



Report on the Policy Community Survey

Prepared for IDRC's Think
Tank Initiative

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS	4
Implications and Opportunities	5
INTRODUCTION	7
APPROACH	8
NOTES TO READERS	12
PART 1: PERCEPTIONS OF THE POLICY-MAKING CONTEXT AND INFORMATION NEEDS	
Perceptions of the Policy-Making Context	14
Most Important Information Needs	16
Usefulness of Information	17
Access to Information	18
Importance vs Ease of Access	19
PART 2: SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE POLICY DEVELOPMENT	
Sources of Information	21
<i>Use of Government Sources</i>	22
Reasons for Turning to Think Tanks	24
Quality vs Usage	27
Useful Forms of Information Exchange	28
PART 3: PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT	
Improving Performance of Think Tanks	29
PART 4: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS	
Perceptions of the Policy-Making Context and Information Needs	31
Supporting Effective Policy Development	31
Performance Improvement	32
Looking forward	32
QUESTIONNAIRE	34

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Background. IDRC's Think Tank Initiative engaged GlobeScan to conduct its first policy community survey in several countries in Africa, Latin America, and South Asia. In total, 985 stakeholders of the policy-making community participated in the research, between November 2009 and February 2011. This study aims to develop a better understanding of policy communities in specific countries, and to provide strategic direction to think tanks on how they can best contribute to the quality of policy making in countries where they operate.

Improving the policy-making process. Overall, stakeholders across Africa, Latin America, and South Asia offer assessments of the quality of policy-making processes in their respective countries that are neither strongly negative, nor strongly positive. Notably, government stakeholders (i.e., those most closely involved in policy making) tend to be the most positive about the overall process.

Consistent information needs. Despite the very different contexts in which they work, stakeholders across the three regions consistently point to information on poverty alleviation and economic/fiscal issues as being the most important to their policy-making work.

Ambivalent views about access to information. In most countries, stakeholders report that accessing the information they say they need to support their policy work is neither easy nor difficult. This could be one of the reasons why respondents are similarly ambivalent about the overall quality of the policy-making processes in their country. Improving access to critical information areas may improve the overall quality and sophistication of dialogue and insights on policy.

...but concerns about usefulness. Overall, stakeholders are less than satisfied with the usefulness of information needed to support their policy-making work. Further research may be needed to better understand how this information could be made more useful to stakeholders in the policy-making community (e.g., more current, made available in different modes, focused on the "right" topics, etc.).

Think tanks are a trusted source of information. In South Asia and Latin America, think tanks are among the top-rated organizations for providing quality research, along with international agencies and international university-based research institutes. As a result, think tanks are used frequently as a source of research-based evidence by stakeholders in these regions. However, in Africa, while think tanks are perceived to deliver quality outputs, they are used much less frequently by stakeholders, suggesting that think tanks are less established in the policy-making process in Africa.

Reliance on government sources... In all regions, government sources of information (e.g., government agencies and government-owned research institutes) are among the most frequently used by stakeholders to support their policy work. And perhaps not surprisingly, public sector stakeholders are the most likely to rely on government sources.

...but concerns about quality. However, there are underlying concerns across all stakeholder groups—including government respondents—about the quality of government sources. The frequent use of public sector sources, especially among government stakeholders, is likely related to convenience and ease of access, and

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

may also reflect a current lack of awareness among this stakeholder group of other sources of information to support their policy-making work.

Demand for trusted data. Across all regions, there is high demand among stakeholders for primary data and access to statistical databanks. Results suggest stakeholders may have very specific information needs that are not yet being addressed and therefore want access to reliable and trusted data to review and analyze in detail for themselves. This demand for primary data may also reflect the current quality of reports and information that stakeholders have access to: consistent advice to think tanks in all regions is to improve the user-friendliness of their reports.

Opportunities to improve. The primary advice from stakeholders on how think tanks can most improve is focused on research quality, the relevance of the research itself, the capacity of staff, and the dissemination of their research to the broader policy community. A better understanding is also needed of which areas of governance require most attention (e.g., in financial management, independence, capacity building, recruitment, government relations, communications and stakeholder outreach, analysis and report writing, etc.).

Implications and Opportunities

Raise awareness. Despite quality concerns, stakeholders, especially among those working in government, currently rely heavily on public sector sources. This suggests a strong need for think tanks to improve public sector stakeholders' awareness of other sources of information to support their work. Doing so could have a potentially positive impact on the overall quality of policy-making processes across the three regions. .

Improve quality of government sources. In addition, there may be a consultative and capacity-building role for think tanks to play in helping improve the overall quality of research and information coming from public sector sources, given that these are among the most frequently used sources in most countries.

Trusted. Now spread the word. As a highly trusted source of research-based information in many countries, think tanks have earned credibility with most stakeholders. Heeding stakeholders' advice, think tanks now need to focus on getting their research into more hands. Doing so can help improve the overall quality of policy dialogue, and the policy-making process itself, which is currently seen as neither excellent nor poor by the majority of respondents.

Define role. Think tanks are generally seen as trusted sources of information, and are applauded for their quality of research. Think tanks, however, face a challenge in achieving an effective balance between research and advocacy that is not shared by their counterparts such as university research institutes and NGOs. While these other types of organizations tend to have more clearly defined roles of research or advocacy, think tanks need to identify their own balance between these two functions in order to create a clear role for themselves within the policy-making context.

Build relationships. Given the large number of organizations involved in the policy-making process, the varying levels of perceived usefulness and quality of these organizations, and the traditional role these organizations have in policy making (research vs. advocacy), think tanks should work to identify potential strategic relationships with different types of organizations to help promote public debate.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Ensure relevance. Stakeholder demand is highest for information on poverty alleviation and economic/fiscal issues. Think tanks can sustain their relevance by ensuring their work lends itself to and addresses these overarching themes, as well as by packaging and disseminating their research outputs in ways that are most useful to policy stakeholders.

African opportunities? Think tanks in the African countries surveyed are trusted but used relatively less frequently than other sources. Outreach to, and awareness-raising with, the policy community is a priority.

More consultative work? Given stakeholders' high demand for primary data, think tanks may have an opportunity to offer more specific and customized analytic services to deliver on the information needs of stakeholders. Results suggest that think tanks should work toward finding innovative ways to share primary data with stakeholders who require it for their work in policy making.

INTRODUCTION

The policy community survey was undertaken as part of IDRC's Think Tank Initiative. The survey was conducted with policy stakeholders in Africa, Latin America, and South Asia. The survey was designed to develop an understanding of the policy community in specific countries identified by the Think Tank Initiative. Stakeholders of the policy-making process were asked general questions about the policy-making context in their countries, the types of information needed for their work, as well as questions about sources of information and information formats. They were also asked specific questions about think tanks generally, and how they can be improved. The results related to these topics are contained in this report.

A parallel objective of the survey was to understand strengths and weaknesses of particular think tanks, and to understand what activities are associated with the success of think tanks, in order to help design and implement support strategies. These findings are not included in this report, but are being used as a rich source of reflection both by individual think tanks as

they identify their own priorities for organizational strengthening and capacity building, and by the Think Tank Initiative as it develops its approach to supporting its grantee organizations in their progress towards sustainability.

Feedback from think tanks on the findings (both on the regional surveys and the specific findings related to individual think tanks) have been positive overall, with several organizations already using the data for their own organizational development purposes.

Lastly, the survey was intended to create a benchmark against which future surveys can be compared, to track changes over time in the policy community and perceptions of think tanks in selected countries. It is important to note that this study was a unique and difficult undertaking, and as preparation is done for the next round of policy community surveys the sample, methodology, and questionnaire will be examined closely to identify potential improvements and enhancements.

