote too many resources to finding sources of funding.

### STAFF RETENTION

A recurring concept throughout the forum was the issue of staff retention and the lack of human capacity within African think tanks, affecting both the quality of research and sustainability of a think tank. The Forum highlighted the aging population of think tank researchers and executives, and the inability to recruit and subsequently retain younger staff. This lack of a pipeline for the industry is a major hurdle. Ideas for creating such a pipeline included utilizing measures such as creating a Masters degree in think tank management, providing online training for younger researchers, and taking an interest in the younger generation by making them an active audience member. Additionally, one long term solution to African think tanks’ problem of recruiting and retaining staff, especially young staff, could be the transformation of the African education sector in a manner that trains young people throughout the continent to engage in research and the work done by African think tanks. One way to further engage with younger populations could be to explicitly engage with the universities which harbor the brightest and youngest academics and scholars throughout the continent.

Another solution proposed during the forum to resolve staff retention and lack of human capacity was the potential for traveling scholars. Retaining scholars could be made easier and more effective if it became common practice for researchers to continue their research while abroad. Additionally, it may be helpful for think tanks to receive scholars from other local and international think tanks, both for new ideas and as a way to save costs on staff. This may come in the form of visiting fellows, allowing those who are not typically based in Africa, but bring extensive knowledge to the continent, to further aid African think tanks in their missions.

### AUDIENCE

The challenge of determining the appropriate audience to address in reports and other forms of work product affects think tanks world wide. However, this challenge is especially acute for Africa’s think tanks. This is due to the current fragile situation of Africa’s think tanks and the pressing need for think tanks to reach a large audience for staff retention and to have a larger impact on policy. Connecting with domestic government can be a challenge, but leaders remarked that it is important to try. Governments often approach African think tanks with distrust if they
fear criticism. Participants remarked that that this fear can be constructive: as one Director remarked, “respect what makes them listen; fear is what gets you into the room.” Finally, in addition to addressing governments, it is also becoming increasingly important for African think tanks to interact with their local populations.

AFRICAN THINK TANK NETWORK

For long-term success, it was recommended that African think tanks strive to create a continental network and unified African voice. This network has the potential to hold African think tanks accountable. It can facilitate peer reviews and visiting fellows, as remarked earlier, and on a large scale to hold each other reliable in terms of accuracy and accountability. This collaboration can come in many forms and should be articulated in strategic plans and regional commitments. For instance, this collaboration may revolve around interlocking specializations that maximize expertise.

This think tank network is crucial due to Africa’s fragile think tank ecosystem. This network would provide the opportunity for thriving think tanks to be a model and help those who are struggling. Developed think tanks can work to create online resources that can be used for professional development at other institutions. Think tanks can reinforce each other’s credibility, feature blog series open to members of other institutions, and engage with local universities to expand funding and academic bases. Additionally, by banding together, African think tanks can create a unified voice in terms of goals and needs when it comes to discussing funding with international donors and potentially increasing the effectiveness of communications with donors, and therefore increasing the capacity, quality, and sustainability of Africa’s think tanks.
## NOVEMBER 3RD, 2017

### TIME | PROGRAM
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16:00-20:15 | Forum Venue Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars  
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20004

09:00-16:00 | Participants Arrive All Day in Washington

16:00-17:00 | Registration

17:00-18:30 | Panel I: Understanding the Think Tank Sustainability Crisis In Africa and Its Potential Impact on Think Tanks, Policy Makers and the Public

In 2014, Dr. Frannie Leautier, former Executive Secretary of the ACBF, reported that 30% of Africa’s think tanks may close or be in serious crisis. If this crisis is not addressed immediately, it may be too late to reverse the damages it will create by the time its full magnitude is understood. Panel I will start the forum off by exploring the reasons why this crisis is occurring and the effects it has and will have on think tanks, policy makers and the public. The purpose of Panel I is to bring together a group of leading scholars and think tank executives to share their views on how the current policy and funding environment is impacting the research, and operations of think tanks, as well as their ability to recruit and retain key staff. Panel I will also be expected to discuss the current and future impact of the crisis on think tanks and on the countries and people they serve. It is also intended to preview the central issues to be explored at the Forum.

