ThinkTank Initiative

FINAL REPORT

Understanding Think Tank-University Relationships in the Global South

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On **2014**

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1. Introduction

The Think Tank Initiative (TTI) is founded on the belief that public policies work best when they are designed and implemented in-country. Local research can give policymakers the knowledge they need to help build equitable and more prosperous societies. By supporting sustainable and influential independent policy research institutions – or think tanks – in developing countries, TTI aims to strengthen the research knowledge environment, with the goal of promoting more objective, evidence-based decision-making that makes real, sustained improvements in people's lives.

TTI is a multi-donor program managed by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC). Launched in 2008, TTI currently supports 43 institutions in 20 countries, offering them core, non-earmarked funding. This support allows the institutions to attract, retain, and build local talent, develop an independent research program, and invest in public outreach to ensure that research results inform and influence national and regional policy debates.

Think tanks do not act in isolation within the research knowledge environment: another important group of players in this space are universities. Both types of institutions can play key roles in improving the living conditions of people in the countries in which they operate by producing high quality research that addresses local policy challenges. The Think Tank Initiative intervenes in the research to policy environment by providing core funding and technical support to think tanks; yet there are different views amongst international donors, governments, and experts about the relative benefits of supporting universities and think tanks. There are questions, for example, about the impact that supporting one type of institution may have on the other, and the degree to which capacity building support provided to one or both may influence the relationship between these institutions.

Aim of the project
With the above issues in mind, TTI commissioned a project to generate a better understanding of the relationships between think tanks and universities and the ways in which externally provided support might affect these relationships. The project involved three regional studies, carried out in Latin America, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa, each examining a number of countries in the region. This publication aims to synthesise the findings generated by the studies, drawing out lessons for effective collaboration that might inform universities and think tanks wishing to engage with one another. The findings may also be of use to donors and other supporters of these institutions who wish to facilitate collaboration between think tanks and universities.

The three regional studies were guided by the following questions:

1. What are the most important drivers, features, and consequences of the relationships between think tanks and universities? What are the different types of relationships between these two institutions?
2. How are the relationships between think tanks and universities affected by externally provided support?
3. What are the ways in which think tanks and universities have developed mutually beneficial relationships? What are the characteristics that appear to be conducive to positive outcomes? What explains cases where relationships have performed less well?
4. What can be learned for support to think tanks, to universities, and to policy research more broadly?

This synthesis report does not aim to systematically answer all of these ambitious questions, as the extent to which the regional studies were able to fully respond to each of them varied considerably. The report also does not attempt to provide generalised responses to these questions across regions, as the situation varies from region to region, and indeed from country to country, at times significantly. Rather, this report aims to draw out common lessons and major findings of the regional studies that address some of the above questions, drawing some examples from the country-level research, and placing a particular emphasis on lessons and recommendations that might provide guidance for think tanks, universities, and the organisations that support them.[1]

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[1] For region-specific details, the reader is invited to refer to the regional reports themselves, which are available on the Think Tank Initiative's website: http://www.thinktankinitiative.org

2. Methodology of the Regional Reports

The three regional studies were conducted independently, each with its own research design. The methods employed by the research teams in each region and the countries covered by the regional studies are summarised in Table 1. All three studies focused on think tanks and university departments involved in social science research.

The African study, undertaken by the Partnership for African Social & Governance Research (PASGR), Kenya, employed a mixed quantitative and qualitative approach in ten countries, as well as a literature review. The quantitative portion of the research involved a common survey administered to representatives of think tanks, universities, and third-party organisations that either provide funding to or use research outputs from think tanks and universities. These statistical results were complemented by interviews and focus group discussions, and finally, the findings were shared and

validated at a workshop with senior staff members from universities and think tanks.

The Latin American regional study was conducted jointly by Grupo FARO, an Ecuadorian think tank, and the Centro de Políticas Comparadas de Educación, a research centre at the Universidad Diego Portales in Chile. This team focused on nine countries, selected to include the three major sub-regions – Central America, the Andean countries, and the Southern Cone – as well as variety of country sizes and research traditions. This regional study also took a mixed approach, with the quantitative portion centred on bibliometric and webometric analyses. Bibliometrics revealed articles in indexed journals published jointly by universities and think tanks, a direct indicator of collaboration between the two types of institutions.[2] Webometrics was used to uncover connections between think tanks' and universities' websites – a proxy indicating a relationship, though not a direct indicator of collaboration. The qualitative portion of

Table 1: Summary of research methods employed in each region

	Africa	Latin America	South Asia
Quantitative	• Common survey and data entry tool across ten countries.	• Bibliometric and webometric analyses.	• Bangladesh: n/a • India: survey administered to 12 think tanks and 3 universities. • Pakistan: quantitative interview administered to 15 think tanks and 17 university departments.
Qualitative	• Interviews: representatives of 65 universities and 90 think tanks • Focus group discussions: 12 universities and 6 think tanks in 8 of the selected countries. • Interviews: 64 third-party organisations • Findings sharing and validation workshop with 65 senior staff from universities and think tanks.	One qualitative study in each country: • Description of think tanks and universities and the evolution of relationships between them. • Overview of regulatory framework. • Three case studies of examples of relationships between think tanks and universities, including at least one with less successful outcomes.	• Bangladesh: 21 key informant interviews; 3 institutional case studies. • India: focus group discussions, indepth interviews in 11 think tanks and 3 universities. • Pakistan: 32 indepth, semistructured interviews with senior staff in think tanks and universities.
Countries	Benin, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Uganda, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Zimbabwe	Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Guatemala, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay	Bangladesh, India, Pakistan

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[2] A limitation of this method was that the vast majority of the journals in this analysis were English-language publications, in which Latin American institutions do not frequently publish.

the research involved nine country studies, each of which included a description of the knowledge environment as it relates to think tanks and universities in that country, and at least three cases of specific examples of collaboration between think tanks and universities.

In South Asia, research teams took slightly different approaches in the three countries involved in the study: Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan. In Bangladesh, a qualitative approach was used. Twenty-one key informant interviews were conducted with senior staff members in Dhaka, where most think tanks and universities have a base, and institutional case studies were undertaken in three institutions with different typologies – two think tanks, and Dhaka University. In India, the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies undertook a mixed approach, administering quantitative surveys in twelve think tanks and three universities, and conducting focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with directors and senior faculty. Finally, in Pakistan, the Sustainable Development Policy Institute looked at fifteen think tanks and seventeen university departments in five cities, conducting semi-structured interviews with senior staff that included both a quantitative and qualitative section.

Each regional report also used a slightly different conceptual framework in analysing the relationships between think tanks and universities (which can be found in the Appendix). This study refers to elements of the regional frameworks, but does not attempt to create a generalised framework applicable across all regions.

3. Comparing and Contrasting Universities and Think Tanks

What is a think tank?

The authors of the three regional studies did not generate a single definition of a think tank, indicative perhaps of the fairly wide range of institutional types that may be labelled as "think tanks." The studies cite McGann, who defines think tanks as "public-policy research analysis and engagement organizations that generate policy-oriented research, analysis, and advice" (2013, p. 15). To this, Abelson adds that they are "generally nonprofit, nonpartisan organizations" (2009, p. 9),

and Rich, that they are "independent" and that they aim, through expertise and ideas, "to gain support and influence the processes of policy formulation" (2005). However, what is also made clear in all three reports is that there is enormous variation between think tanks, both in their levels of independence from other institutions, including governments and universities, and in their goals and objectives. The African regional study considers four broad types of think tanks: university-affiliated, being situated within a university; government-affiliated, receiving all of their funding from the governments and sometimes formally remaining part of government structures; otherwise-affiliated, being linked to another institution, such as a political party; and independent.

The Think Tank Initiative itself defines a think tank (based on the institutions which it supports) as "an independent, non-governmental organization that conducts rigorous and impartial research; is not financially dependent on a single source of funds; is nonpartisan and politically neutral; is committed to publishing research findings in the public domain; and has the ability to set an independent research agenda" (Think Tank Initiative, 2015, p. iv).

