



Photo: Arne Hoel/World Bank

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Think tanks can best determine their own gender research priorities, based on their knowledge of the local landscape.
- A flexible approach to capacity building allows think tanks to build the organizational strengths they feel they need to address gender.
- We could have been bolder in our expectations for think tanks' influence on gender in their policy research landscape.

Think tanks and gender equality

TTI Insights distill ten years of learning from the Think Tank Initiative to inform donors, researchers, and practitioners working to strengthen policy research. Here, we explore insights gained from our experience in facilitating think tanks' research and capacity building in gender analysis.

What's at stake?

More than two decades after the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women highlighted the urgent need to address gender equality, women in most countries remain under-represented in politics and the board room, underpaid relative to male peers, and vulnerable to physical and sexual violence. [Goal 5](#) of the UN Sustainable Development Agenda calls for continued action to reduce gender inequality and empower women. Increasingly, development and human rights organizations recognize that gender intersects with poverty and other vulnerabilities, deepening power imbalances and heightening inequalities. Many are also striving to engage men in addressing gender-based violence and discrimination.

Through their citizen and policy engagement, think tanks play an important role in fostering more equitable and inclusive societies. Their contributions to gender equality can be seen not only in their research and advocacy, but in how they are making their own organizations more gender-inclusive in policy and practice.

What have we learned?

Gender was not explicit in TTI's initial results framework, but emerged as an important area of focus among many of our partners. An internal mapping revealed that nearly all the think tanks we supported were engaged in gender-related work. We deepened our exploration of gender in Phase 2 of TTI, as we learned from the gender-focused research and organizational change that think tanks were pursuing. Here we present key insights related to our objectives for strengthening think tanks' capacity to address gender at an organizational level — and as a policy research issue (see "Our approach" sidebar inside).

- 1 **Think tanks can best determine their own gender research priorities, based on their knowledge of the local landscape.**

Our mapping, along with [TTI's second interim evaluation report](#),¹ revealed that our partners varied widely in the degree to which they focus on gender, and the specific issues they address. Our core funding and

OUR APPROACH

We provided resources that responded to the expressed needs and priorities of supported think tanks. Along with our core funding, this enabled them to set their own objectives and directions.

In addition to showcasing partners' contributions to gender equality — through blogs, events, and publications — we facilitated training and mentoring to help them address gender in their research and organizational policies and practices. Some of this support was provided to groups of think tanks, while other activities targeted the gender learning priorities of individual organizations.

Three objectives guided how we accompanied think tanks' efforts to promote greater gender equality:

- Showcase and disseminate their work on gender equality and gender-related issues.
- Enhance their existing capacity to research and engage on gender theory, policy, and practice.
- Enhance their capacities to put gender at the core of their institutional sustainability plans.

We also hoped to see progress toward a fourth outcome that was beyond our direct influence:

- Enhance capacity within the broader policy research landscape in South Asia, Latin America, and Africa to prioritize gender issues in research and organizational development.

responsive approach to capacity building created space for think tanks to determine how they define gender equality and address its intersections with other aspects of identity, and what they see as gender gaps and priorities within their own national or regional contexts.

In India, for example, where gender-based violence is a pressing public concern, the [Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability](#) (CBGA) teamed up with the [Jagori Rural Charitable Trust](#) to review Delhi's governance structures in 2015, highlighting gaps in fiscal policies and public spending intended to protect women. They focused on measures and services such as policing, public bus services, night shelters, and public hospitals. Their [2017 joint report](#)² shed light on how the low priority accorded to women's needs, and the resulting lack of investment and political will, have undermined the effectiveness of these services in curbing violence against women. Working with key stakeholders, the two organizations are now developing a budget framework for looking at policy measures in relation to violence.

With its focus on caste-based discrimination, the [Indian Institute of Dalit Studies](#) has carried out more than 15 research studies on gender-related topics. It has created a specialized team, the Gender and Social Exclusion Studies Unit, to explore how gender intersects with caste, ethnicity, and religion in shaping access to education, health, livelihoods, and political participation.³

2 A flexible approach to capacity building allows think tanks to build the organizational strengths they feel they need to address gender.

One of TTI's most important contributions to advancing gender equality is the space we created for partners to address gender at an organizational level. This is partly a function of the core funding we provided, which enabled think tanks to invest in organizational strengthening.

For example, we have supported five think tanks through a Gender Action Learning Project that allows each organization to design strategies addressing its own gender priorities. Led by the feminist knowledge network Gender at Work, participants have been guided through a multi-stage action learning process



Photo: Benoit Colin/EMBARQ

that includes peer learning and expert mentoring. For example, the [Centre for Population and Environmental Development](#) (CPED), which works with rural communities in Nigeria to [strengthen maternal and child health](#),⁴ looked at its own gender balance in management and staffing and incorporated gender equality measures in project design and implementation. As well, it developed gender analysis frameworks and tools to use in its programming with an aim to develop internal policy and guidelines to ensure gender equality in CPED activities over the coming years. Each participating think tank received expert mentoring, built in periods of reflection, and engaged in peer learning.