APPROACH

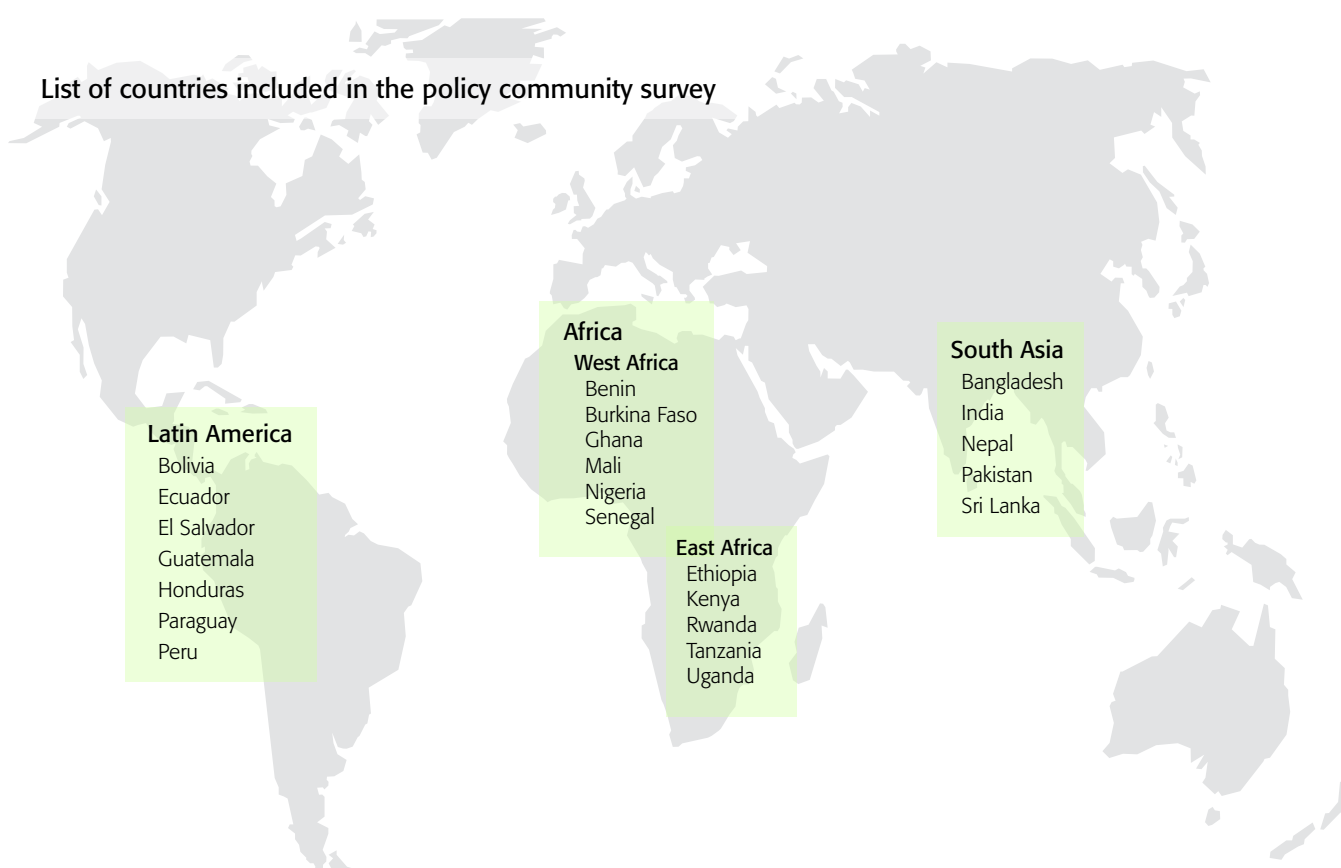
This study was designed to gather views of senior level policy actors within national policy communities on their needs for research, perceptions of research quality, and impressions of think tank performance. The questions on these topics were asked to policy actors with reference to their own national policy contexts. The study was not intended to gather perceptions of a larger, representative subset of the policy community which could generate statistically significant findings on the demand for research. This more qualitative approach, with a smaller group of senior-level stakeholders, was chosen deliberately, recognizing its limitations, but acknowledging the value of understanding perceptions of individuals in senior positions within each national policy community who often are very difficult to reach.

In each region, a target of 40 respondents per country was set with a balanced quota of responses across different stakeholder categories. The exception was India, where the total number of interviews was increased to 80 to reflect the difference in the size of the policy community, while maintaining consistency with the sample sizes in other countries. The total population surveyed in each region was determined by the number of countries included in the study, and does not reflect the overall population size of the region.

In a number of countries it proved difficult to achieve the target of 40 stakeholders even though a long list of contact names had been generated. Balanced quotas in each country were achieved, with varying degrees of difficulty in the data collection process.

METHODOLOGY

The policy community survey was conducted in three regions. The study was first fielded in Africa in 2009–2010, and then in Latin America and South Asia in 2010–2011. The exact dates are listed below. The countries involved in the study were selected by the Think Tank Initiative.



Fieldwork dates

By region

Africa	November 11th, 2009 – April 20th, 2010
Latin America	December 6th, 2010 – February 24th, 2011
South Asia	December 2nd, 2010 – February 11th, 2011

METHODOLOGY

Respondents were identified for the study by both the Think Tank Initiative, including its supported institutions, and GlobeScan. Respondents were selected based on their role as active members of the national policy community, meaning that they develop or influence national government policy. Respondents were grouped into the following stakeholder categories:

- **Government:**¹ Senior officials (both elected and non-elected) who are directly involved in or influence policy making.
- **Non-governmental organization:** Senior staff (local or international) whose mission is related to economic development, environmental issues, and/or poverty alleviation.
- **Media:** Editors or journalists who report on public policy, finance, economics, international affairs and/or development, who are knowledgeable about national policy issues.
- **Multilateral/bilateral organization:** Senior staff from bilateral organizations (e.g., DFID, USAID, etc.), or multilateral organizations (e.g., UN agencies, World Bank, etc.).
- **Private sector:** Senior staff working at large well-known national and multinational companies.
- **Research/academia:** Senior staff at universities, colleges, research institutes, and/or think tanks.
- **Trade unions:**² Senior representatives of national trade unions.

Because institutions supported by the Think Tank Initiative supplied potential respondent names, those respondents are likely to have a direct interest in the subject matter which forms the supported institutions' areas of focus.

Stakeholder group sample size

Number of interviews, by region

	Africa	Latin America	South Asia
Elected government	36	39	23
Non-elected government	103	37	38
Media	54	34	36
Multilateral/bilateral	42	34	33
NGO	73	35	41
Private sector	67	36	45
Research/academia	76	38	38
Trade union	N/A	37	N/A

¹ Throughout the report, government officials are referred to as Government-elected and Government-non-elected. Which category government stakeholders belong to is determined by their answer to a question within the survey.

² The trade union stakeholder group only applies to Latin America.

METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted using a mix of online, telephone, and face-to-face interviews, with slight methodological changes between fieldwork in Africa and the Latin America and South Asian fieldwork a year later. In Africa, stakeholders were invited to participate via an email invitation, and telephone follow-ups were made to schedule telephone and face-to-face interviews where necessary. In Latin American and South Asia initial contact with stakeholders was made by telephone, and stakeholders were given the option of completing the survey over the telephone, scheduling a face-to-face interview, or conducting the survey online. The table to the right outlines the number of interviews completed within each region through both online and offline methodologies.

Methodology

Number of interviews, by region

	Total	Africa	Latin America	South Asia
Total	985	451	290	244
Online	252	234	6	12
Offline	733	217	284	232

NOTES TO READERS

Throughout the questionnaire definitions of certain key terms were given to respondents.³ While it is acknowledged that differences can exist in respondent interpretation of question wording, the definitions listed below are intended to guide respondents in their interpretation.

When defining quality of the policy-making process, factors included are: existence and use of mechanisms for national policy making and implementation; competency reputation of technocrats; participation by individuals other than policymakers in policy processes; openness of policy makers to expert (or technical) advice; use of evidence in policy debates and formulation; and transparency of the policy-making process.

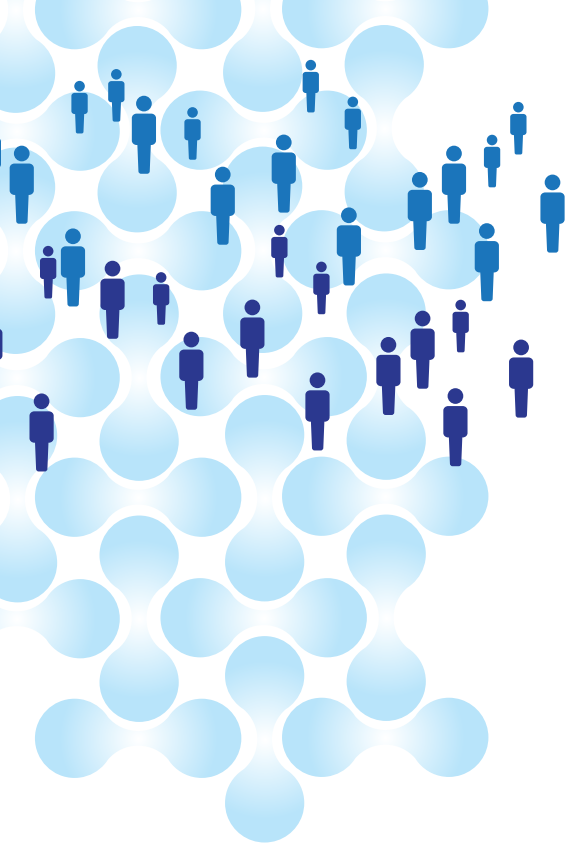
Quality of research is defined as being evidence-based, robust and rigorous; relevant and up-to-date; reputable and credible; and situated in relation to existing research literature and findings, nationally and internationally.

Research-based evidence is defined as findings or results from research that can help inform decision making.

All figures in the charts and tables in this report are expressed as percentages, unless otherwise stated. Total percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding. Likewise, because of rounding, results expressed as aggregates (e.g., excellent + good) may differ slightly from a simple addition of data points shown in charts. In case of stacked bar charts, white space typically represents the proportion of respondents who responded “3” on a five-point scale.

Throughout this report we refer to the regions as Africa, Latin America, and South Asia. These region names are used as a shorthand, and findings should not be extended to the full region, but rather the region as defined by the countries involved with the Think Tank Initiative Policy Community Survey.

³ All definitions (with the exception of the definition of research-based evidence) were added to the questionnaire in the South Asia and Latin America waves of fieldwork.