Although they vary greatly, there are some key characteristics that set think tanks apart from universities and that affect collaboration with universities. First, think tanks' primary purpose is to influence policy, and most do not have a primary focus on teaching. Second, think tanks tend to be more agile and flexible organisationally, and they also tend to be much smaller than universities. The authors of the South Asian report point out that think tanks' organisational structure can sometimes be flexible to a fault, for example, with informal hiring practices that can lead to poor records on equal opportunities and staff protection. A third key characteristic of think tanks is that their research focus tends to be on policy-relevant topics. As such, the intended audience of their work is often policymakers, and their thematic focus is usually narrower than that of universities. As a result of their more practical, applied orientation, think tanks' research is sometimes perceived as being less rigorous and independent. The regional studies authors, however, are quick to point out that in many cases this may be a false perception: it ignores the fact that many think tank staff were

either trained in or have worked for universities, and in fact many hold dual positions at both institutions (as shall be discussed later in this report), and so the rigour of the work they conduct as part of think tanks is likely up to par with the research conducted at universities.

Despite the above attempts at cleanly defining think tanks, the authors of the Latin American regional study argue that it is difficult to describe think tanks by listing a catalogue of their characteristics, since there is so much variation between different types of institutions. Instead, they propose that think tanks are made unique by "the social space they occupy, the roles they perform within it and relationships among each other" (Arellano & Bellettini, 2014, p. 10). The authors borrow Medvetz's (2012) contention that think tanks occupy a unique, privileged, and central 'interstitial position' between four broad social fields: politics, civil society, the media, and knowledge production. Their ability to carve out an autonomous, hybrid social space between these fields enables their autonomy.

The author of the South Asian regional synthesis report also refines the characteristic-based definitions of think tanks, arguing that what truly differentiates them from universities is that while universities are focused on the advancement of disciplinary research, think tanks' goal is the deployment of knowledge to address real-life problems (Wood, 2014, p. 26). This knowledge deployment remains quite academic for what Wood (2014) calls 'ideal-type' think tanks, which maintain a focus on theory and knowledge building. However, many South Asian think tanks face funding pressures that push them to seek out short-term consultancy-type work, leading to a shifting in their goals away from academic research and towards more applied, pragmatic work. The Latin American and African regional studies also hint at this being a problem for cash-strapped think tanks, and even occasionally universities, in their regions.

What is a university?
Unlike think tanks, universities can be quite clearly defined. The authors of the Latin American regional study describe them as:

… learning organizations that form and certify professionals and senior technicians, that communicate or disseminate knowledge that is transferred internally, and some of which also produce scientific-technical knowledge validated by members of disciplinary communities or specialized areas of knowledge and transfer it to various users in the economy, society and State. (Arellano & Bellettini, 2014, p. 8)

There are some key characteristics that set universities apart from think tanks, agreed upon across all three regions. First, they have a strong focus on teaching, which, in many cases, actually crowds out universities' role as generators of knowledge. In private universities in particular, high-quality teaching attracts students, who bring in tuition fees, and so research tends to be sidelined as a priority (for a discussion of the differences between public and private universities in Bangladesh, see Box 1). In the African study, 24% of the universities surveyed had in fact carried out no research projects in the previous five years, whereas this was not the case for any of the think tanks surveyed. Latin American and South Asian universities also experience this problem (see, for example, the case of Bangladesh – Box 1).

A second characteristic of universities that differentiates them from think tanks is their bureaucracy, which the reports variously describe as being 'rigid,' 'inflexible,' 'strongly institutionalised,' and 'highly regulated.' Universities also tend to be larger than think tanks, in terms of number of researchers and other staff, breadth of focus, organisational structures such as number of departments and faculties, etc.

Third, when universities do conduct research, the focus tends to be on theory development, rather than on topics that are oriented towards policy. In Africa, this is the primary difference between the activities of universities and think tanks: while roughly similar rates of each type of institution report having research,[3] training and education, and consultancy as areas of focus, only 69% of universities surveyed state that they have a focus on policy dialogue, compared to 92% of think tanks. However, this focus may be changing, with universities beginning to take more of an interest in policy-relevant research. The Latin American

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[3] It should be noted that having research as a focus area does not necessarily equate to engagement in research projects. This is especially true for universities, as discussed above..

authors contend that this increased complementarity in research focus may lead to more collaboration between think tanks and universities. On the other hand, the authors of the South Asian report point out that it may also lead to increased competition between these institutions. Universities' research focus also tends to be very broad, covering a range of disciplines, and the goal is to publish research in academic journals, representing a wider audience than for think tanks, which primarily target policymakers.

Box 1: Public and private universities in Bangladesh

Research at Bangladesh's 34 public universities tends to be under-funded, but these institutions are nevertheless considered the "guarantors of quality knowledge production" (Maitrot, 2014, p. 16). The country's 76 private universities do not enjoy this reputation for the most part. In fact, with a few exceptions, private Bangladeshi universities produce little to no research – teaching takes precedence as an institutional priority, and there are few, if any, systems in place to encourage the generation of quality research outputs.

Public universities, meanwhile, tend to be strongly engaged in politics, with academic staff and even students publically declaring their political affiliations. This can affect recruitment and promotion, and, as a result, research. The Bangladesh country study found that many research participants believed that this encroachment of politics "affects the independence, impartiality, and autonomy of knowledge production within public universities" (Maitrot, 2014, p. 17). This is generally not the case at private universities, where the financial bottom line outweighs any political involvement, and most institutions remain politically neutral. Staff salaries also tend to be higher, and organisational systems, more entrenched. Private universities also frequently serve as knowledge providers to the private sector on an on-demand basis, prioritising short-term consultancy-type work in order to mobilise financial resources.

The characteristics of both public and private universities in Bangladesh can hinder relationships with think tanks: they shy away from associating with the strongly politicised public universities, while private university staff prefer consultancy work, which is often more lucrative and seen as more prestigious, rather than embarking on policy-related work with think tanks. Indeed, while the research incentives at public and private universities may differ, the result for both types of institutions is little institutional engagement in the policy sphere. However, on an individual level, university staff often engage directly in the policy sphere through their political activities, or through consultancy work with civil society organisations, including think tanks. Indeed, taking on work outside of their university duties is a common strategy for university staff that wish to publish more papers and supplement their income. As a result, the connections that do exist between universities and think tanks often rely heavily on individual relationships.

The Latin American study examines universities' and think tanks' relationships with Medvetz's (2012) four social fields, contrasting think tanks' 'interstitial' position with universities' dominance mostly in the field of knowledge production:

Table 2: Universities' and think tanks' relationships with Medvetz's four social fields
(adapted from Arellano & Bellettini, 2014, pp. 28-9)

Social Field	Universities	Think tanks
Quantitative	• Dominant: they are institutionalised in this sphere, and have autonomy and fiscal resources. • They produce expert knowledge.	• Subordinate: they have limited autonomy. • They must obtain personnel, funds, influence from other fields.
Politics	• Generate and transfer knowledge, produce research. • Not as easily integrated nor as influential as think tanks.	• Intermediates between knowledge production field and political field: package, transfer, and disseminate information, mobilise issues and influence policy. • More easily integrated than universities.
Civil society	• Face symbolic borders with civil society and are usually closer to the political field.	• Represent civil society groups, act in their interest.
Media	• Influence the discipline. • Do not engage widely in public intellectual communications.	• Occupy a central position: use media for advocacy. • Media is necessary for influence, prestige, fundraising, and visibility in media is often an impact indicator.

4. Regional Contexts

The nature of the knowledge environment is shaped by all of the institutions that operate within it – not only universities and think tanks. In particular, the environment can be impacted by the institutions that generate demand for research, whether actively, for example by commissioning specific research projects, or passively, by consuming research outputs and constituting an audience for research results. When it comes to policy research, government is without a doubt the most powerful such actor. As well, the knowledge environment can be sculpted by the actions and decisions of the institutions that offer funding to research organisations. This may also include government, as well as domestic or foreign non-governmental donors, as well as the private sector.