**Chair:** James McGann, Senior Lecturer, International Studies and Director, Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, University of Pennsylvania

**Panelists:** Ibrahim Diarra, Executive Director, Centre Ivoirien de Recherches Economiques et Sociales (Cires)

Donald Mmari, Executive Director, Research for Poverty Alleviation

Monde Muyangwa, Director, Africa Program, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

Agostinho Zacarias, Research Director, African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes

18:30-18:45 | Break

18:45-20:15 | Dinner Hosted by the Wilson Center

**Dinner Keynote Address by:** Albert Zeufack, Chief Economist for Africa, The World Bank
### NOVEMBER 4TH, 2017

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<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
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<tr>
<td>09:00-15:30</td>
<td>Forum Venue The Brookings Institution&lt;br&gt;1775 Massachusetts Ave., NW., Washington, DC 20004</td>
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<td>09:00-09:15</td>
<td>Welcome and Introductions</td>
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<td>09:15-10:15</td>
<td>Panel II: The Quality-Capacity Conundrum: How To Enhance Capacity and Maintain Quality and Independence With Limited or No Institutional Support</td>
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<td>The purpose of Panel II is to bring together a group of think tank executives to share their views on how to meet the challenge of how to raise funds and produce quality research while also maintaining institutional independence. This requires a delicate balancing act that think tanks around the world must manage on a daily basis.</td>
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<td>Chair: Prakash Loungani, Senior Fellow, OCP Policy Center</td>
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<td>Panelists: Gountieni Lankoande, Executive Director, Groupe de Recherche et d’Analyse Appliqués pour le Développement (GRAAD Burkina)</td>
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<td>Kwame Owino, Chief Executive Officer, Institute of Economic Affairs</td>
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<td>Andrew Selee, Executive Director, Migration Policy Institute</td>
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<td>Lemma W. Senbet, Executive Director, African Economic Research Consortium</td>
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<td>10:15-10:45</td>
<td>Roundtable Discussion</td>
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<td>10:45-11:00</td>
<td>Coffee/Tea Break</td>
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<td>11:00-12:15</td>
<td>Panel III: Why Think Tanks Matter in Africa: Forging Strategic Partnerships with Policy Makers, Donors and the Public</td>
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<td>The purpose of Panel III is to bring together a group of think tank executives to share their views on how think tanks can more effectively engage policymakers and the public in policy issues that are key to Africa’s development. Think tanks are critical in supporting the implementation of key economic, social and good governance policies and programs, but they could do a more effective job in reaching key audiences and stakeholders. This panel will explore how think tanks can utilize strategic communications, strategic partnerships and new technologies to increase revenue, reach and impact.</td>
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<td>Chair: Brahima Coulibaly, Senior Fellow and Director, Africa Growth Initiative, Brookings Institution</td>
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<td>Panelists: Kofi Bentil, VP External Relations, IMANI Center for Policy and Education</td>
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<td>Moussa P. Blimpo, Economist, World Bank</td>
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<td>Ibrahim Diarra, Executive Director, Centre Ivoirien de Recherches Economiques et Sociales (CIRES)</td>
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<td>Eugene Didier Goussikindey, Directeur Général, Centre de Recherche et d’Action pour la Paix</td>
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<td>12:15-12:45</td>
<td>Roundtable Discussion</td>
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<td>12:45-13:45</td>
<td>Working Lunch Hosted by the Brookings Institution: Taking Think Tanks Off the Endangered Species List: Strategies for Enhancing the Capacity, Quality and Independence of Think Tanks in Africa</td>
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<td>14:00-15:15</td>
<td>Panel IV: Realizing Sustainable Future for Africa’s Think Tanks: An Action Agenda</td>
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<td>This Panel is meant to bring together ideas and issues discussed at the Forum and formulate some possible conclusions and concrete recommendations for action that will help alleviate the think tank sustainability crisis in Africa. The Panel is expected to help participants generate a plan of action that will focus on realizing a sustainable future for Africa’s think tanks.</td>
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<td>Panelists: Brahima Coulibaly, Senior Fellow and Director, Africa Growth Initiative, Brookings Institution</td>
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<td>Agostinho Zacarias, Research Director, African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes</td>
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<td>15:15-15:30</td>
<td>Closing Remarks:</td>
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<td>James G. McGann, Senior Lecturer, International Studies; Director, Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program; and Senior Fellow, Fels Institute of Government</td>
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CONFIRMED AND REGISTERED THINK TANKS AT THE 2017 AFRICA THINK TANK SUSTAINABILITY FORUM

