A Joint Evaluation of a Conference on Think Tanks Sponsored by the World Bank Institute and the Center for International Private Enterprise

Beirut, Lebanon; February 6-8, 1999

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Adrian Hadorn
Erik C. Johnson (CIPE)
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Evaluation Report

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Since November 1997, the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) and the World Bank Institute (WBI) have co-sponsored four regional capacity building workshops for think tanks. One thing that sets these workshops apart from standard conferences is the linked relationship between the succeeding events. Each conference plays a part in the identification of the objectives or in the improvement of the methodology for the next conference. A global conference of think tanks is currently being planned for December 1999.

The evaluation design of the conference held in Beirut, Lebanon (February 6-8, 1999) was tailored to fit this specific context. Given the interest of CIPE and WBI in forging long-term partnerships with policy institutes, special focus has been placed on having a clear picture of the expectations of think tanks. The evaluation was based on the results of one pre- and one post-conference questionnaire.

The agenda of the Beirut workshop presented 8 objectives:

- Five objectives related to information sharing between think tanks:
  - to expand the regional network of think tanks to include new organizations,
  - to expand the regional network to include new countries,
  - to facilitate information sharing among think tanks in the region,
  - to strengthen existing linkages between think tanks,
  - and to facilitate collaborative projects among think tanks in the region;
- One objective related to the increase of the institutional capacity of think tanks in key areas of their activities; and
- Two objectives related to policy issues: to develop a consensus regarding the key constraints to economic growth which can benefit from think tank intervention, and to identify best practice strategies for think tanks to contribute to the policy process in key issue areas.

Participants' levels of interest in the objectives and the topics of the conference were measured at the beginning of the event. Participants expected that the conference would allow them to increase the institutional capacity of their organizations. They were also interested in the sessions presenting the development of a worldwide think tank network, although their interest at the beginning of the conference might have been more intellectual than practical. The interest in policy issue topics was mixed; the fact that participants perceived themselves as more knowledgeable about policy issues than about institutional or communication skills may have influenced their pre-conference ratings.
At the end of the conference, participants were asked to assess the extent to which each conference objective was met. Overall, the conference was perceived by the participants as a useful event, with high-quality speakers and participants. Participants felt that the conference enabled them to expand their personal network of contacts and develop new collaborative initiatives.

The conference was also perceived by participants as a useful learning event. Self-reported increases in knowledge were impressive for the topics related to information sharing and capacity building. The perceived gains in knowledge were smaller for policy issues, with which participants were more familiar. Participants intended to use what was made available to them, even for those topics that they were disappointed with. However, participants felt that the objectives set by the program were too ambitious for the time available, and that some issues were not treated in sufficient depth.

Immediately following the Beirut conference, a preliminary review of the pre- and post-evaluation surveys was conducted in order to draw some conclusions which might be applied to the design of the succeeding conference in Harare, Zimbabwe. The effect that these proactive efforts had on the quality of the program will be analyzed in the evaluation of the Harare event.

Recommendations

- The use of a pre-conference questionnaire, to be sent out well in advance of the conference rather than at the beginning of the event, is recommended to assist in the planning stage. The questionnaire should identify participants' levels of interest in conference topics and objectives, as well as their perceived knowledge of proposed conference topics.
- Based upon participants' perceived knowledge of the subject matter, the format and style of conference presentations could be shaped to better fit participants' levels of knowledge and interest.
- Certain objectives may be too difficult to fulfill during the course of a conference. Some examples are identifying "best practice" strategies for think tanks to contribute to the policy process, or developing a consensus regarding the key constraints to economic growth. Examination of how the think tank network might be utilized in an ongoing manner to address specific objectives is recommended.
Background and Context

Since November 1997, the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) and the World Bank Institute (WBI) have co-sponsored four regional capacity building workshops for think tanks. Events have been held in Cairo, Egypt (November, 1997); Moscow, Russia (September, 1998); Beirut, Lebanon (February, 1999); and Harare, Zimbabwe (March, 1999). A global conference of think tanks is currently being planned for December 1999.