Naturally, there is tremendous variation in the nature of the knowledge environment from country to country, as each of the three regional reports details. However, three characteristics of the knowledge environment stand out as having a particular impact on think tanks and universities: the degree of autonomy they enjoy; the level of demand for their policy research; and the nature of funding available to them. These three themes are strongly inter-related, as shall be discussed below.

If these characteristics of the knowledge environment impact think tanks and universities individually, then they can also shape the nature and extent of relationships between them. For example, a stifled environment, where dissenting opinions are discouraged or where there is low demand for policy research, would decrease the amount of policy research being produced in general, lessening the number of opportunities for collaboration. As well, the characteristics of the knowledge environment might affect think tanks and universities differently, since they operate under different incentives, as discussed above. This might also warp the nature of the relationships between these two types of institutions. Finally, if funders prefer offering support to one

type of institution over another, or if their funding is shaped in ways that either encourage or discourage collaboration, this too may impact how universities and think tanks relate. The remainder or this section shall explore each of these three important characteristics of the knowledge environment.

Autonomy

In some countries, the political environment is hostile to criticism and open debate, either due to extreme political polarisation or to a government that actively discourages or suppresses voices that oppose it. The extent to which this occurs varies by country, but it is noted as being particularly problematic in several of the African nations included in the study.

Many countries surveyed in the African regional study followed a similar historical path, with research environments flourishing in the years immediately after independence, followed by a crackdown by governments fearful of having their policies criticised and authority challenged (Kimenyi & Datta, 2011; Mkandawire, 2000; Rashid, 1994; Sawyerr, 2004). Several countries have now seen a reversal of this trend, with a more relaxed political atmosphere – Kenya, Tanzania, and Nigeria are among

the examples cited in the regional study. As well, South Africa is held up as a shining example within Africa, with a generally positive and open political environment, and a correspondingly high number of collaborations between universities and think tanks.

In other countries, meanwhile, the political atmosphere remains somewhat hostile to independent research that may challenge the status quo. For example, in Uganda, Zimbabwe, and Ethiopia, the policy environment is tightly controlled, and freedom of speech is perceived as more limited in comparison with other African countries (see Box 2 for the case of Ethiopia). In Zimbabwe, the political environment is so highly polarised that institutions would hesitate to partner with an organisation considered anti-government. In Uganda, think tanks might consider carefully the risks associated with collaborating with government-affiliated universities, while universities in turn might be cautious of collaborating with think tanks critical of the government.

Demand for research

In many national contexts, the problem is not so much that critical voices are actively stifled, but rather that governments simply do not commonly turn to evidence and research as a basis for designing policies. As is argued in the South

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Box 2: The case of Ethiopia

The research sector in Ethiopia has long been the object of suspicion by successive governments, which have feared that research institutions might "agitate for regime change" and contribute to political instability in the country (Abebe & Aga, n.d., p. 3). Unlike in many neighbouring countries, this suspicion has not significantly abated over time, amid concerns about influence of external actors via funding from outside the country. In 2009, Ethiopia enacted a new Charities and Societies Proclamation that restricts civil society organisations receiving more than 10% of their funding from foreign sources from engaging in a variety of activities surrounding democratic and human rights (Amnesty International, 2012). This has had a notable impact on the operations of think tanks, which are subject to this law, as well as on the relationship between think tanks and universities, especially with regards to their collaboration on activities related to government policy.

Indeed, four of the seven think tanks surveyed that had engaged in policy dialogue activities with universities in the past five years reported that the trend in this type of collaboration was decreasing. The reasons given included the restrictive nature of the new Charities and Societies Proclamation, as well as a perceived lack of interest by the government in policy-related research. Challenges to collaboration on policy dialogue cited by survey respondents included a "ceiling by government on policy dialogue," "limited policy space for warm policy dialogue," and "low cooperation from government bodies to engage in policy dialogue" (Abebe & Aga, n.d., p. 22). At the level of collaboration between researchers, 70% of individuals surveyed from universities and 65% from think tanks reported not having participated in policy dialogue activities at all in the past five years. It appears, therefore, that the Charities and Societies Proclamation may very well be having a chilling effect on policy-related research as well as on think tanks' and universities' ability and willingness to collaborate on these issues.

Asian study, the role of institutions such as think tanks and universities ought to be one of intermediary between the state and the people – the state should use these institutions' research as a means of helping them formulate and choose those policies that are best suited to addressing the people's most pressing needs.

Instead, in South Asia, the studies found that policies are often based not on evidence but on patronage and the vested interests of powerful actors, including political parties, labour unions, religious and sectarian groups, and the military. This is especially the case in Pakistan and Bangladesh, as compared to India. As a result, the climate in South Asia is one in which "the internal mechanisms for the assessment of policy choices in relation to the interests of vast sections of the population are generally weak" (Wood, 2014, p. 10). The low value placed on evidence-based policymaking means that there is little to no demand for policy research from the government. This can be particularly detrimental to think tanks, which are primarily focused on research, whereas universities can fall back upon their teaching role to generate the income necessary to survive.

On the other hand, the Latin American study points out an increasing trend in this region toward the "Weberian secularization, rationalization, intellectualization, bureau-cratization and specialization (…) [in] contemporary societies" (Arellano & Bellettini, 2014, p. 31). This is analogous to the push in South Asia toward increased "Value for Money" in public spending, which emphasises results and impact. Both of these trends may strengthen governments' desire to base policies on evidence and to measure their results and impacts, implying an increased demand for policy research. In Africa, demand for research is also generally low, with many governments not relying on evidence to form policies. South Africa stands apart, where the government has quite a strong focus on research, and regularly consults with researchers on policy issues. Kenya, too, shows these consultative trends to some extent.

Funding

Funding for research can come from many sources, including the government – of course in countries where critical voices are stifled or there is little demand for research, government funding for research is concomitantly low. For countries with very poor economic situations, the problem is exacerbated. In Zimbabwe, for example, there is limited funding available for either think tanks or universities, with think tanks undertaking a great amount of consultancy work just to raise the resources necessary to survive. In Mozambique, university wages are so low that staff spend more time on consultancies than on academic research – ironically, very often with donor-supported think tanks. In Bangladesh and Pakistan (although less so in India), think tanks and universities also tend to receive very limited government funding, and so are reliant upon donors, as is the case for think tanks in Senegal and Benin. Policy choices can also play a role in restricting funding to research institutions. For example, in Ethiopia, the inflexible policy environment includes laws that classify non-government affiliated think tanks as NGOs, subjecting them to regulations that severely restrict the amount of foreign funding they can accept. As well, structural adjustment programs advocating austerity have led to funding cuts to research institutions.

When core funding is not available, institutions rely on donors and consultancies. However, dependency on short-term project funding can have the perverse effect of causing research priorities to be donor-driven, rather than based on the issues representing the most pressing local needs. Moreover, unless donors themselves value collaboration between think tanks and universities, project-based funding often leaves few resources available for the facilitation of a formal relationship.

5. THE NATURE OF RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN
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5. The Nature of Relationships between Universities and Think Tanks

Although university-think tank relationships take various forms, the regional studies, and therefore, this synthesis report, focus primarily on collaboration (or cooperation) between think tanks and universities. Collaboration generally is understood as a desirable phenomenon, since it is perceived to carry the potential for better outcomes for both types of institutions, as shall be discussed in this section. The authors of the regional studies point to several direct advantages of collaboration, such as higher-quality research outputs, mutual capacity development, increased credibility for both institutions, and a wider scope of research. Moreover, relationships are sometimes encouraged by third parties, including donors, who may prefer outputs resulting from collaboration between universities and think tanks.

However, some authors have made a distinction between different types of relationships between these two institutions, which are worth mentioning here – if only to highlight that not all forms of relationships are necessarily desirable or productive; and perhaps also to indicate that further inquiry may still be needed to unpack understandings of these relationships.