Main Findings

PART 1:

PERCEPTIONS OF THE POLICY-MAKING CONTEXT AND INFORMATION NEEDS

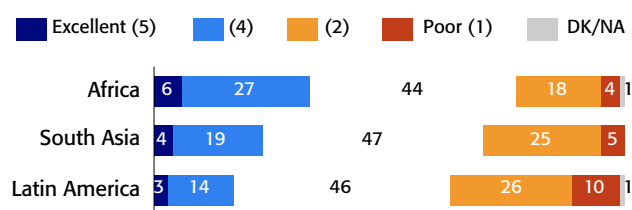
This section looks at stakeholders' perceptions of the policy-making contexts in which they work, as well as their information needs to support policy-making work. Stakeholders' reported access to and the perceived usefulness of information are also covered in this section, providing an "audit" into the current information landscape within which stakeholders across the three regions work.

Perceptions of the Policy-Making Context

When asked to rate the quality of current policy-making processes⁴ in their respective countries overall, stakeholders tend to give ratings that are neither positive nor negative, with majorities or near majorities in each region opting for the mid-point on a five-point quality rating scale. Stakeholder views in Africa are notably more positive than in South Asia or Latin America, where respondents are more likely to offer a negative rating of the policy-making process in their respective countries.

Quality of current policy-making processes in your country

% of total respondents, by region



The white space in this chart represents ratings of (3).

Based on full sample: Africa, $n=451$; Latin America, $n=290$; South Asia, $n=244$

Q. A1

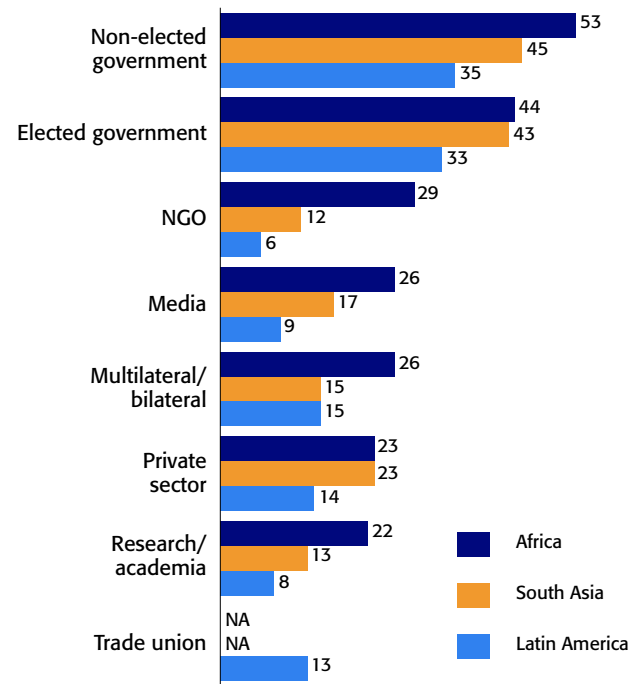
⁴ While responses are quantified in this report, it is acknowledged that the concept of quality of the policy-making processes is difficult to define, as respondents have many aspects to consider. Interpretation of these results should be conducted with caution.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE POLICY-MAKING CONTEXT AND INFORMATION NEEDS

In all three regions, those most directly involved in policy making (i.e., elected and non-elected government stakeholders) give the most positive ratings, perhaps not surprisingly. The chart to the right shows how much more critical Latin American stakeholders are of policy-making processes compared to their counterparts in other regions, across nearly all stakeholder groups. The consistently less positive ratings given by stakeholders working outside of government in all regions is notable.

Quality of current policy-making processes in your country

% of total respondents selecting "Excellent" (4+5), by stakeholder group, by region



Based on full sample: Africa, $n=451$; Latin America, $n=290$; South Asia, $n=244$

Q. A1

PERCEPTIONS OF THE POLICY-MAKING CONTEXT AND INFORMATION NEEDS

Most Important Information Needs

When stakeholders are asked what information they most need to support their work related to public policy, information on poverty alleviation and on economic/fiscal issues is mentioned as most important in all three regions.⁵ It is possible that these two topic areas are in high demand because they are broad, cross-cutting topics that could potentially cover many other areas such as gender, education, and health. Such strong interest in economic and fiscal issues across the three regions might also reflect the current global economic context (i.e., sluggish economic growth in some countries, the ongoing recovery associated with the global financial crisis, etc.). The consistently low demand for information on foreign affairs across all three regions suggests stakeholders are focused more on their country's internal issues than on relationships with other countries.

In South Asia, it is notable that majorities of stakeholders say they require all prompted types of information, whereas in Africa, only one-half of the prompted areas are required by majorities of stakeholders. This could be interpreted in a few ways. African stakeholders may be taking a more focused and subject-specific view in their policy work, while those in South Asia are taking a broader view, looking across different subject areas to support their work. Or, it could be related to the way in which stakeholders interpret each topic area, which is more broadly interpreted in South Asia and more specifically interpreted in Africa.

While demand for information on poverty alleviation is uniformly high across all stakeholder groups in each

region, there are some differences in information needs by stakeholder group. For example, elected government stakeholders in each region are in general more likely than others to say that information on education and agriculture is important for their work. Similarly, private sector stakeholders in each region are more inclined than others to say they need information on trade and industry.

Information required for your work in public policy

% of respondents, combined mentions, by region

	Africa	Latin America	South Asia
Poverty alleviation	62	78	86
Economic/fiscal issues	59	77	82
Education	54	64	78
Environment / natural resources / energy	50	68	80
Agriculture / food security	49	56	77
Trade/industry	46	58	71
Health care	41	55	72
Gender issues	40	49	72
Human rights	39	56	68
Foreign affairs	22	41	53

Based on total full sample Africa, $n=451$; Latin America, $n=290$; South Asia, $n=244$

Q. A2

⁵ Sample compilation is acknowledged to factor into this finding, as many of the institutions supported by the Think Tank Initiative who provided lists of potential respondents have a focus on socio-economic issues.

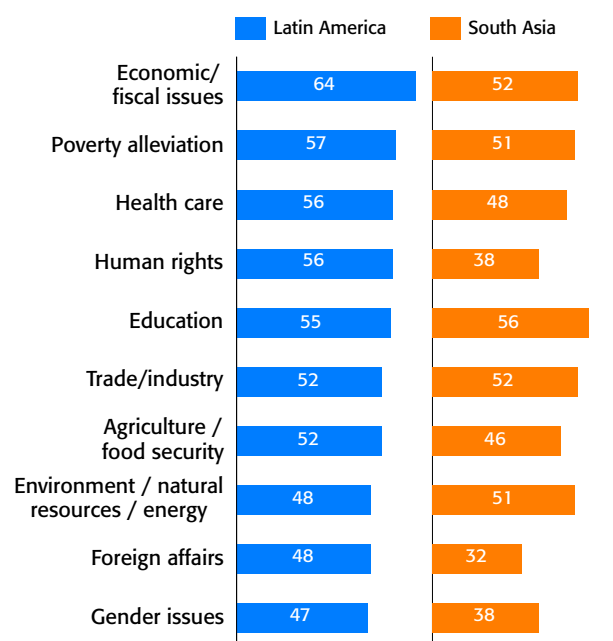
Usefulness of Information

When asked about the usefulness of each information area used to support their work in policy development, Latin American and South Asian stakeholders⁶ are generally less than satisfied. Around 50 percent or more of respondents either rate each area that they use not very useful or use the mid-point on a 5-point scale.

In Latin America, elected government stakeholders tend to be the most critical of the usefulness of information, while in South Asia it is multilateral stakeholders who are the most critical. Notably, in both South Asia and Latin America, non-elected government stakeholders tend to be among the most positive about the usefulness of information for all the prompted topic areas. Despite these less than positive overall views, stakeholders tend to be most satisfied with the quality of their highest priority information areas (e.g., information to do with economic/fiscal issues, poverty alleviation, and education).

Usefulness of information to support policy development

% of total respondents selecting “Very useful” (4+5), by region



Subsample: Those who require information about each issue for their work; Latin America, n=120–226; South Asia, n=129–211

Q. A3a

⁶ These questions were added to the questionnaire in the South Asia and Latin America waves of fieldwork.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE POLICY-MAKING CONTEXT AND INFORMATION NEEDS

Access to Information

In addition to asking about the perceived usefulness of information needed to support their policy work, stakeholders were also asked how easy it is to access this information. Overall, stakeholders report neither easy nor difficult access to their most important information needs, with about one-third giving neutral ratings. These generally average ratings are consistent across the three regions, although a few differences stand out.

South Asian and African stakeholders report more difficulty in accessing information on foreign affairs and human rights compared to their Latin American counterparts.

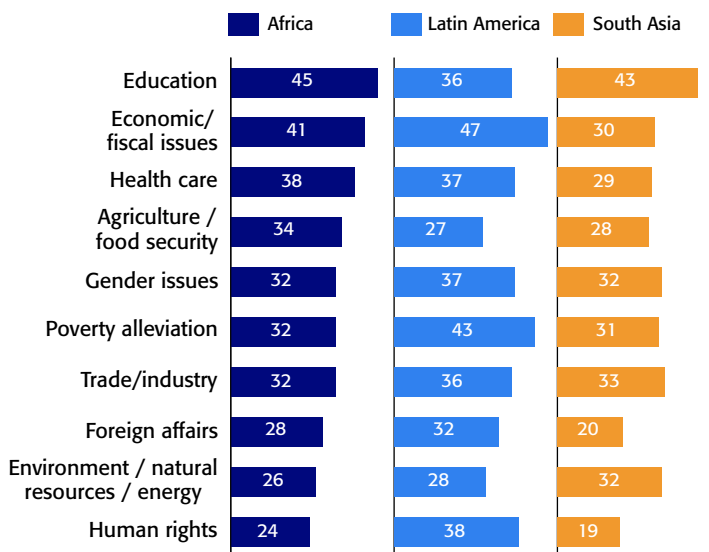
For education, the opposite is true: South Asian and African stakeholders report relatively easier access to educational information than those in Latin America.