The decision by CIPE and the World Bank to jointly sponsor these workshops is based on a shared interest in strengthening the institutional capacities of policy institutes so that they may better fulfill their role in civil society.

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, the World Bank has recently organized two large conferences (Mediterranean Development Forums, "MDF"), each gathering more than 500 participants. The objective of these two events (held in May, 1997 and September, 1998) was to “make a substantial contribution to the MENA policy debate in key issues of regional interest” and “empower civil society and the private sector to influence public policy”. To the World Bank, the Beirut workshop was also a follow-up for the MDF conferences, as regional think tanks constituted key stakeholders at those conferences.

One significant element of the partnership between CIPE and WBI has been the joint evaluation of the workshops. This collaborative effort was initiated as a means of establishing a process by which the lessons learned from each workshop could be directly applied to the improvement of future programs. In effect, the evaluation function is a means of accumulating knowledge on how to contribute most effectively to the strengthening of think tanks as leading policy catalysts in their respective countries. The evaluative experience of each regional event will then flow into the design of the global event.
Evaluation Design and Methods

One thing that sets the Beirut evaluation apart from standard conference evaluations is the linked relationship between the succeeding events. Each conference plays a part in the identification of the objectives or in the improvement of the methodology for the next conference. The evaluation design was tailored to fit this specific approach.

The evaluation was based on the results of one pre- and one post- conference questionnaire. The pre-conference questionnaire targeted the single issue of the expectations of the participants. Participants were asked about the degree to which they were interested by the objectives and the lectures of the conference, and what they expected to take from the conference and apply in their organization. The post-conference questionnaire measured the degree to which the expectations of the participants were fulfilled and the extent to which the conference met its objectives as stated at the outset. The post-conference questionnaire was also designed to capture the effectiveness of the conference in three areas: discussion on policy issues, institutional strengthening, and information sharing among think tanks. The questionnaires offered a mix of closed quantitative and open qualitative questions. Both questionnaires are annexed to the present report.

Of the 31 participants, 28 (90.3%) responded to the pre-conference questionnaires and 20 (64.5%) responded to the post-conference questionnaire.
Conference Objectives

The agenda of the Beirut workshop presents 8 objectives, set by CIPE and WBI, which could be combined into 3 categories:

- Five objectives related to information sharing between think tanks: expand the regional network of think tanks to include new organizations, expand the regional network to include new countries, facilitate information sharing among think tanks in the region, strengthen existing linkages between think tanks, and facilitate collaborative projects among think tanks in the region;
- One objective related to the increase of the institutional capacity of think tanks in key areas of their activities (mobilizing public opinion, access to funds, evaluation of activities); and
- Two objectives related to policy issues: develop a consensus regarding the key constraints to economic growth which can benefit from think tank intervention, and identify best practice strategies for think tanks to contribute to the policy process in key issue areas.
Participant Expectations

The conference organized in Beirut was not an isolated event. It was a follow-up to a conference organized in Cairo in 1997. As mentioned earlier, it was also expected to produce information for the organization of a global conference in 1999. Given the interest of WBI and CIPE in forging long term partnerships with policy institutes, special focus has been placed on having a clear picture of the expectations of think tanks.

1. Participants rate their organizational levels of interest in the objectives of the conference

At the beginning of the conference, each participant was asked to assess his or her organization's level of interest for each of the 8 objectives of the conference. The results are presented in Table 1. For more details, the reader can refer to Annex A, the entry questionnaire. A 5 point Likert type scale, ranging from 1= minimum to 5= maximum, was used for each question. Twenty-eight out of 31 participants (90%) answered this questionnaire. In the following text, the reader will note that the number of respondents to each question varies. This is because some participants answered only part of the questionnaire.