Models of relationships
All three regional studies describe the idealised relationship between think tanks and universities as lying on a spectrum between cooperation and competition, though each region uses a different framework to illustrate the range of possible relationships. The African and South Asian regional studies borrow Najam's (2000) framework conceptualising the relationship between governments and non-governmental organisations, contrasting their ends, or goals, and their means, or strategies:

Figure 1: Conceptual framework describing the possible relationships between universities and think tanks (Najam, 2000)		
	Similar ends	**Dissimilar ends**
Similar means	Cooperation	Co-optation
Dissimilar means	Complementarity	Confrontation

Cooperation (or collaboration), when there is convergence of both means and ends, and confrontation, when there is divergence of both means and ends, are relatively clear categories. When institutions share similar ends but prefer to employ dissimilar means to achieve these ends, the relationship is one of complementarity: together, the institutions pursue the common goal, but each uses the means, or methods, in which it has a comparative advantage. Najam (2000) illustrates this with the example of an NGO and a government both trying to improve basic sanitation in an urban slum, the NGO employing bottom-up, grassroots strategies, and the government, top-down, engineering-based methods. Finally, when institutions share similar means but dissimilar ends, the result can be co-optation. The example given by Najam (2000) is friction between NGOs and government agencies that are both attempting to provide basic services in the same country (similar means). A major goal of the government, however, may be to solidify support for the ruling party amongst service recipients, and some party members might perceive the NGOs' objective as promoting plural democracy. If a clampdown on the NGOs were to ensue (confrontation), and some NGOs caved to pressure and became overtly sympathetic to the government and ruling party – they would have been co-opted.

Expanding on the cooperation/confrontation spectrum, the regional studies employ different conceptual frameworks to illustrate think tank-university dynamics, examples of which can be found in the Appendix. These models take into account some of the regional particularities of think tank-university relationships. The African study builds into its model four broad areas of collaboration: research; training and education; policy dialogue; and consultancies. In Africa, there is much more collaboration on research and training/education than on policy dialogue and consultancies (Partnership for African Social & Governance Research, 2014). In Latin America, the authors include in their model the other institutions in the knowledge environment, and they illustrate think tanks' privileged 'interstitial' position within this environment (Medvetz, 2012). One of the conceptual frameworks used in the Latin American report also demonstrates the generally weak linkages between think tanks and universities in this region (Arellano & Bellettini, 2014, p. 12). In South Asia, the final conceptual framework

reflects the mixed picture in the region. In Bangladesh and Pakistan, where the research sector is relatively weak and donor-dependent, think tanks are very often reduced to consultancies, and do not interact much with universities. Meanwhile, in India, where there is a much better funded and more well-established research sector, the links between universities and think tanks are relatively strong.

Individual and institutional incentives for collaboration

When universities' and think tanks' objectives match, and they enter into cooperative or complementary relationships, these collaborations often take the form of informal relationships between individuals, though they may also represent more formalised relationships between institutions. In all three regional studies, informal collaboration based on relationships between individuals predominates. This is no doubt because formal, institutional collaboration requires much more effort to build, given the mismatch in universities' and think tanks' organisational structures. Think tanks tend to be smaller and more agile than bureaucracy-heavy universities, and so the latter have more difficulty responding quickly and flexibly to research and funding requests; individual researchers, meanwhile, can avoid the heavy university bureaucracy by informally working together.

Individual incentives

There are a number of incentives for collaboration that researchers at think tanks and universities face, but they can be summed up in three main categories. First, collaboration opens up research opportunities. This is particularly important in Africa, where academics employed at universities conduct more research in collaboration with think tanks and other institutions than as part of their official university role. As noted earlier, research is strongly crowded out by teaching at many African universities. Collaboration may also give researchers the chance to undertake different types of research: more applied, policy-oriented work for university academics, and more theoretical work for think tank researchers.

Second, individuals may pursue collaboration with colleagues at different institutions in order to boost their status as researchers. Increased research opportunities may translate into the chance to produce more publications, an important marker of status in the academic setting. In addition, as the African regional study points out, for think tank staff, working with university researchers may confer a degree of academic distinction, as research conducted at universities is perceived as being more rigorous and credible, inspired by a public

Box 3: A Collaborative "bright spot" from Pakistan: the Sustainable Development Policy Institute

The Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) is one of Pakistan's most well-established think tanks. It is also a Think Tank Initiative grant recipient and the leader of the Pakistan country study for the current project examining the relationship between think tanks and universities. This think tank has collaborated extensively with foreign and domestic universities, primarily on dissemination and policy advocacy activities, and also on research projects.

For example, a research project looking at livelihoods in resource-scarce areas and the inclusion of marginal groups was undertaken with the University of Agriculture, Faisalabad (UAF). The two institutions jointly conducted the research and analysis for the externally funded project, and SDPI led the dissemination and policy engagement activities. The partnership was fruitful, and eventually led to further collaboration between the two institutions, with SDPI's Executive Director appointed as an Adjunct Professor at UAF and supervising doctoral research.

While formal collaboration with a university on a research project is not very common for SDPI, the think tank does frequently engage with universities on activities related to policy advocacy and the dissemination of research results. Most notably, SDPI hosts the annual Sustainable Development Conference, at which nearly one third of speakers are from universities and another third from other think tanks.

SDPI is also an example where reliable, core funding – provided by the Swiss National Science Foundation and by IDRC's Think Tank Initiative – has enabled researchers to focus on non-commissioned policy research, which the institution reports has led to increased interest from universities to engage in collaborative activities with the think tank.

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sense of institutional legitimacy. Third, researchers may pursue work with other institutions simply to supplement their income, which in many institutions is quite low.

Institutional incentives
Although formal, institutional collaboration is difficult to implement, there are of course different incentives for this to occur. Think tanks can benefit from universities' stronger research capacity, increasing the quality of their own research outputs. Think tanks' credibility can also be strengthened through associations with universities, as these are perceived as having more rigorous academic standards. For universities as well, working with established think tanks can lead to an increase in credibility, especially if they wish to enter the arena of policy-relevant research. Think tanks can also solicit funds for joint research projects, which universities often have more difficulty in accessing. Moreover, in Africa, researchers at universities point out that end users often prefer work that is done jointly with think tanks. And the South Asian study points out that the increasing popularity of trans-disciplinary university degrees means that think tank researchers, who tend to work across the disciplines in their research, are well placed to provide input into the design and teaching of these degrees.

The authors of the regional studies caution, however, that in instances where formal collaboration does occur, it is important that the institutions take into account the drivers of collaboration at the researcher level. This can help ensure sustainability of the collaboration in the longer term.

Relationships through talent sharing
Another important driver of relationships between think tanks and universities is the fact that they often share talent. Cross-employment is quite common, with staff employed full-time in one institution and part-time in another. Employees also frequently move from one type of institution to the other. The institutions benefit from this staff sharing and rotation, as researchers bring with them fresh skills and experience as well as the credibility of the other institution. Individual staff members, meanwhile, may pursue better job stability at universities, or better pay at think tanks. Researchers may also switch to a different institution in order to pursue new types of research, or, in the case of university staff moving to

think tanks, for increased flexibility and the ability to focus on policy-relevant topics.

Another source of talent sharing occurs with the movement of students. Think tank staff return to universities to undertake advanced degrees, while university students move to think tanks to pursue internships, temporary research projects, and careers. The authors of the Latin American study point out that both think tanks and universities engage in the "formation of advanced human capital": universities undertake the "initial professionalization," while think tanks do workplace training (Arellano & Bellettini, 2014, p. 14). This complementary relationship constitutes a catch-22 for think tanks when trying to attract university researchers as staff members, since depleting the talent pool at universities may erode the formation of future researchers, and hence, future think tank staff.

Barriers to collaboration, and recommendations for overcoming these barriers
Besides mismatched ends or means, numerous barriers stand in the way of collaboration between think tanks and universities. This section addresses the three main hurdles, and proposes solutions.