Another notable difference across regions is access to information on the environment, natural resources, and energy: African and Latin American stakeholders say this is one of the most difficult areas to access information, while South Asian stakeholders report slightly easier access.

Stakeholders place high importance on environmental and resource-related information, and express underlying concerns both about their access to and usefulness of this information (especially in Latin America). Further research and follow-up conversations may be needed to better understand the challenges stakeholders face in accessing this information, and to identify opportunities to help improve the overall usefulness of it.

Ease of obtaining information to support policy development

% of total respondents selecting "Very easy" (4+5), by region



Subsample: Those who require information about each issue for their work; Africa, *n*=100–279; Latin America, *n*=120–226; South Asia, *n*=129–211

Q. A3

PERCEPTIONS OF THE POLICY-MAKING CONTEXT AND INFORMATION NEEDS

Importance vs Ease of Access

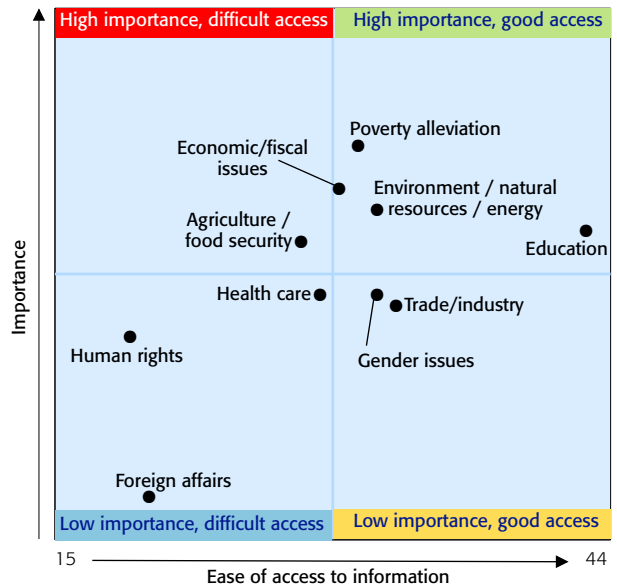
The matrix charts on the right and on the next page show the importance of each topic area compared to how easy stakeholders say it is to access this information. Topic areas falling in the top-right green quadrant are considered important to stakeholders and are relatively easy to access. Topics in the top-left red quadrant are of particular interest, as stakeholders say these are highly important to their work but report difficulty in accessing this information. The bottom-left blue quadrant contains topic areas that are of lower importance and that are considered difficult to access. And topics in the bottom-right yellow quadrant are of low importance and considered easier to access.

The matrix to the upper right suggests that in South Asia, stakeholders' information access is in a relatively good position: Their most important information needs are generally among the easiest to access (e.g., poverty alleviation, environment, education, and economic and fiscal issues). In contrast, harder to access information (e.g., foreign affairs and human rights) is generally considered less important to their policy work.

Similarly, in Latin America, stakeholders' perception of information access is generally positive, although information on environment, natural resources, and energy stands out: while it is identified as among the most important for stakeholders' policy work, it is among the most difficult to access. Going forward, it will be important to better understand stakeholders' challenges in accessing this kind of information, to help improve both their access to it and their concerns about the quality of this information (e.g., is it that not enough information is currently available? not available in an appropriate medium? not up to date? addresses the wrong issues? etc.).

Importance vs access of information

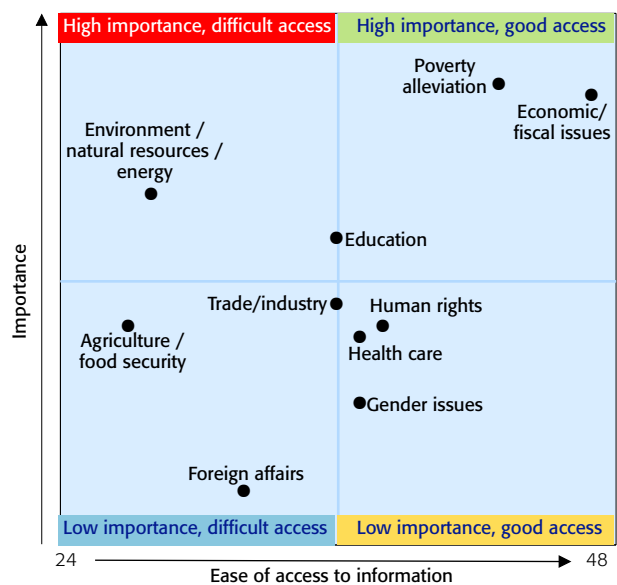
% of total respondents, combined mentions vs respondents selecting "Easy" (4+5), South Asia



Q. A2, A3

Importance vs access to information

% of total respondents, combined mentions vs respondents selecting "Easy" (4+5), Latin America



Q. A2, A3

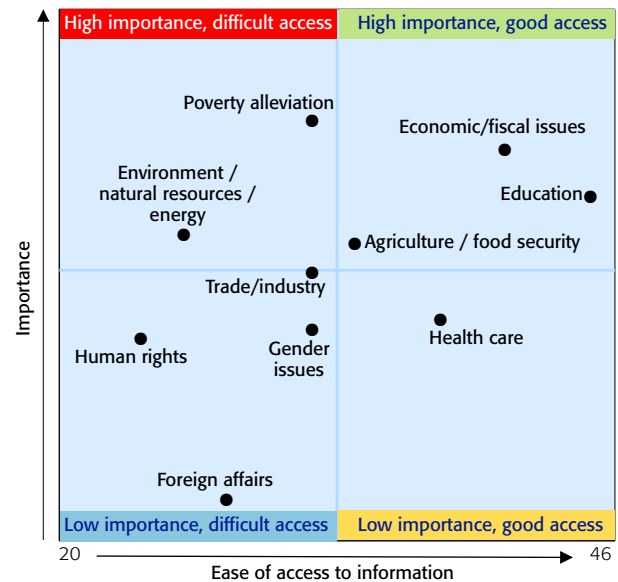
PERCEPTIONS OF THE POLICY-MAKING CONTEXT AND INFORMATION NEEDS

The information context for African stakeholders appears to be somewhat more challenging than in the other two regions, as there are two important topic areas—poverty alleviation and environment / natural resources / energy—that are considered difficult to access. As in Latin America, it will be important to first better understand the nature of their challenges in accessing information in these key areas in order to constructively assist stakeholders in the African region.

The table below summarizes the information context across the three regions. The placement of each topic area in the quadrants on the preceding pages determines the colour of each cell in this table, allowing for comparison across regions. The cells that are coloured with two colours indicate that the specific topic area falls directly between two quadrants. The table illustrates a remarkably consistent picture of what stakeholders say is important to support their policy work, as well as the regional challenges stakeholders face in accessing information in some areas.

Importance vs access of information

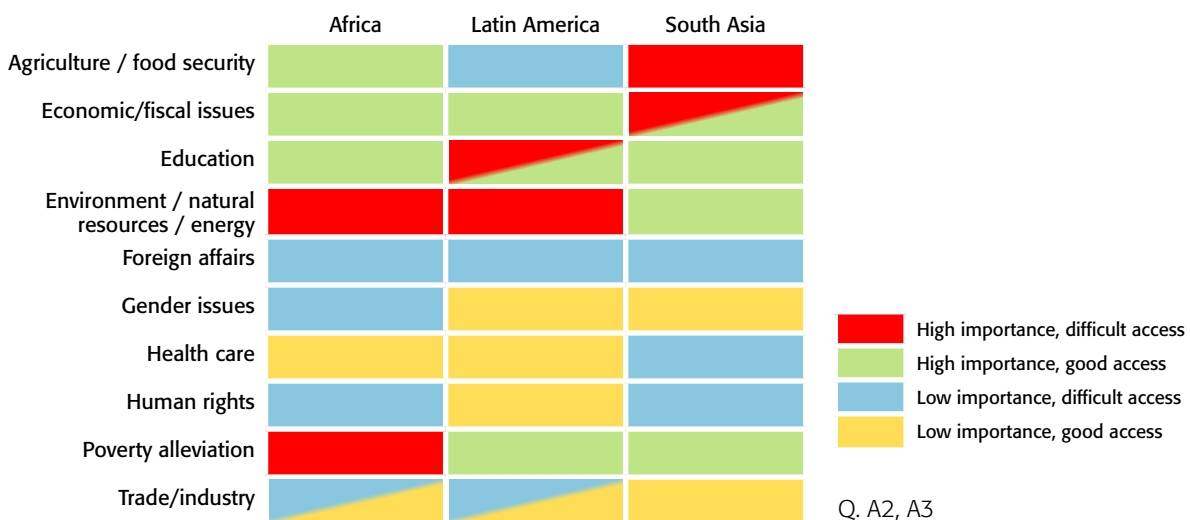
% of total respondents, combined mentions vs respondents selecting "Easy" (4+5), Africa