The arithmetic average rating was above 3.30 for all questions, which means that all objectives were of interest.

a) Keen interest in institutional capacity, particularly fundraising:

Participants showed a keen interest in the objective of capacity building (see Table 1): 89.3% of respondents gave it the highest score (4 or 5) for their respective organizational levels of interest.
## Table 1. Results of the questions asking for the participants' levels of interest

### Pre-conference - levels of interest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please rate each aspect below on a scale of 1 (minimum) to 5 (maximum).</th>
<th>Mean¹</th>
<th>% 1 or 2¹</th>
<th>% 4 or 5¹</th>
<th>Lowest⁴</th>
<th>Highest⁵</th>
<th>Std. Dev.⁶</th>
<th>N'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1- Indicate your organization's level of interest for the conference objectives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. to expand the regional network to include new organizations</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. to increase the institutional capacity of think tanks in key areas of their operations</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>89.3%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. to facilitate collaborative projects among think tanks in the region</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. to identify &quot;best practice&quot; strategies for think tanks to contribute to the policy process in key issue areas</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>80.8%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. to strengthen existing linkages between think tanks</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>78.6%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. to develop a consensus regarding the key constraints to economic growth in the region</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. to facilitate information sharing among think tanks in the region</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>78.6%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. to expand the regional network to include new countries</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>40.7%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- Indicate your organization's level of interest for each lecture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. The regulation of the economy</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Fiscal decentralization</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. The evaluation of think tank programs</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Building a development network of think tanks worldwide</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. The role of think tanks in the cross-national transfer of ideas</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>78.6%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. How think tanks can tap into philanthropy and the private sector for funding</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Transparency in the budget process</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. How to develop online communication strategies</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>67.9%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Education sector reform</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. An internet, &quot;virtual&quot; association of think tanks in the region</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>67.9%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. How the past affects future development in the region</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Arithmetic average rating of all respondents to the question on a scale of 1 to 5, where "1" = "minimum;" and "5" = "maximum."
² Percentage of participants who answered with a "1" or a "2" out of all respondents to the question.
³ Percentage of participants who answered with a "4" or a "5" out of all respondents to the question.
⁴ Lowest rating awarded by at least one participant to the question.
⁵ Highest rating awarded by at least one participant to the question.
⁶ Standard deviation: the larger the standard deviation, the more heterogeneous the opinion of the group on the question.
⁷ Number of responses.
When asked more specifically to cite one concrete example of something they expected to take away from the conference and apply in their organization, 16 (76%) of the 21 respondents mentioned a capacity building skill: 43% (9 out of 21) of the respondents to this open question referred to fundraising for financial stability and/or general financial skills and 33% (7 out of 21) respondents quoted best practices in organizational, management and communications skills (see Table 2). Capacity building skills that participants hoped to take away with them included strategies to mobilize public opinion, influence public policy, and gain knowledge of how think tanks can best use the latest on-line communications skills to build efficiency.

Table 2: Entry evaluation: Question 4: “Can you cite one example of something you would hope to take from this conference and apply in your organization?” Coding of participants’ answers (21 respondents).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics→</th>
<th>Best practices, management, organizational and on-line communication skills</th>
<th>Fundraising and financial skills</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total (1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Networking/ collaborative projects, information sharing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of answers</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) Some of the 21 respondents offered several answers

b) Mixed interest for policy issues:

Participants were unequally interested in the objectives concerning policy issues (see Table 1). The identification of best practices for think tanks to contribute to the policy process was of interest to all participants (mean=4.42; all 26 respondents gave a rating higher than or equal to 3). By comparison, the development of a consensus regarding the key constraints to economic growth was less attractive to participants (mean=3.74; only 55.6% of the 27 respondents gave a rating of 4 or 5, which is the second lowest score).

At the pre-conference evaluation, participants did not specify any particular policy topic as one which they hoped to apply in their organization (see Table 2).

c) Information sharing among think tanks: an interest for the reinforcement of the existing regional network, less interest for expansion.

The expectations of participants concerning objectives related to the information sharing among think tanks were also mixed (see Table 1). The strengthening of existing linkages, the facilitation of collaborative projects and the information sharing among think tanks in the region were appealing. More than 78% of respondents gave high ratings (4 or 5) for their levels in interest in these three areas. When asked more specifically to cite one concrete example of something they expected to take away from the conference and apply in their organization
52% (11) out of the 21 respondents to this open question expected that the conference would allow them to network effectively and to start a systematic process of knowledge sharing between experts in various think tanks throughout the region (see Table 1). By contrast, the objectives concerning the expansion of regional networks to include new organizations or new countries were less attractive to participants (mean rating respectively of 3.64 and 3.30).