Lack of a culture of collaboration
Because think tanks and universities do not engage in collaboration very often, there is a lack of guidance available to these institutions when they do wish to engage in collaboration. In other words, there is the "lack of a deliberate and formalised collaborative culture" (Partnership for African Social & Governance Research, 2014, p. 33) between think tanks and universities. This results in a lack of awareness about one another's strengths and a mutual suspicion of motives: think tanks are perceived as being biased and lacking in rigour, while universities are seen as being out of touch with pressing policy issues.

Solutions
Practically speaking, the most important element when engaging in collaboration is a clear definition of roles and an agreed-upon agenda. For example, the National Council of Applied Economic Research, an Indian think tank, has a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Survey

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Research Centre at the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research. The two institutions will cooperate on research methodologies, technologies, and research initiatives, and the MoU clearly outlines which activities will be undertaken as part of this collaboration, as well as the role of each institution (Banerjee, Mishra, & Sabharwal, 2014, p. 99).

To incite collaboration, however, increased communication is needed for think tanks and universities to become aware of each other's motives and comparative advantages. This requires resources – for meetings and communications technologies. As well, the authors of the African study recommend building knowledge platforms to harness best practices in collaboration and to demonstrate positive outcomes. This might be a role for donors, they argue. However, the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), a Pakistani think tank, demonstrates that such platforms need not be donor driven: its annual Sustainable Development Conference brings together participants from think tanks, universities, and many other institutions, to "interact with each other, suggest policy recommendations and enter into ongoing policy dialogue" (Naveed & Suleri, 2014, p. 46).

An important step that universities might take would be to shift their own organisational cultures, encouraging more collaboration. This might require placing more emphasis on research over teaching, and valuing policy impact, not simply academic publications. This is already beginning to occur in some South Asian universities, which are feeling pressured to offer more inter-disciplinary, policy-relevant degrees, such as 'sustainable development,' 'climate change,' and 'public policy and governance.' Moreover, in India, it is common for universities to include think tank staff on advisory boards and adjunct faculty, in an attempt to orient themselves towards policy impact (Wood, 2014, p. 30). Another step universities can take is to lighten their bureaucracies, which would simplify any attempts at collaboration.

Finally, third party organisations, including donors, may wish to favour collaborative work and design funding opportunities for collaboration. However, they should also be extremely careful not to warp the relationships that already exist between think tanks and universities, or push institutions into unhappy partnerships that they may not wish to enter into. Ideally, institutions should seek collaborative funding

opportunities after they have come to the decision to work together, rather than have collaboration be driven by funding opportunities.

Funding
A general lack of resources constitutes the second major barrier to collaboration between think tanks and universities. As discussed above, formal, institutional relationships are difficult to establish and maintain, and they therefore require the investment of time and resources by both institutions. However, these overhead costs are rarely covered by project-based funding. What funding does exist also tends to be unpredictable: donor agendas are unstable, deadlines for proposals are short, and project targets change while work is in progress. Finally, when institutions are reliant on donor funding, research agendas can become donor-driven, which can mean inflexibility in the ability to collaborate.

Besides the problem of a lack of resources, funding models are also different and not always compatible between universities, think tanks, and donors. This poses the most significant problem to universities, as their heavy bureaucracy means they are less agile, and therefore less able to act quickly to access funding, or to be flexible to accommodate collaborative funding opportunities.

Solutions
If they wish to encourage further collaboration between think tanks and universities, funders should consider the advantages of providing flexible, core, long-term funding, allowing grantees to choose if they want to collaborate, and with whom. IDRC's Think Tank Initiative provides a prime example of this funding model, and many of the think tanks it supports do indeed collaborate with universities, as well as with other think tanks.

Donors should also encourage government and private sector actors to invest in research in their own right, in order to build their own capacity, and, in the case of government, to inform policy decisions. Arellano and Bellettini (2014) propose that legislation could provide incentives for private sector investment in research. They point to the cases of Brazil, where tax incentives encourage private companies to invest in cultural and sporting activities, and in Uruguay, where companies donating to universities receive similar tax

breaks. However, at the moment, private Brazilian donors do not invest in research, and donations to Uruguayan think tanks are not eligible for tax breaks (Arellano & Bellettini, 2014, pp. 34–35). Another example comes from recent legislation in India requiring companies to invest 2% of their net profits in corporate social responsibility (Prasad, 2014). This regulation has the potential to lead to new and welcome flows of funds to think tanks to undertake socially oriented research.

Finally, funders should strive to be more efficient as a group by coordinating amongst themselves, in order to minimise duplication and align their interests in ways that support collaboration.

Capacity

The studies indicate that think tank and university staff generally lack the capacity to develop and manage collaborative projects. This is particularly important in the case of institutional collaboration, which requires more management than individual, informal collaboration. In addition, there is a lack of research capacity in general, which can also hinder collaboration: younger researchers often lack mentorship, and senior researchers are vulnerable to the brain drain, leaving think tanks and universities for the private sector, or for developed countries.

Solutions

Think tanks and universities should review, and if needed, increase the amount of human resources dedicated to facilitating collaboration, so that staff are not overly burdened in their management responsibilities. Researchers should also be offered opportunities for capacity building, especially with regards to their research ability, thus increasing their attractiveness to each other. Think tanks and universities can collaborate by training one another's staff in the areas in which they have a comparative advantage, as in the abovementioned case of NCAER's collaboration with the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research's Survey Research Centre, during which the think tank will receive training in survey-based research methodologies (Banerjee et al., 2014, p. 100). Another Indian example comes from the Centre for Study of Science, Technology and Policy, which receives research advice from the faculty of the Indian Institute of Science, a university with which it has a memorandum of understanding (Banerjee

et al., 2014, p. 98). A further recommendation arising from the regional studies is that think tanks employ university staff not only to work on projects, which they already do, but also to mentor their younger researchers.

Finally, to increase universities' and think tanks' capacities to collaborate, funders should identify ways to target resources for think tanks and universities to accomplish all of this: for strengthening their human resources, for undertaking capacity building, and for engaging in sharing and technical exchanges with one another.

6. Conclusion

This synthesis report provides an overview of the relationships between think tanks and universities, as explored by the regional studies commissioned by the Think Tank Initiative in Africa, Latin America, and South Asia. These relationships can and do take many forms throughout the countries in these regions. In particular, the institutions themselves – and therefore the relationships between them – are strongly impacted by the country-specific knowledge environments in which they operate. The most important influences appear to be: the degree of autonomy institutions face in setting their agendas and in conducting research that may find fault in government policies; the strength of demand for research outputs from government and from other institutions, such as the private sector; and the amount of funding – and especially core funding – that these institutions are able to access.

One feature of the relationship between these two types of institutions that does run throughout the regional studies is that collaboration overwhelmingly appears to be informal and based on relationships between individual researchers. Formal, institutional relationships, while perhaps more sustainable, are nonetheless difficult to establish for several reasons, not the least of which is the heavy bureaucratic structure of universities. This often hinders universities' ability to engage in flexible work relationships with think tanks and take advantage of funding opportunities. Nonetheless, institutional collaboration may be desirable to both think tanks and universities, which may benefit from increased capacity,

higher-quality outputs, and opportunities for joint funding. Individuals, meanwhile, are better able to work together across institutions without engaging with their organisations' bureaucracies. They may find various incentives to do so, including a higher number of and more varied research opportunities, the potential to publish, an increase in status by association with another institution, and additional income.

Broader barriers to cooperation between think tanks and universities also emerge across the three regional studies. First, there is a lack of a culture of collaboration between think tanks and universities, leading to a mutual lack of awareness of each other's strengths and suspicion of each other's motives. Second, there is a general lack of funding available to think tanks and universities, and resources are necessary to facilitate formal collaboration. Funding also tends to be unpredictable and unstable, and universities and think tanks often have funding models that are incompatible with one another, hindering collaboration. Finally, both types of institutions tend to lack the capacity to manage collaborative projects, further hindering cooperation.