African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (South Africa)
African Economic Research Consortium (Kenya)
Atlantic Council (United States)
Botswana Institute for Development Policy Analysis (Botswana)
Brookings Institution (United States)
Carnegie Corporation of New York (United States)
Research Center for Social Action, CEPAS (DRC)
Center for African Studies, Stanford University (United States)
Centre de Recherche et d’Action pour la Paix (Côte D’Ivoire)
Centre for Democracy and Development (Nigeria)
Centre Ivoirien de Recherches Economiques et Sociales (Côte D’Ivoire)
Economic and Social Research Foundation (Tanzania)
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Future for Advanced Research (United Arab Emirates)
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IMANI Center for Policy and Education (Ghana)
Korea Institute for International Economic Policy (South Korea)
Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (Germany)
Migration Policy Institute (United States)
OCP Policy Center (Morocco)
REPOA (Tanzania)
Sadeq Institute (Libya)
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United Nations (United States)
Wilson Center (United States)
World Bank (Global)
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Dr. Albert G. Zeufack  
World Bank  
Chief Economist for Africa
SUMMIT CONTRIBUTORS

SUMMIT CO-HOST AND ORGANIZERS:

Fundacao Getulio Vargas (FGV)
Think Tank and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP)

PARTNERS:

Brookings Institute
Wilson Center
Fundacao Getulio Vargas (FGV)
Think Tank and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP)

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Laura Whelan (Project Lead)
Ebe Inegbenebor
Shay Moon
Lauren Platz
Ana Robinson
**ABOUT TTCSP**

**THINK TANKS AND CIVIL SOCIETIES PROGRAM**

The Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP) of the Lauder Institute at the University of Pennsylvania conducts research on the role policy institutes play in governments and civil societies around the world. Often referred to as the “think tanks’ think tank,” TTCSP examines the evolving role and character of public policy research organizations. Over the last 25 years, the TTCSP has developed and led a series of global initiatives that have helped bridge the gap between knowledge and policy in critical policy areas such as international peace and security, globalization and governance, international economics, environmental issues, information and society, poverty alleviation, and healthcare and global health. These international collaborative efforts are designed to establish regional and international networks of policy institutes and communities that improve policy making while strengthening democratic institutions and civil societies around the world.

The TTCSP works with leading scholars and practitioners from think tanks and universities in a variety of collaborative efforts and programs, and produces the annual Global Go To Think Tank Index that ranks the world’s leading think tanks in a variety of categories. This is achieved with the help of a panel of over 1,900 peer institutions and experts from the print and electronic media, academia, public and private donor institutions, and governments around the world. We have strong relationships with leading think tanks around the world, and our annual Think Tank Index is used by academics, journalists, donors and the public to locate and connect with the leading centers of public policy research around the world. Our goal is to increase the profile and performance of think tanks and raise the public awareness of the important role think tanks play in governments and civil societies around the globe.

Since its inception in 1989, the TTCSP has focused on collecting data and conducting research on think tank trends and the role think tanks play as civil society actors in the policymaking process. In 2007, the TTCSP developed and launched the global index of think tanks, which is designed to identify and recognize centers of excellence in all the major areas of public policy research and in every region of the world. To date TTCSP has provided technical assistance and capacity building programs in 81 countries. We are now working to create regional and global networks of think tanks in an effort to facilitate collaboration and the production of a modest yet achievable set of global public goods. Our goal is to create lasting institutional and state-level partnerships by engaging and mobilizing think tanks that have demonstrated their ability to produce high quality policy research and shape popular and elite opinion and actions for public good.

**THE LAUDER INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

The Lauder Institute of Management and International Studies offers an MA in international studies, and conducts fundamental and policy-oriented research on current economic, political, and business issues. It organizes an annual conference that brings academics, practitioners and policy makers together to examine global challenges such as financial risks, sustainability, inequality, and the future of the state.

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The University of Pennsylvania (Penn) is an Ivy League school with highly selective admissions and a history of innovation in interdisciplinary education and scholarship. A world-class research institution, Penn boasts a picturesque campus in the middle of a dynamic city. Founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1740 and recognized as America's first university, Penn remains today a world-renowned center for the creation and dissemination of knowledge. It serves as a model for research colleges and universities throughout the world.