2. Participant interest in the topics of the conference

Participants were asked at the beginning of the conference to rate their respective organizational levels of interest for each topic. The arithmetic average rating was above 3.8 for all questions, which means that all topics were of interest.

Quite surprisingly, the interests of participants from a practical point of view differed in some instances from their intellectual interest. For example, participants indicated that they were most interested in the topic on the development of a worldwide think tanks network (85.7% of respondents gave a rating of 4 or 5). However, they did not identify the expansion of the present network as a key objective for their organization. The development of on-line communication strategies was a topic attractive to all participants; no respondent gave a rating below 3. Furthermore, the understanding of on-line communication was cited by two participants as a skill they wanted to take away from the conference.

The two least attractive lectures related to policy issues, which was consistent with the findings on objectives: Fiscal decentralization and education sector reform were the least attractive topics. They received the lowest mean (3.82) together with the lowest percentage of high ratings (60.7%).
Overall Achievement of Objectives

At the end of the conference, participants were asked to assess the extent to which each conference objective was met. Annex B provides the questionnaire used at the end of the conference. Twenty participants answered the questionnaire (65% of registered participants). The results are presented in Table 3. The mean ratings given by respondents to the items of this question (questions 1a to 1h, question 2d) ranged from 2.84 to 3.85, clearly indicating that there were below average ratings.¹

1. Information sharing and networking: broadening or deepening?

Participants felt that the objective to expand the regional network to include new organizations was met (See Table 3; mean=3.81, no 1 or 2 ratings, N=16). However, the objective of expanding the regional network to include new countries received a lower marking (3.15).

Overall, participants felt that the conference enhanced their personal network of contacts (mean=3.85, N=20). The strengthening of existing linkages and the information sharing among think tanks in the region received a rating in the 3.55 range. The objective of facilitating collaborative projects among think tanks in the region was neither perceived as a success nor as a failure. Sixty-five percent of the respondents to this question gave it a neutral (3) marking, 10% a low marking (1 or 2), and 25% a high marking (4 or 5).

When asked directly whether the conference allowed them to develop new collaborative initiatives between their organizations and other participants (question 7), 68% of the 28 respondents gave a positive answer. Of these, only three participants listed names of newly founded linkages with other participants. One participant stated, "some possibilities for new collaborative initiatives are up. To what extent they can be materialized is another issue." Another said, "new collaborative initiatives are only in design stage."

¹ In the following text, unless mentioned otherwise, the number of respondents (N) refers to the respondents for the question under consideration.
### A Joint Evaluation of a Conference on Think Tanks

#### Table 3. Post-conference data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please rate each aspect below on a scale of 1 (minimum) to 5 (maximum).</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>% 1 or 2</th>
<th>% 4 or 5</th>
<th>Lowest</th>
<th>Highest</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. To what extent did the conference meet the following objectives?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. to expand the regional network to include new organizations</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>68.8%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. to increase the institutional capacity of think tanks in key areas of their operations</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>55.0%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. to facilitate collaborative projects among think tanks in the region</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. to identify &quot;best practice&quot; strategies for think tanks to contribute to the policy process in key issue areas</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. to strengthen existing linkages between think tanks</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. to develop a consensus regarding the key constraints to economic growth in the region</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. to facilitate information sharing among think tanks in the region</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. to expand the regional network to include new countries</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. To what extent, for you personally, did the conference</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. focus on the issues you hoped would be addressed?</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>52.6%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. allocate enough time for constructive participation?</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. treat issues in sufficient depth for your own learning?</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>55.0%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. enhance the creation or the strengthening of your own network of contacts?</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>65.0%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Overall, to what extent has the conference been a worthwhile use of your time?</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>70.0%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Arithmetic average rating of all respondents to the question on a scale of 1 to 5, where "1" = "minimum," and "5" = "maximum."
2. Percentage of participants who answered with a "1" or a "2" out of all respondents to the question.
3. Percentage of participants who answered with a "4" or a "5" out of all respondents to the question.
4. Lowest rating awarded by at least one participant to the question.
5. Highest rating awarded by at least one participant to the question.
6. Standard deviation: the larger the standard deviation, the more heterogeneous the opinion of the group on the question.
7. Number of responses.
2. Institutional capacity: think tanks were attracted by evaluation and new management tools.