Areas for future research

This project merely scratches the surface of the many and varied relationships between universities and think tanks in the three regions under study, and it opens up many avenues for future exploration, some of which are highlighted in the regional study reports. The most obvious one might be to explore in more depth the non-collaborative relationships that exist between these two types of institutions, including competition and co-optation. Could greater competition become a useful promoter of collaboration between think tanks and universities under certain conditions? In what ways may the negative implications of co-optation be minimised? Country-specific and perhaps even case-based methods might be best suited to this line of inquiry, rather than the broad, far-reaching type of research undertaken for the current project.

Another interesting line of research might focus on the perspective of the funders and consumers of think tanks' and universities' research. Besides higher quality outputs, are there benefits to end users of research arising from work that is undertaken collaboratively? For donors, do think tanks and universities directly compete for research funding opportunities? If so, does this warp the relationship between these institutions? Can funders do anything to mitigate this? And finally, does providing funding to or commissioning research from exclusively one type of organisation impact think tank/university relationships, for example, drawing talent towards one type of institution?

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Appendix:
Conceptual Frameworks Describing the Relationship between Universities and Think Tanks

The three regional studies take different approaches to developing a framework describing the relationships between think tanks and universities, and the knowledge environment in which both types of institutions exist.

Africa

The African regional study begins by adapting Najam's (2000) "four C's" framework, originally developed to describe interaction between NGOs and the government, to think tank/university relationships:

Table 3: Possible relationships between think tanks and universities
(Partnership for African Social & Governance Research, 2014, p. 11; adapted and modified from Najam, 2000)

Possible combinations of goals (ends) and means (strategies)	Possible relationship	Explanation of the relationships at both institutional and individual levels
Similar ends with similar means	Cooperation	A cooperative relationship is likely when, on a given issue, think tanks and universities not only share similar goals but also prefer similar strategies for achieving them (A convergence of preferred ends as well as means).
Dissimilar ends with dissimilar means	Confrontation	A confrontational relationship is likely when think tanks and universities consider each other's goals and strategies to be antithetical to their own (Total divergence of preferred ends as well as means)
Similar ends but dissimilar means	Complementary	A complementary relationship is likely when think tanks and universities share similar goals but prefer different strategies (Divergent strategies but convergent goals).
Dissimilar ends but similar means	Co-optation	A co-optive relationship is likely when think tanks and universities share similar strategies but have different goals (divergent goals but convergent strategies). These kind of relationships are unstable and often transitory.

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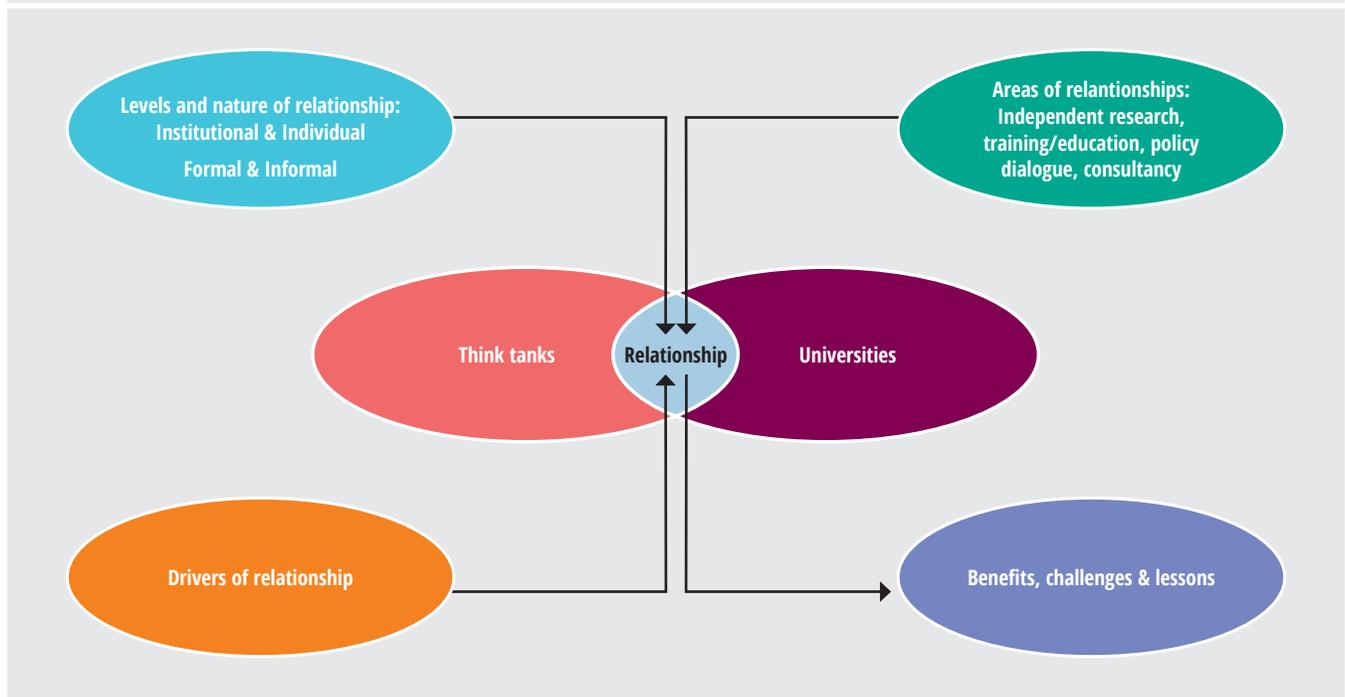Working Papers Series

Africa

In order to develop a conceptual framework, the authors add to these possible types of relationships the different levels that relationships can take – institutional or individual, formal or informal; the areas in which relationships may be formed – research, training or education, policy dialogue, and consultancy; and the drivers and outcomes of these interactions. This framework is presented in Figure 2:

**Figure 2: A framework for university-think tank relationships**
(Partnership for African Social & Governance Research, 2014, p.13)