Q. A2, A3

Summary: Importance vs access to information

By region



PART 2:

SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE POLICY DEVELOPMENT

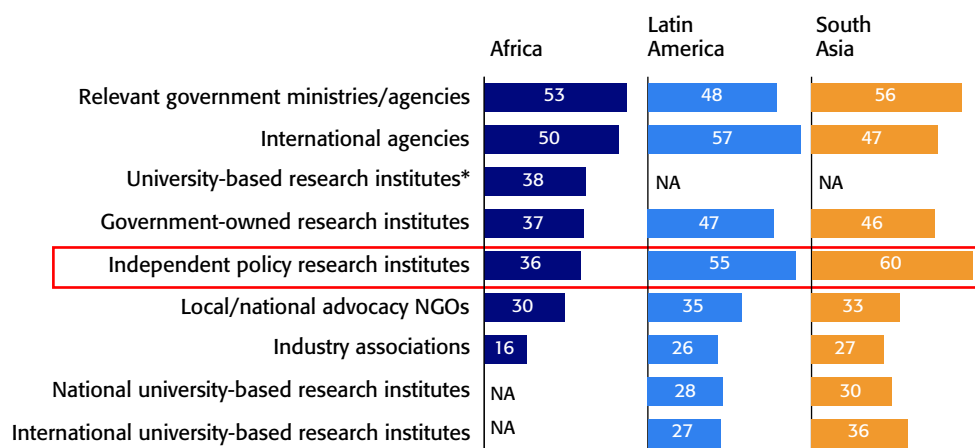
This section reports on the types of organizations that stakeholders say they rely upon for research-based evidence related to social and economic policy, and their assessment of the quality of information provided by each. This section also summarizes stakeholders' preferences for forms of information exchange. These findings highlight the overall credibility of independent policy research institutes (hereafter referred to as "think tanks") as an information source, and, more generally, shed light on the context in which think tanks are operating across the three regions.

Sources of Information

Stakeholders were asked about the types of organizations they turn to when they need information on social and economic policy. In South Asia and Latin America, think tanks are among the most frequently used sources of research-based evidence, along with government ministries and international agencies (e.g., the United Nations, the World Bank, etc.). In comparison, think tanks are much less used by African stakeholders, who are more likely to rely on relevant government ministries and international agencies. Results suggest that think tanks in Africa are less established and embedded in the policy-making context.

Types of organizations used as a source for research-based evidence

% of total respondents selecting "One of your primary sources" (4+5), by region



*Note that in Africa the question was asked as "University-based research institutes" with no differentiation between national and international.

Based on total sample: Africa, $n=451$; Latin America, $n=290$; South Asia, $n=244$

Q. B1

Differences exist in the primary “go-to” sources that stakeholders use for research-based evidence. However, a notable similarity across the three regions is stakeholders’ much lower tendency to draw upon information from industry associations⁷ and local or national advocacy NGOs. This consistently lower use may reflect stakeholders’ preconceptions that NGOs and industry associations do not produce or provide much in the way of primary research, and instead focus their efforts on cause-related or advocacy work.

Another similarity across the three regions is that stakeholders tend to rely on actors similar to themselves for information (e.g., government stakeholders are more likely than others to turn to government sources, multilateral stakeholders to international agencies, private sector stakeholders to industry associations). The survey did not ask stakeholders for reasons why they turn to specific sources, but one reason, especially among government stakeholders, could be convenience and the ease with which information can be accessed from these sources. Other reasons might include stakeholders’ lack of awareness about the information each organization makes available, as well as stakeholders’ underlying trust and confidence in each source. This trust may be particularly strong where there is high level of transparency associated with the source, and there is public clarity about the purpose of their agenda and confidence in their ethical stance and governance. Follow-up conversations with stakeholders would help confirm these and identify other reasons.

► USE OF GOVERNMENT SOURCES

Elected government stakeholders in all three regions tend to turn to their own relevant government ministries/agencies and government-owned research institutes as a primary sources of information before turning to other external sources such as think tanks or international agencies. The same is true for non-elected government stakeholders in Africa and South Asia, but not in Latin America, who are more likely to turn to international agencies. Notably, in all three regions, these public sector stakeholders are among the least likely to turn to think tanks. This group’s tendency to rely on internal sources, despite quality concerns, may suggest convenience is a strong motivator, and may also signal their lack of awareness about the availability and quality of information produced by other sources.

⁷ An industry association is an organization founded and funded by businesses that operate in a specific industry.

SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE POLICY DEVELOPMENT


Overall, results suggest that think tanks are not top of mind for those most closely involved with policy making. In all three regions, government stakeholders (both elected and non-elected) are the least likely to turn to think tanks as a primary source of research-based evidence. Think tanks are, however, more top

of mind for those not directly involved in policy making (i.e., non-government stakeholders). In Africa and South Asia, multilateral stakeholders are most likely to turn to think tanks, while in Latin America, media and NGO stakeholders report using think tanks most often as a primary source.

Think tanks used as a source for research-based evidence

% of total respondents selecting "One of your primary sources" (4+5), by stakeholder type, by region

	Africa	Latin America	South Asia
Elected government	25	33	39
Non-elected government	29	54	45
Media	43	73	61
Multilateral/bilateral	47	53	82
NGO	42	71	49
Private sector	28	64	63
Research/academia	41	61	76
Trade union	NA	35	NA

 Stakeholder type using think tanks most often as a primary source

Based on total sample: Africa, n=451; Latin America, n=290; South Asia, n=244

Q. B1

Reasons for Turning to Think Tanks

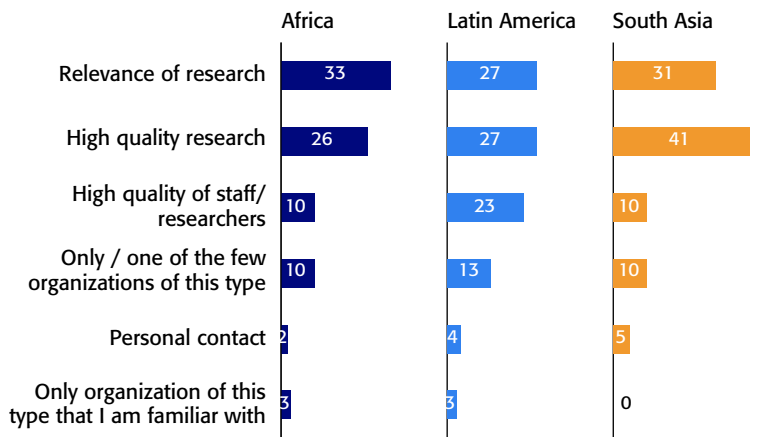
Stakeholders who say they use think tanks as a primary source of research-based evidence were then asked why they do so. Across all three regions, the primary reasons are to do with the relevance and high quality of research produced by think tanks. It is notable how much importance Latin American stakeholders, in comparison to those in Africa and South Asia, place on the quality of think tanks' personnel. Few respondents say they turn to a think tank because it is the only or one of the few such organizations known to them in

their country, suggesting stakeholders have a choice in information sources. Think tanks clearly need to prioritize both the relevance and quality of their work to remain a "go-to" source for policy makers.

Very few stakeholders say they never use think tanks as a primary source of research-based evidence (71 respondents in Africa, 28 in Latin America, and only 7 in South Asia). The main reason for not doing so is a lack of familiarity with any think tank, with government and NGO stakeholders the most likely to give this response.

Reasons for turning to think tanks as a primary source of information

% of respondents, by region



Subsample: Those who say they use think tanks as a primary source (selecting 5 on a 5-point scale): Africa, n=58; Latin America, n=71; South Asia, n=39

Q. B1b

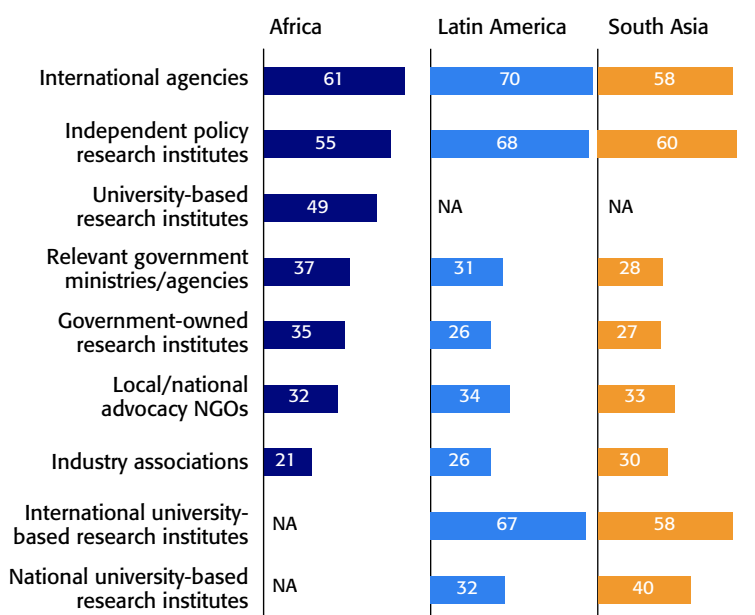
Quality of Information

In addition to the sources of information stakeholders draw upon to support their policy work, respondents were also asked about the quality of each source of information used. In each region, think tanks, along with international agencies and university-based research institutes,⁸ consistently top the list in terms of perceived quality, without much differentiation between them. These three types of institution are highly regarded by those who use them. Ratings of the other organizations are considerably less positive, and in some cases, negative (e.g., one-quarter of stake-

holders in all three regions give industry associations negative ratings). One reason for this could be that stakeholders perceptions are influenced by the role traditionally associated with different types of organizations. Organizations such as universities have a clear mandate to undertake quality research, whereas NGOs for example may be understood to have an agenda that is rooted more strongly in advocacy. This does not suggest that different organizations do not have an important role to play in policy-making processes; in fact, it suggests that think tanks may need to develop strategic relations with different types of organization in order to maximize the leverage of their research findings.