Overall, the objective related to the increase of the institutional capacity of think tanks received a 3.55 rating (see Table 3). Only a few participants (5%) were dissatisfied with the way the objective was met (1 or 2 rating). Furthermore 80% (16 out of 20) of the respondents reported in an open question (question 6) that they will implement at least one of the capacity building skills (funding issues, on-line communication strategies, evaluation of think tank programs) in their organizations. Almost 70% (11 out of 16) of the respondents quoted evaluation, 30% (5 out of 16) identified fundraising, and 20% mentioned on-line communication strategies.

3. A mixed picture related to policy issues.

The two objectives related to policy issues received the lowest markings (see Table 3). The development of a consensus regarding key constraints to economic growth received a mean rating just at the midpoint of the scale (mean=3.00; 26% of participants gave a rating of 1 or 2; N=19). The identification of best practices for think tanks to contribute to the policy process received a mean rating below the midpoint (mean=2.84; 26% of people gave a rating of 1 or 2; N=19).

Although they did not feel that the conference had met its objectives related to policy issues, participants intended to use what the conference made available to them. Seventy percent of the respondents to question 5 (12 out of 17) reported that they would study in greater depth with their staff at least one of the conference policy topics (reform and development, deregulating of the economy, fiscal responsibility, education reform and the role of think tanks in policy making). Seven participants (41% of respondents) mentioned education reform, 4 (23%) quoted fiscal reform, and 4 (23%) deregulation.

4. Overall rating: a useful conference, but too many objectives in too little time.

Overall, participants felt that the conference focussed on issues they hoped would be addressed (see Table 3; mean=3.63; N=19). All participants agreed that the conference had been a worthwhile use of their time (mean=3.95; N=20; no rating below 3). Participants were particularly happy with the selection of audience and the presenters. More than half of the respondents to question 8 (11 out of 19) attributed the success of the conference to the quality and diversity of participants and speakers.

However, many participants pointed out that the objectives set by the conference were too ambitious for the amount of time available: respondents to
the post-questionnaire felt the issues were not treated in sufficient depth (answer to question 3c: mean=2.84; N=20; 55% of respondents gave a rating of 1 or 2).

Participants were also asked if they could identify any feature of the conference that limited its effectiveness. All responses addressed logistical issues, 70% (13 out of 19 responses) of which focused on a clear need for more time to discuss and cover issues in greater depth. Several participants suggested that the objectives of the conference as stated in the agenda, should have been more realistic so as to have been met by the agenda. One participant stated, "the goals of the conference have to be clearer so as to keep the discussion speeches more focused." Another stated that "I think the conference was a very interesting one. The topics discussed were quite challenging. I am not quite sure, however, it met the objectives it had set for itself ..."

When asked to identify topics that they would like to spend more or less time on (questions 11 and 12), participants had a wide range of responses. The 18 respondents had 30 suggestions for topics to spend more time on and 14 for those less deserving of conference time. Almost all suggestions (for more or for less time) fell under the policy issues or capacity building categories. The time allocated to information sharing did not seem to raise problems. No clear pattern appeared concerning a topic on which participants wanted to spend more time: answers were shared among deregulating the economy, fundraising, evaluation and education. The topics on which participants wanted to spend less time ranged widely, with no single item earning more than 20% of the votes.
Usefulness of the Conference as a Learning Event

Participants were asked at the end of the seminar to assess their pre/post level of knowledge. Nineteen participants answered this questionnaire, and the results were matched question by question. Non-respondents to either the pre-course question or the post-course question were excluded from the computation of results.