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Latin America

In the Latin American report, Arellano and Bellettini (2014) consider think tanks and universities in the context of the broader policy knowledge sector, consisting of a number of different institutions:
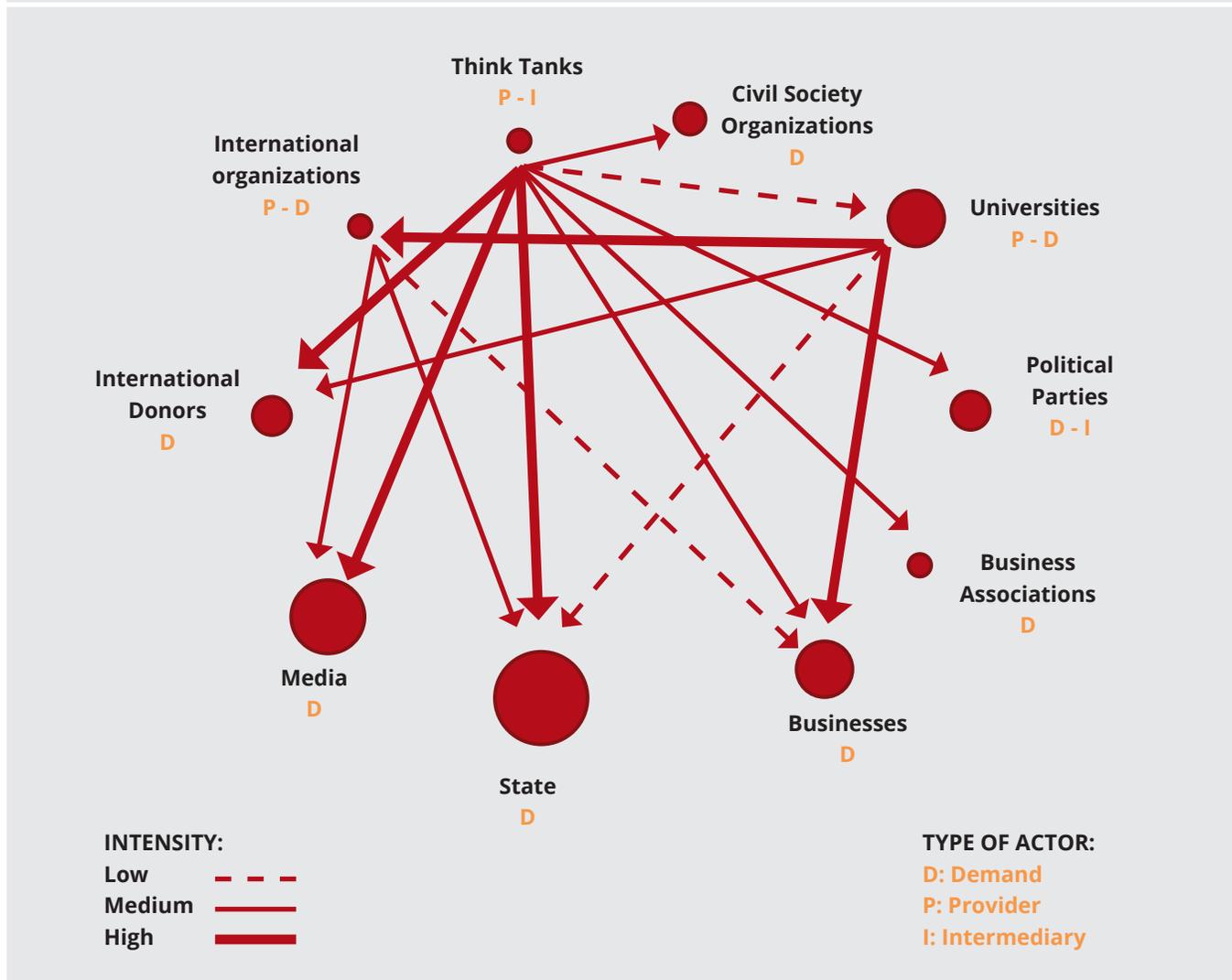
Figure 3: The knowledge sector as an ecosystem *(Arellano & Belletini, 2014, p. 6)*
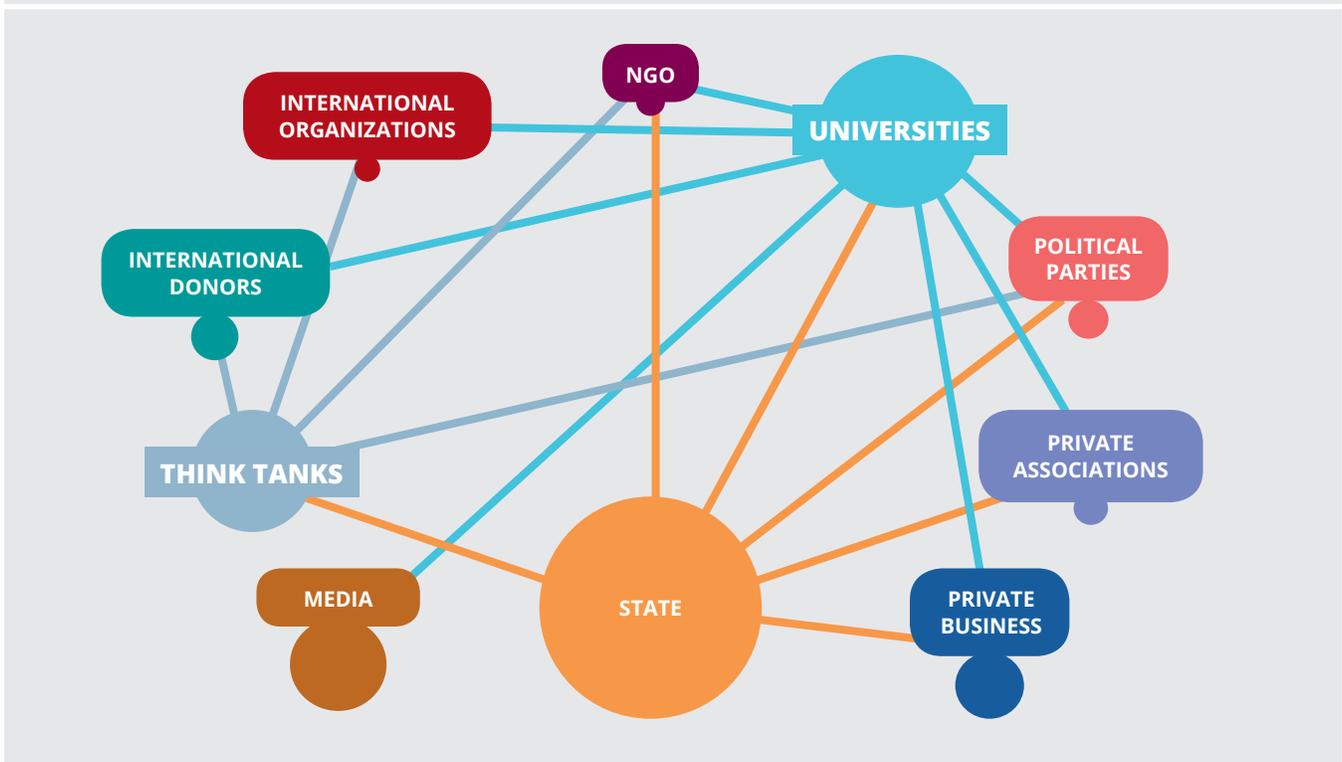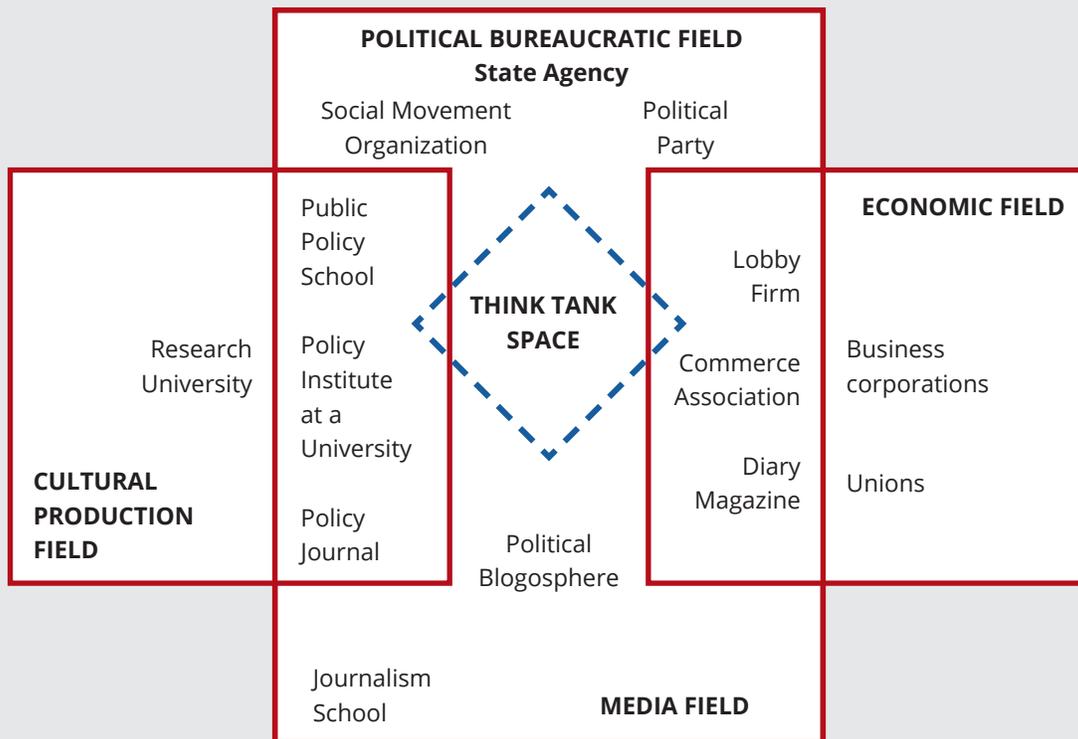
Latin America

The interactions between these entities in the Latin American context are further conceptualised in Figure 4. This framework identifies the intensity of these relationships, as well as which institutions are knowledge providers (P), knowledge seekers (or demanders, D), and intermediaries (I). As is evident in the diagram, the authors consider the relationship between think tanks and universities to be of low intensity in Latin America.