In another action learning project, Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment ([ACODE](#)) in Uganda and Consortium pour la recherche économique et sociale ([CRES](#)) in Senegal have honed their effectiveness in [gender-responsive budgeting](#). Through research and engagement, these two organizations have come together to share learning and knowledge, working closely with policymakers from relevant government ministries. ACODE aims to see more gender-responsive budgeting in Uganda's agricultural sector, while CRES targets change in energy and agricultural budget planning.

3 We could have been bolder in our expectations for think tanks' influence on gender in their policy research landscape.

In mapping our objectives, we did not anticipate the wider impact that TTI-supported think tanks could have on gender dynamics within the broader research landscape. The findings of some think tanks have helped to shape more gender-inclusive policies in their national contexts, while others have developed tools and approaches to guide those interested in taking a more gender-inclusive approach to their research and engagement.

The work of [Grupo Sofia](#) exemplifies the role that think tanks can play in changing how women are seen in society. To address women's under-representation and lack of recognition in the social sciences, four of Peru's leading social research institutions came together in 2014 to establish Grupo Sofia. The group promotes greater participation of women in academic publishing and knowledge sharing, and in public debates and policy formulation.



In a series of studies on [gender inequalities in the social sciences](#),⁵ Grupo Sofia found nearly twice as many men as women in higher academic posts, and similar disparities in the media and academic events. In addition to raising awareness of these gaps, Grupo Sofia created practical tools to help universities and other organizations increase the participation of women. These included guidelines to ensure greater gender equality in research and policy events, which in turn influenced the [event planning guidelines](#) we adopted for the final TTI Exchange. Grupo Sofia also published a [directory of female social science experts](#) for media and event organizers, and studies of policy alternatives for tackling gender inequality in academia.

In El Salvador, [research](#) spearheaded by [FUSADES](#) (La Fundación Salvadoreña para el Desarrollo Económico y Social) revealed how women were deterred from using public transport by sexual harassment and a menacing environment on buses and at stations. Their influential work spurred government action to clean up infrastructure, and invest in signage and facilities that enhance women's safety. San Salvador's new mass transit buses, for example, have been plastered with posters demanding the respectful treatment of women and girls.

Putting insights into practice

To advance gender equality and women's empowerment, donors and development practitioners need to think about how their support creates space for think tanks to identify gender-related research priorities, and strengthen their internal capacity. Based on our experience:

- Providing **core funding** lets think tanks set their own research priorities and approaches for building gender capacity. It also let us respond to emerging needs at little additional cost.
- Seeking **quality gender experts** and factoring in their guidance at early stages help strengthen program design.
- Providing **peer learning** opportunities allows research organizations to tap others' experience to build their own gender-related capacities. Donors and practitioners can also learn much from taking part in peer and action learning processes with grantees.
- **Tailoring capacity building** to regional specifics makes the learning more directly relevant to think tanks. This is because local context often shapes patterns of gender inequality and the range of possible solutions. For example, in South Asia, dynamics around caste and class exacerbate the gaps between men and women, so must be addressed in gender-related research and organizational change.
- **Creating an enabling environment** to address gender inequality demands thinking beyond individual projects — to creating networks and collaborative initiatives that support women and other marginalized groups in asserting their voice.

- 1 Christoplos, I. et al. 2017. *External Evaluation of TTI Phase Two: Second Interim Report*. Allerød, DK: NIRAS.
- 2 Kaul, K. & Shrivastava, S. 2017. *Safety of Women in Public Spaces in Delhi: Governance and Budgetary Challenges*. Delhi: CBGA and Jagori.
- 3 IIDS publishes the *Journal of Social Inclusion Studies* (<http://www.dalitstudies.org.in/journal.php>). Examples of past work on gender and intersectionality can also be found online in their Working Paper series: <http://www.dalitstudies.org.in/working-paper-series.php>.
- 4 CPED Policy Brief Series 2017, No. 2. *Accessing Maternal, Newborn and Child Healthcare Services in Underserved Rural Communities: Users Challenges in Delta State and Recommendations for Improvements*. Available at: <http://cped.org.ng/index.php/2017/06/28/accessing-maternal-newborn-and-child-healthcare-services-in-underserved-rural-communities-users-challenges-in-delta-state-and-recommendations-for-improvements/>.
- 5 See Alcázar, L. & Balarin, M. (eds). 2018. *Desigualdad en la academia: mujeres en las ciencias sociales peruanas*. Lima: Grupo Sofía and GRADE.

*The **Think Tank Initiative** helped strengthen policy research organizations in 20 developing countries across South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. Launched in 2008 and managed by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), TTI was a partnership between five donors.*

www.idrc.ca/en/initiative/think-tank-initiative