Self-reported knowledge is commonly used as means to estimate what participants have learned when it is not practical to organize a test, which is usually the case in conferences. It is worth noting, however, that participants' perceived gain in knowledge is not an accurate measure of their actual increase in knowledge. With this in mind, the results indicate a positive perceived knowledge gain of 20% or larger across 7 out of 11 topics (see Table 4).

1. Information sharing among think tanks: an important perceived gain in knowledge for all topics.

The respondents' perceived gain in understanding was above 30% for the 3 topics related to this issue: the internet association of think tanks in the region (39.1%), the building of a worldwide network of think tanks (34.7%), and the role of think tanks in the cross-national transfer of ideas (32%).

2. Institutional capacity of think tanks: participants feel more knowledgeable, especially about evaluation:

Three topics related to this issue were addressed in the presentations: evaluation, fundraising, and on-line communication. The respondents' perceived gain in understanding for the question relative to the evaluation of think tanks programs received the highest of all ratings (57.8%). This topic was the one about which participants perceived themselves as less knowledgeable before the conference (pre-mean of 2.50).
Table 4. Comparison between pre-conference and post-conference ratings of self-assessed level of knowledge

Results of the matched respondents question by question

("Matched respondents" are the respondents who answered both the pre-course question and the post-course question. Therefore, in the table below, non-respondents to either the pre-course question or the post-course question or both are excluded from the computation of the question.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please rate your level of knowledge before and after the conference of:</th>
<th>Pre mean(^1)</th>
<th>Post mean(^2)</th>
<th>Total change(^3)</th>
<th>% of total change(^4)</th>
<th>Matched N(^5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. The regulation of the economy</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Fiscal decentralization</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. The evaluation of think tank programs</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>57.8%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Building a development network of think tanks worldwide</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. The role of think tanks in the cross-national transfer of ideas</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. How think tanks can tap into philanthropy and the private sector for funding</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Transparency in the budget process</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. How to develop online communication strategies</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Education sector reform</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. An internet, &quot;virtual&quot; association of think tanks in the region</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>39.1%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. How the past affects future development in the region</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Arithmetic average rating of all matched respondents to the pre-course question on a scale of 1 to 5, where "1" = "very low" and "5" = "very high."
2. Arithmetic average rating of all matched respondents to the post-course question on a scale of 1 to 5, where "1" = "very low" and "5" = "very high."
3. Mean of the post-course question minus mean of the pre-course question.
4. "Total pre/post change" divided by "pre mean" multiplied by 100.
5. Number of matched respondents to the question.
The perceived increase in knowledge for funding issues was 23.5% (N=19). Respondents did not consider themselves very knowledgeable about funding issues (pre mean of 2.68). Despite the increase in perceived knowledge brought by the conference, respondents still did not feel they knew a lot about this topic (participants gave to this topic the lowest ranking post mean: 3.32).

The ratings for the development of on-line strategies showed a perceived gain in the 23% range.

3. A smaller perceived gain in knowledge for policy issues.

The education sector reform was the policy issue for which the respondents' perceived knowledge increase was highest (21.4%). Yet this perceived gain is less than that for any of the topics relating to institutional capacity or information sharing.

One explanation for the participants lesser perceived gain in knowledge may be that they were already familiar with policy topics. The five policy topics were those for which participants' mean score for self-assessment of pre-conference knowledge scored the highest (see Table 4; the respective pre-knowledge means for "How the past affects future development in the region," the "regulation of the economy," the "budget process," "education reform" and "fiscal decentralization" were 3.63, 3.37, 3.22, 3.11 and 2.94).
Conclusions, Suggestions for Improvement, and Recommendations

Participants expected that the conference would allow them to increase the institutional capacity of their organizations. They were also interested in the sessions presenting the development of a worldwide think tank network, although their interest at the beginning of the conference might have been more intellectual than practical. The interest for policy issues was more mixed; the fact that participants perceived themselves as more knowledgeable on policy issues than on institutional or communication skills may have influenced their pre-conference rating.

Overall, the conference was perceived by the participants as a useful event, with high-quality speakers and participants. Participants felt that the conference enabled them to expand their personal network of contacts and to develop new collaborative initiatives. The conference was also perceived by participants as a useful learning event. Participants intended to use what was made available to them, even on those topics that they were disappointed with. But participants felt that the objectives set by the program were too ambitious for the time available.