Figure 4: Links of think tanks and universities with other actors in society, based on their function in the knowledge ecosystem *(Arellano & Belletini 2014, p. 12)*

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Arellano and Bellettini (2014) further describe the privileged position of think tanks in the knowledge production space. Borrowing from Medvetz (2012), they note that think tanks occupy an 'interstitial position' between the four main fields that make up the knowledge production space: the political/bureaucratic, economic, cultural production, and media fields (Figure 5). This position lends think tanks power and autonomy (Medvetz, 2012).

Figure 5: Think tanks in the social space *(Arellano & Bellettini, 2014, p. 21; adapted from Medvetz, 2012, p. 37)*

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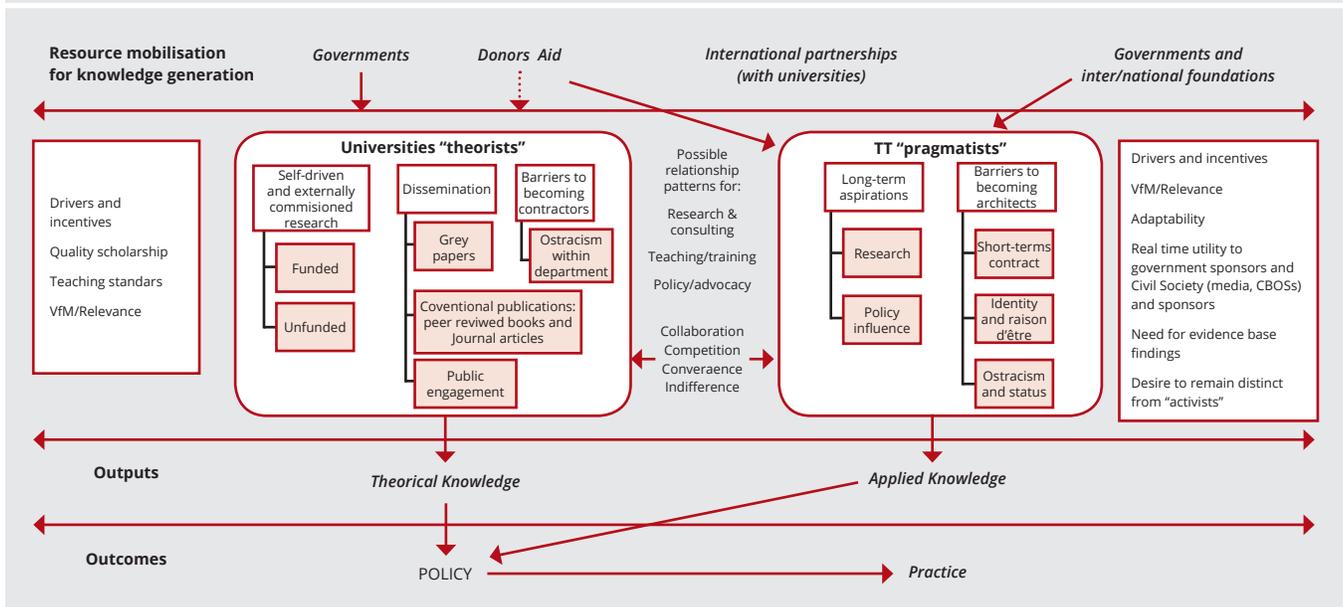
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South Asia

In the case of South Asia, Wood (2014) begins with an initial conceptual framework that builds on the idealised notion of think tanks as pragmatists and universities as theorists (Figure 6). This framework situates the two types of institutions in relation to one another and to other institutions in the research environment, and it describes the landscape of constraints and incentives in which they operate.
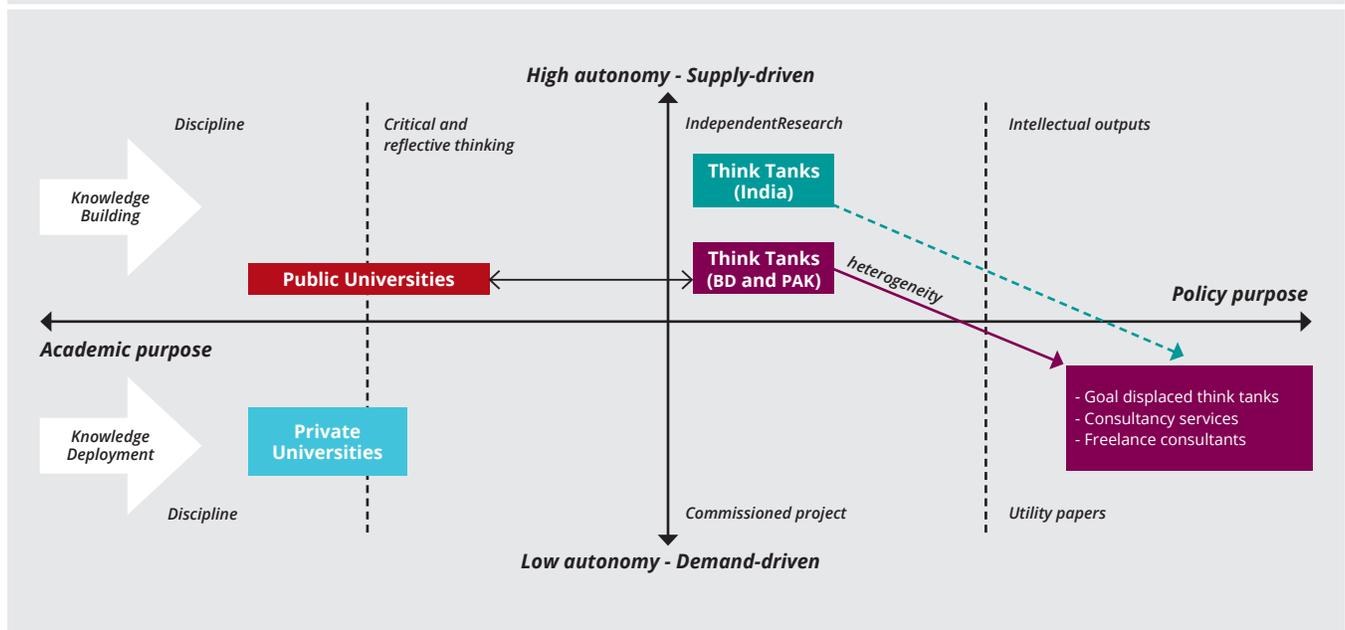
By the end of the South Asian report, the author has refined the pragmatist/theorist dichotomy, and presents a revised framework (Figure 7). Instead, Wood (2014) draws a distinction between 'genuine' think tanks, and think tanks that have seen their goals displaced for a variety of reasons – including a lack of core funding. These 'genuine' think tanks are just as much in the business of autonomous knowledge building as public universities, according to the author, although their purpose of their research is to influence policy rather than academe. 'Genuine' think tanks and public universities have a high degree of autonomy, and their work is supply-driven. Meanwhile, goal displaced think tanks are rather more like consultancies in that they lack autonomy and their work is demand-driven: they deploy, rather than generate, knowledge. Similarly, private universities, which are focused primarily on teaching, may also act as demand-driven knowledge deployers, undertaking research projects on an ad-hoc basis.

Figure 6: Initial conceptual framework

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South Asia

Figure 7: Revised conceptual framework

High autonomy - Supply-driven

Discipline *Critical and reflective thinking* *IndependentResearch* *Intellectual outputs*

Knowledge Building

Think Tanks (India)

Public Universities

Think Tanks (BD and PAK)

heterogeneity

Policy purpose

Academic purpose

Knowledge Deployment

Private Universities

- Goal displaced think tanks
- Consultancy services
- Freelance consultants

Discipline *Commissioned project* *Utility papers*

Low autonomy - Demand-driven

ThinkTank
Initiative