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General FAQs

What is the Think Tank Initiative?

The Think Tank Initiative is a multi-donor program dedicated to strengthening independent policy research organizations in the developing world. Managed by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), it is a partnership between IDRC, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Netherlands Directorate-General for International Cooperation (DGIS), envisioned as a long-term investment over 10 years.

Why is the Initiative important?

Think tanks in the developing world are in a unique position to effect change in their societies. They can strengthen public policy debates and promote more objective, evidence-based decision-making. However, most think tanks never receive predictable core funding, instead depending on short-term project grants and consultancy contracts. The Initiative provides think tanks in countries of the developing world with stable funding so that they can attract, retain and build local talent, develop an independent research program, and invest in outreach to ensure that research results are used in policy debates.

How does the Think Tank Initiative work?

The defining feature of the Think Tank Initiative is its provision of core, non-earmarked funding to participating organizations. The Initiative also assists participating organizations in three broad areas: research methods and skills; communication and outreach; and general organizational development. Four year core grants and two year renewable grants are combined with dedicated technical support to address key weaknesses. The Initiative supports peer-to-peer review, learning and exchange by bringing together supported organizations, outside experts, and other stakeholders.

Which countries are eligible?

The Initiative was launched in Africa in June 2008. It initially solicited applications from think tanks in Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. View the African institutions [here](#).

A second Call for Expressions of Interest was launched in Latin America and South Asia in July 2009, requesting applications from think tanks in:

- *Latin America*: Bolivia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Paraguay, Peru
- *South Asia*: Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka

View the Latin American institutions [here](#) and view the South Asian institutions [here](#).

How were the recipients selected?

IDRC received a total of over 600 proposals from African, Latin American and South Asian think tanks. Following a transparent and rigorous screening process including site visits by IDRC staff, a shortlist of candidates was submitted to the Initiative's [International Advisory Group](#) who reviewed and discussed the proposals. Based on their advice, representatives of the funding agencies made final decisions on the organizations to be supported. Further information on the selection process is available [here](#).

Why did the Initiative start its activities in Africa?

Africa faces pressing policy challenges, all the more so in light of the current economic crisis. The shift toward more plural, democratic debate in Africa raises opportunities for think tanks to play an increasingly important role. Strong researchers and institutions exist, but support for these organizations is required. Lessons learned in Africa informed the Initiative's strategy for the Call in Latin America and South Asia.

Brain drain is a problem in many developing countries. Will it be a challenge to access excellent researchers?

There is a wealth of promising researchers and think tanks in developing countries. Think tanks can play a positive role in strengthening public policy debates and decisions, and thus offer exciting opportunities for researchers to bridge the gap between ideas and action. The Initiative will provide long-term core support to help create, attract and retain a new pool of local expertise, hence reducing the brain drain – and ideally helping to attract talented individuals back to developing countries. This and other issues will be the focus of a careful monitoring and evaluation plan carried out as part of the Initiative.

How much is invested in the Initiative?

Strengthening organizational capacity is a long-term endeavour. The Initiative is envisioned as an investment over at least 10 years. The five donor partners have committed a total of about US\$ 110 million to the program.