1. Participant recommendations

a) Topics that could be addressed in a next conference

In their answers to open questions, a few participants volunteered topics that could be addressed in a future conference:

- **Information sharing among think tanks**: With regard to networking, one participant suggested that "more time should have been devoted to linkages between MENA Think Tanks and their partnership with World Bank."
- **Increase in the institutional capacity of think tanks**: A participant said, "a topic which was omitted was the effect of donors' assistance on Think Tanks—their programs and priorities."
- **Policy issues**: One participant said that the conference could have been more effective if it covered the questions, "how can think tanks lobby for political liberalization? How can Think Tanks mobilize popular support for their objectives?"
b) Pedagogy and logistics

In their answer to open questions, participants offered additional comments on four issues:

- **Improve role of moderator**—about 20% of the participants said (in oral interviews and written questionnaires) that the role of moderator should be strengthened to avoid collapsed time schedules. One participant said, “the moderators could have been more assertive and effective.”

- **Distribute papers in advance**—participants who offered comments regarding the conference materials appreciated the papers that were distributed, but they expressed a strong need for distributing them prior to the conference. One participant stated, “To make the discussions more meaningful, focused, and fruitful, we need to have had the opportunity to read the papers in advance, in order to come prepared and contribute…”

- **Improve the role of discussants**—it was noted by several participants that the discussants diverted from the papers being presented, often expressing their own views. This was in part due to the fact that there were some last minute cancellations of some of the original discussants. Participants suggested that, in inevitable situations, the time originally allocated for discussants could be used for comments from participants.

- **Increase discussion time**—when asked whether the conference had allocated enough time for discussion, 25% of the respondents to the post-questionnaire were clearly unsatisfied, giving a marking of 1 or 2. (mean=3.15, N=20). Almost 80% of participants noted at least one limiting feature to the effectiveness of the conference. Seventy percent of this group said that issues were not discussed in sufficient depth, and/or that presenters spoke in very general terms. Answers to open questions offered means to remedy the situation: increasing the number of conference days, decreasing the number of topics, and/or organizing small discussion groups.

- **Improve pedagogy**—while panel discussions (which constituted about 90% of the conference) were acknowledged as an appropriate setup, several participants suggested variations in pedagogy. They welcomed the discussion on evaluation—the only session that used transparencies and an overhead projector. One participant said, “the content of the presentations are very rich and that is important, but the way in which they are delivered is equally important...to make it interesting and help retain the information.”

2. Evaluator recommendations

A pre-conference questionnaire could be sent out well in advance of the conference to assist in the planning stage. The questionnaire would address issues such as interest in conference topics and objectives. The pre-conference questionnaire could also be used to identify participants’ perceived knowledge of proposed conference themes and topics. The results of the Beirut conference indicated that when participants perceive their knowledge of a particular issue to
be high, there is a greater need for those issues to be covered more in-depth. Those sessions need be less theoretical and more practical (for example, utilizing case studies to present the material). Avoiding a lecture-like presentation will increase the chances that participants will be proactive and more willing to participate.

Another idea would be to explore how the think tank network can be mobilized as a tool to facilitate information sharing. For example, data from the Beirut suggests that the conference did not fully meet its objective to identify “best practice” strategies for think tanks to contribute to the policy process and to develop a consensus regarding the key constraints to economic growth in the region. Issues such as these are difficult to address and resolve during the course of a conference. Can the network be used to address such policy issues?