Quality ratings of research provided by...

% of total respondents selecting "Excellent" (4+5), by region



Subsample: Those who use each type of organization Africa, n=263–384; Latin America, n=210–262; South Asia, n=203–231

Q. B2

⁸ In the Africa survey, no differentiation was made between national and international university-based research institutes in the question wording. This may account for the reason that African respondents considered university-based research institutes to be comparable in terms of quality to international agencies and independent policy research institutes. This distinction was made explicit in the survey conducted in the other regions.


SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The table below highlights which stakeholder groups in each region give think tanks the highest ratings in terms of quality. In Africa, NGO stakeholders have the most positive perceptions of the quality of research produced by think tanks. In Latin America, research/academia and media stakeholders are the most positive, and in South Asia, multilateral and bilateral stakeholders give the highest ratings. Also noteworthy is the relatively lower quality ratings given by government stakeholders (both elected and non-elected) across the three regions.

Quality ratings of research provided by think tanks

% of respondents selecting "Excellent" (4+5), by stakeholder type, by region

	Africa	Latin America	South Asia
Elected government	42	60	53*
Non-elected government	51	66	53
Media	58	78	63
Multilateral/bilateral	52	59	72
NGO	67	71	53
Private sector	45	73	65
Research/academia	62	80	62
Trade union	NA	57	NA

 Stakeholder type rating quality of think tank research highest

*Small sample size (n=19)

Subsample: Those who use think tanks as source of information: Africa, n=24–66; Latin America, n=30–35; South Asia, n =19–40

Q. B2

Quality vs Usage

The table below summarizes stakeholders' perceptions of the quality of information from each source organization and how frequently stakeholders turn to that source for information. Green reflects an ideal position, as these organizations are perceived to deliver high quality research and are used frequently by stakeholders. Red indicates that stakeholders think the organization produces high quality outputs, but rely on them less frequently than other sources. There are many reasons why an organization could be in the "red" zone, including stakeholders' lack of awareness of the organization, challenges in accessing information, or an infrequent supply of new or updated information, among other reasons. Blue indicates a lower-use organization that gets lower than average quality ratings. Yellow reflects a higher-use organization that gets lower than average quality ratings, which could reflect convenience in accessing the information.

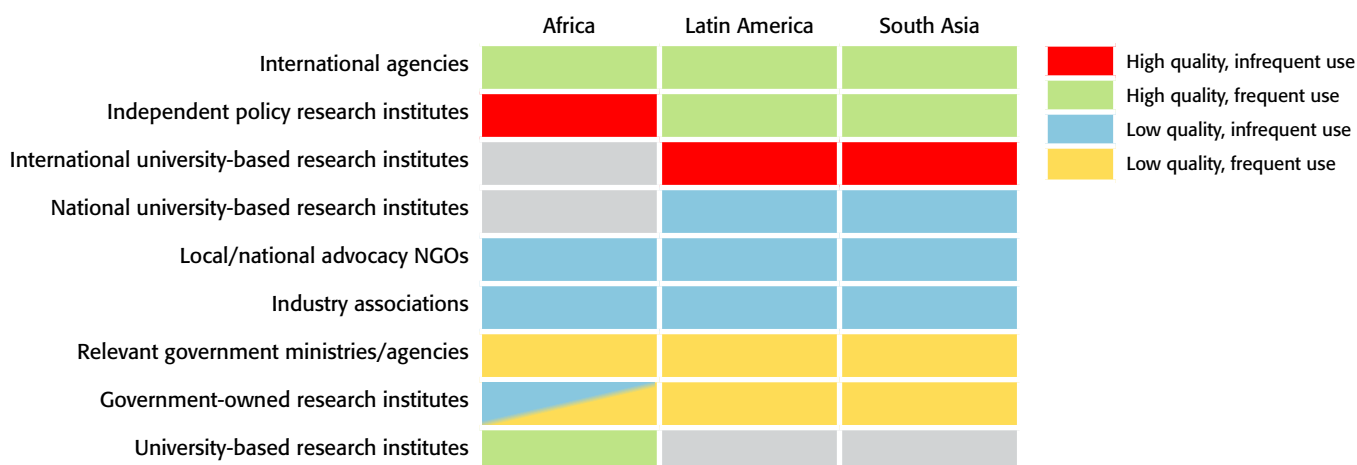
As the table shows, the relationship between perceived quality and frequency of use is very similar in Latin America and South Asia. The two types of organizations perceived to produce the highest quality

of research (international agencies and think tanks) are also the types used most frequently as a source of information. Also similar is the perceived high quality, but lower use, of international university-based research institutes, and the high use, but perceived lower quality, of government sources.

The African context is somewhat similar (i.e., more frequent use of high-quality organizations), however, there are some notable differences. Think tanks, for example, are on the cusp "red" quadrant: although perceived as relatively high quality, stakeholders report using them less frequently than other high-quality sources such as international agencies and university-based research institutes. Also noteworthy is the relatively higher perceived quality of government sources in Africa compared to other regions. Given the less frequent use of think tanks in Africa by policy stakeholders, compared to the other regions, what might think tanks learn from other more frequently used sources, such as government ministries and international agencies (e.g., is it the channels these sources use that drive higher traffic? is it the relevance of their information? is it the convenience and accessibility of the information?).

Summary: Quality vs frequency of use of organizations

% of total respondents selecting "Excellent" (4+5) vs "Primary source" (4+5), by region



Useful Forms of Information Exchange

Across the three regions, stakeholders consistently say they prefer user-driven, self-directed information exchanges to more interactive forms to support their work in national policy. When provided with nine different types of information exchanges, South Asian and Latin American stakeholders say databases / statistical databanks and online/electronic publications and reports are most useful to their work. In Africa, databases / statistical databanks are also considered among the most useful, after print publications or reports. Note the difference between Latin American stakeholders and those in South Asia and Africa with regard to online publications, which may reflect regional differences in access to technology and reliable internet connections. Also notable are the significant differences between the South Asian countries. In India and Sri Lanka, online publications are considered the most useful form of information exchange. In comparison, in Bangladesh and Nepal, online publications are considered much less useful than databases and print reports. These differences may reflect the varying Internet access across these South Asian countries (e.g., recent estimates suggest Internet access is less than 1% in Bangladesh versus more than 8% in India).⁹

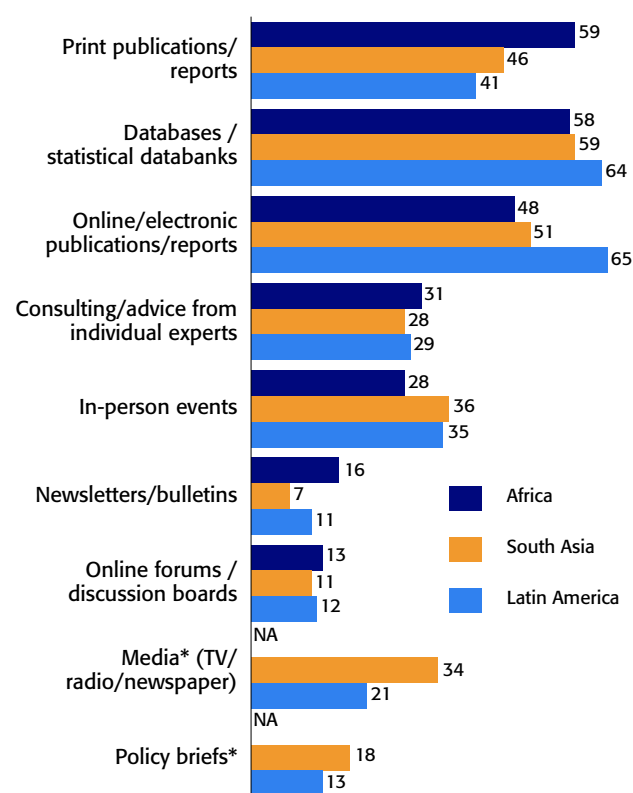
In all regions more informal communications, such as newsletters and online forums, are considered much less useful. Notably, policy briefs¹⁰ are seen as among the least useful forms to support involvement in national policy in South Asia and Latin America. Follow-up conversations may be needed to better

understand how stakeholders think these briefs can be improved and made more relevant to support their day-to-day policy work.

The consistently strong interest in databases and statistical databanks across the three regions is notable and might reflect stakeholders' current lack of access to reliable and trusted primary data sources. It might also reflect that stakeholders need very specific evidence for their policy work and may currently lack this data to support their work and areas of focus. Clearly, there is strong underlying demand for primary data among stakeholders in all regions.

Forms of information exchange useful to support involvement in national policy

% of total respondents, combined mentions, by region



⁹ Internet penetration statistics from <http://www.isoc.org/internet/stats/>

¹⁰ Policy briefs and media were not a response option in Africa.

Based on total full sample: Africa, n=451; Latin America, n=290; South Asia, n=244

*Not asked in Africa

Q. A4

PART 3:

PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

This section provides insight on how stakeholders believe think tanks can improve their overall performance and be even more relevant to respondents' policy-making work.

Improving Performance of Think Tanks

Stakeholders were asked to rate the importance of several factors in helping improve the overall performance of think tanks. In all regions, one of the most important factors is to increase the availability of trained and experienced staff, suggesting that internal capacity building be made a priority for think tanks.

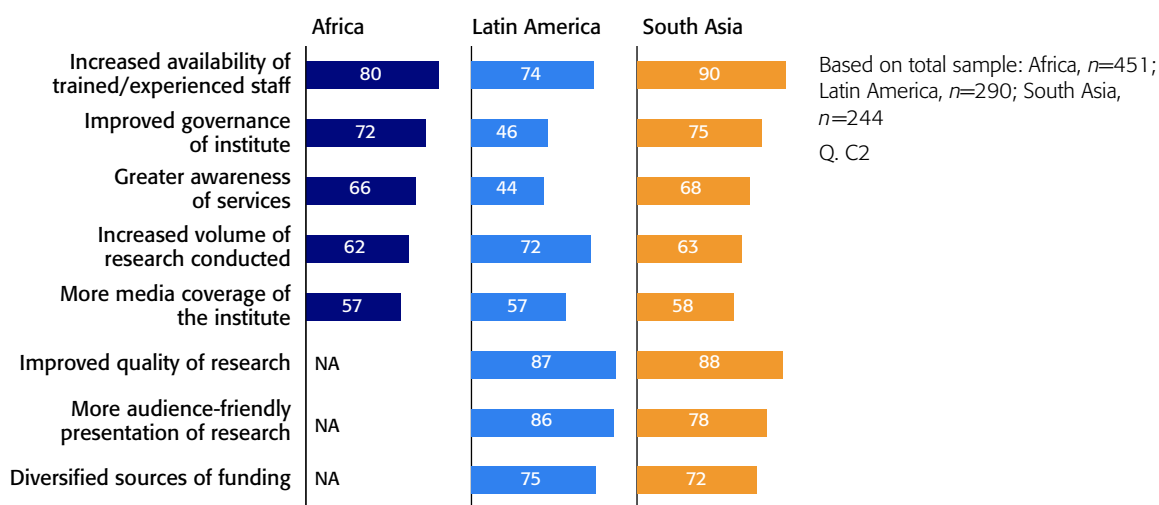
Improving the quality of research produced is also among the most important areas to address in both Latin America and South Asia,¹¹ perhaps not surpris-

ingly given the importance stakeholders place on quality and relevant research. While quality is clearly a priority, stakeholders in both regions also prioritize the production of user-friendly research reports. Results suggest this is a key area for think tanks to address.

Notably, African and South Asian stakeholders point to improving the governance of think tanks as a priority to enhance overall performance. It will be useful to better understand what elements of governance stakeholders think are priorities to address—for example, hiring procedures, training and capacity building, financial management, quality processes, communication protocols, dissemination of results, relationship building, interaction with government, etc. Addressing these areas has the potential to improve the overall quality of dialogue, analysis, and insights on policy making in each country.

Importance of factors for improving performance of think tanks

% of total respondents selecting "Important" (4+5), by region



¹¹ In Africa, stakeholders were given a shorter list to choose from in the first wave of the research. In the second wave of the research in Africa and Latin America the list was expanded.

PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

Stakeholders were also asked, unprompted, to share advice on how think tanks can improve to best assist stakeholders in their work. The table below summarizes the main advice offered, and two clear messages emerge: improve the overall quality of research and get better at disseminating research. Stakeholders' desire for improved access to think tanks' research is indicative of

the value they place on this work. While stakeholders want think tanks to be more collaborative with both government and non-government stakeholders, they also recognize the importance of sustaining their objective and independent voice in the policy-making context. A successful think tank will therefore balance its social capital and networking with its independence.

Unprompted advice to think tanks to better assist work

Unprompted, % of respondents, by region

Africa	Latin America	South Asia
Improve research dissemination (22%)	Improve research dissemination (25%)	Improve quality/accuracy/reliability (22%)
Improve quality/accuracy/reliability (10%)	Improve quality/accuracy/reliability (17%)	Focus on specific / high priority issues (14%)
Create awareness / engage media (9%)	Collaborate with non-government stakeholders (10%)	Improve research dissemination (11%)
Be objective/independent (8%)	Focus on specific / high priority issues (9%)	Improve engagement with government / policy makers (11%)
Collaborate with non-government stakeholders (8%)	Improve engagement with government / policy makers (8%)	Be objective/independent (9%)
Focus on specific / high priority issues (7%)	Be objective/independent (7%)	Collaborate with non-government stakeholders (8%)
Expand scope / research areas (6%)	Create awareness / engage media (6%)	Improve training for staff/researchers (6%)

Based on total sample: Africa, $n=451$; Latin America, $n=290$; South Asia, $n=244$

Q. C3

PART 4:

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Perceptions of the Policy-Making Context and Information Needs

For the purposes of this study, a general definition¹² of quality and how it relates to policy making was supplied to stakeholders in order to aid them in answering a question related to the quality of policy making in their countries. While quality in this context is difficult to evaluate quantitatively, stakeholders across Africa, Latin America, and South Asia tend to offer assessments of the quality of policy-making processes in their respective countries that are neither positive nor negative overall. Those most closely involved in policy making (i.e., government stakeholders) tend to be the most positive about the overall process. In contrast, non-government stakeholders tend to have less than positive perceptions of the quality of policy-making processes.

In most countries, stakeholders report neither easy nor difficult access to information needed to support their policy work, while at the same time expressing concerns about the usefulness of this information. Interestingly, despite these concerns, and the varying contexts in which they work, stakeholders from all three regions tend to be consistent in their information needs. Information on poverty alleviation and economic/fiscal issues are considered to be the most needed types of information for stakeholders' work in policy making.

Supporting Effective Policy Development

In South Asia and Latin America, think tanks are among the top-rated organizations for providing quality research, along with international agencies and international university-based research institutes. In these two regions, not only are think tanks perceived to produce high quality research, but they are also used frequently as a source of research-based evidence by stakeholders in these regions. In Africa, however, while think tanks are perceived to deliver quality outputs, they are used much less frequently by stakeholders, suggesting that think tanks are less established and embedded in the African policy-making context as sources of policy-relevant information.

The survey suggests that think tanks are seen as repositories of useful data in most contexts. It is less clear, however, as to what extent think tanks' capacity to undertake relevant research or to engage proactively in policy dialogue is, in itself, valued. For some policy actors, the mandate of think tanks may be less well defined than organizations such as universities or advocacy NGOs. It would be interesting to have a better understanding of stakeholder perceptions of the existing and future capacity of think tanks. This knowledge may help think tanks shape their contributions nationally, through their research. It may also enable them, potentially, to promote wider public debate through developing strategic relationships and allegiances with different types of organization who play complementary roles.

¹² See Notes to Reader section on page 12

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

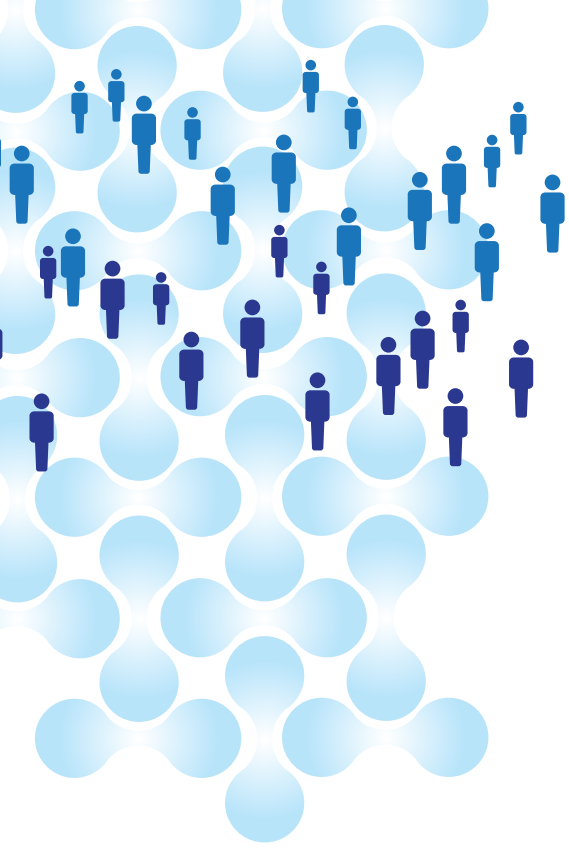
In all regions, government sources of information (e.g., from government agencies and government-owned research institutes) are among the most frequently used by stakeholders to support their policy work. Public sector stakeholders are the most likely to rely on government-produced sources of information. However, even though government sources are used by government stakeholders, there are underlying concerns about the quality of these sources across all stakeholder groups, including government respondents.

Performance Improvement

When asked how think tanks can most improve, stakeholders' advice is focused on research quality, the relevance of the research itself, the capacity of staff, and the dissemination of their research to the broader policy community. Improving governance is also frequently mentioned.

Looking forward

The survey has explored key policy actors' perceptions of their information needs, the accessibility and usefulness of this information for their policy work, and also the value of the contributions of think tanks as generators of this information. The picture, as described in this paper, relates to the current situation. It will be interesting to explore how these perceptions may change over time, as a means of understanding shifts in the policy context. This can be achieved by follow-up studies, some of which may involve direct collaboration with think tanks that are showing increasing interest in engaging in research on policy influence. Such studies can be complemented by some more in-depth exploration of perceptions of key policy stakeholders on specific issues raised in the policy community survey, as well as cross-referencing other relevant research relating to policy community perceptions.



Questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE

A. Information and Policy Making

ASK ALL

A1. Overall, how would you rate the quality of the current national policy making process in [YOUR COUNTRY]?

Note: in determining quality, we include here factors such as existence and use of mechanisms for national policy making and implementation; competency reputation of technocrats; participation by individuals other than policymakers in policy processes; and openness of policy makers to expert (or technical) advice; use of evidence in policy debates and formulation; and transparency of the policy-making process.

Please use a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is “poor” and 5 is “excellent.”

ASK ALL

A2. In your current direct or indirect involvement with national policy making processes, what types of information do you require? Information relating to....

PLEASE SELECT ALL THAT APPLY.

- 01 Agriculture / food security
- 02 Economic/fiscal/monetary issues
- 03 Education
- 04 Environment / natural resources / energy
- 05 Foreign affairs
- 06 Gender issues
- 07 Health care
- 08 Human rights
- 09 Poverty alleviation
- 10 Trade/industry
- 11 Other, please specify:_____

ASK OF AREAS MENTIONED IN A2. IF A2 IS BLANK SKIP TO A4

A3. How easy or difficult is it to obtain information to support policy development in each of the following areas currently?

PLEASE USE A SCALE FROM 1 TO 5 WHERE 1 IS “VERY DIFFICULT” AND 5 IS “VERY EASY.”

- a. Agriculture / food security
- b. Economic/fiscal/monetary issues
- c. Education
- d. Environment / natural resources / energy
- e. Foreign affairs

QUESTIONNAIRE

- f. Gender issues
- g. Health care
- h. Human rights
- i. Poverty alleviation
- j. Trade industry
- k. Other [RESPONSE from A2]

ASK OF AREAS MENTIONED IN A2. IF A2 IS BLANK SKIP TO A4

NOT ASKED TO AFRICAN RESPONDENTS

A3a. How useful is the information you obtain to support policy development in each of the following areas currently?

PLEASE USE A SCALE FROM 1 TO 5 WHERE 1 IS “NOT VERY USEFUL” AND 5 IS “VERY USEFUL.”

- a. Agriculture / food security
- b. Economic/fiscal/monetary issues
- c. Education
- d. Environment / natural resources / energy
- e. Foreign affairs
- f. Gender issues
- g. Health care
- h. Human rights
- i. Poverty alleviation
- j. Trade industry
- k. Other [RESPONSE from A2]

ASK ALL

A4. What format(s) of information exchange is most useful to support your involvement in national policy?

PLEASE SELECT UP TO THREE.

- 01 Databases / statistical data banks
- 02 Print publications/reports
- 03 Online/electronic publications/reports
- 04 Newsletters/bulletins
- 05 In-person events / Face to face meetings
- 06 Online forums / discussion boards

QUESTIONNAIRE

- 07 Consulting/advice from individual experts
- 08 Policy briefs
- 09 Media (TV/radio/newspapers)
- 10 Other, please specify: _____

B. Availability and use of research-based evidence in the national policy context

ASK ALL

I would now like to ask you a few questions about “research-based evidence.” By “research-based evidence,” I mean findings or results from research that can help inform decision making.

B1. When you require information related to social and economic policies, what types of organizations do you typically turn to for research-based evidence?

PLEASE RATE EACH OF THE FOLLOWING SOURCES ON A SCALE FROM 1 TO 5 WHERE 1 IS “NEVER USE” AND 5 IS “ONE OF YOUR PRIMARY SOURCES.”

- a. Government-owned research institutes
- b. National university-based research institutes
- c. International university –based research institutes
- d. Independent policy research institutes
- e. Relevant government ministries/agencies
- f. International agencies
- g. Local/national advocacy NGOs
- h. Industry associations
- i. Other, please specify: _____

ASK FOR EACH SOURCE MARKED ‘5’ IN B1

B1a. You identified [SOURCE NAME in B1] as a *primary source*. Please provide the name of the specific organization you turn to most often.

- a. Government-owned research institutes
- b. National university-based research institutes
- c. International university–based research institutes
- d. Independent policy research institutes
- e. Relevant government ministries/agencies
- f. International agencies

QUESTIONNAIRE

- g. Local/national advocacy NGOs
- h. Industry associations
- i. Other [RESPONSE from B1]

ASK FOR EACH SOURCE MARKED '5' IN B1

B1b. Why do you turn to this specific organization most often?

NOTE: IN SEVERAL OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS, WE REFER TO QUALITY OF RESEARCH, WHICH IS UNDERSTOOD HERE AS BEING EVIDENCE-BASED, ROBUST AND RIGOROUS; RELEVANT AND UP-TO-DATE; REPUTABLE AND CREDIBLE; AND SITUATED IN RELATION TO EXISTING RESEARCH LITERATURE AND FINDINGS, NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY.

- a. INSERT NAME FROM B1A Government-owned research institutes
 - 01 Only / one of few organizations of this type available to you
 - 02 Only organization of this type you're familiar with
 - 03 High quality of research
 - 04 Relevance of research to your needs
 - 05 High quality of staff/researchers
 - 06 Personal contact there
 - 07 Other, please specify: _____
- b. INSERT NAME FROM B1A National university-based research institutes
- c. INSERT NAME FROM B1A International university-based research institutes
- d. INSERT NAME FROM B1A Independent policy research institutes
- e. INSERT NAME FROM B1A Relevant government ministries/agencies
- f. INSERT NAME FROM B1A International agencies
- g. INSERT NAME FROM B1A Local/national advocacy NGOs
- h. INSERT NAME FROM B1A Industry associations
- i. INSERT NAME FROM B1A Other

ASK IF 01 FOR "INDEPENDENT POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTES" CODE D AT B1

B1c. Why is it that you never use independent policy research institutes when you are looking for research-based evidence?

- 01 Not familiar enough with any such institutes
- 02 Research not relevant enough to your needs
- 03 Quality of research does not meet your needs
- 04 Meet your needs through other sources
- 05 Research findings presented in ways that are not useful for your needs
- 97 Other, please specify: _____

QUESTIONNAIRE

ASK ALL

B2. How would you rate each of these sources in terms of the quality of research provided to work on policy issues in [YOUR COUNTRY]?

PLEASE USE A SCALE FROM 1 TO 5 WHERE 1 IS “POOR” QUALITY AND 5 IS “EXCELLENT” QUALITY.

- a. Government-owned research institutes
- b. National university-based research institutes
- c. International university-based research institutes
- d. Independent policy research institutes
- e. Relevant government ministries/agencies
- f. International agencies
- g. Local/national advocacy NGOs
- h. Industry associations
- i. [OTHER response from B1]

C. The role and contribution of think tanks in the national policy context

ASK ALL

C1. In your opinion, which of the following is the most likely source of funding for independent policy research institutes in [YOUR COUNTRY]?

- 01 Domestic government sources
- 02 Domestic private sources
- 03 Foreign government sources
- 04 Foreign private sources
- 05 Multilateral sources (e.g., UN, World Bank)
- 99 Don't know

ASK ALL

C2. How important are each of the following factors for improving the performance of independent policy research institutes in [YOUR COUNTRY]?

PLEASE USE A SCALE FROM 1 TO 5 WHERE 1 IS “NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT” AND 5 IS “HIGHLY IMPORTANT.”

- a. Increased availability of trained/experienced staff
- b. Greater awareness of their services
- c. Increased volume of research conducted
- d. More media coverage
- e. Improved governance

QUESTIONNAIRE

- f. Diversified sources of funding
- g. Improved quality of research
- h. More audience-friendly presentation of research findings
- i. Other, please specify: _____

ASK ALL

C3. What advice would you have for independent policy research institutes in [YOUR COUNTRY] so that they might better assist you in your work?

E. Respondent Profile

ASK ALL

E1. How long have you worked in your current position?

- 01 Less than 1 year
- 02 1 to less than 2 years
- 03 2 to less than 3 years
- 04 3 to less than 5 years
- 05 5 to less than 10 years
- 06 10 to less than 15 years
- 07 15 to less than 20 years
- 08 20 years or more

ASK ALL

E2. What is your gender?

- 01 Male
- 02 Female

ASK ALL

E3. How old are you?

- 01 Under 18 years old
- 02 18 to 29 years old
- 03 30 to 39 years old
- 04 40 to 49 years old
- 05 50 to 59 years old
- 06 60 to 69 years old
- 07 70 years old or older