One topic to consider, including in future conferences (at least for Middle East participants), is the evaluation of think tank activities. In Beirut, this topic received the largest increase in pre- and post-conference knowledge levels. This would suggest that think tanks knowledge and level of awareness of this issue is low. Consideration should be given to including this topic on any pre-conference questionnaire to measure participants’ levels of interest.
Post-script: Influencing the Design of the Harare Conference

Immediately following the Beirut conference, a preliminary review of the pre- and post-evaluation surveys was conducted in order to draw some preliminary conclusions which might be applied to the design of the upcoming Harare conference. A brief list of ways in which participants felt the conference could have been improved was drafted and passed onto the Harare conference organizers. As a result, a number of actions were taken when the conference occurred in March, 1999. First, the conference objectives were condensed and simplified in order to make them more realistic and achievable. Second, conference speakers, moderators and discussants were given written instructions to ensure that they fulfilled the specific obligations of their roles in the program. Third, speakers were asked to utilize a variety of formats in conveying their presentations during the sessions. Flip charts, LCD projectors and overheads were used, as well as a mix of standing and sitting lectures. Finally, key conference materials, including a regional survey paper, were circulated to participants in advance of the conference. The effect of these proactive efforts on the quality of the program will be analyzed in the upcoming evaluation of the Harare event.
Think Tanks as Civil Society Catalysts in the MENA Region: Fulfilling Their Potential
Beirut, Lebanon; February 6-8, 1999

Entry Evaluation Form

We invite you to complete this questionnaire to help us improve our activities in the future. Please be frank and open with your ratings and comments. Your opinion—no matter how positive or negative—is valuable to us and will be taken into consideration in the preparation of future activities. To keep your responses anonymous, please do not write your name on the form.

First, please indicate your confidential evaluation code number here: [___ ___] This number will enable us to link your responses to all our evaluation questionnaires, while maintaining your anonymity.

1. What is your country of residence? ______________________________________________________________________

Please rate the items below on the scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is the minimum and 5 is the maximum. To answer, please completely fill in the red circle corresponding to your response, like this: ● and not like this: X O □.

If you made a mistake in marking an answer, please draw an arrow to the correct answer and write "correct" next to the arrow. Please fill only one circle per question. If you feel that a question does not apply to you, or that you do not have enough information to express an opinion, please fill the "no opinion" option.

2. The principal objectives of the conference you are about to attend are listed below. Please indicate your organization's level of interest for each objective:

   a. to expand the regional network to include new organizations
   b. to increase the institutional capacity of think tanks in key areas of their operations
   c. to facilitate collaborative projects among think tanks in the region
   d. to identify "best practice" strategies for think tanks to contribute to the policy process in key issue areas
   e. to strengthen existing linkages between think tanks
   f. to develop a consensus regarding the key constraints to economic growth in the region which can benefit from think tank intervention
   g. to facilitate information sharing among think tanks in the region
   h. to expand the regional network to include new countries

Please answer the questions that are on the back of this page.
4. Can you please cite one concrete example of something you would hope to take from this conference and apply in your organization?


Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please put it in the "Questionnaire Box" by the door before leaving.
Think Tanks as Civil Society Catalysts in the MENA Region:
Fulfilling Their Potential
Beirut, Lebanon
February 6-8, 1999

Participants' Feedback Questionnaire on the Conference

We invite you to complete this questionnaire to help us improve our activities in the future. Please be frank and open with your ratings and comments. Your opinion—no matter how positive or negative—is valuable to us and will be taken into consideration in the preparation of future activities. To keep your responses anonymous, please do not write your name on the form.

First, please indicate your confidential evaluation code number here: [ ] [ ] [ ] This number will enable us to link your responses to all our evaluation questionnaires, while maintaining your anonymity.

This questionnaire has three parts. The first part is for your own assessment of your knowledge of the conference topics before and after the conference. Then we ask you to give us your opinion of the course by rating some of its aspects. Finally, we ask for your written comments.

To answer, please completely fill in the red circle corresponding to your response, like this: ☐ and not like this: ☒ ☒ ☐.
If you made a mistake in marking an answer (that cannot be erased), please do the following to correct it: 1) fill the circle indicating your preferred answer, 2) draw an arrow to it, and 3) write the word "correct" next to the arrow.
Annex B

1. **Your knowledge of the conference topics:**

   To answer, please completely fill in the red circle corresponding to your response, like this: ● and not like this: ❌ ○ ✔. If you made a mistake in marking an answer (that cannot be erased), please do the following to correct it: 1) fill the circle indicating your preferred answer, 2) draw an arrow to it, and 3) write the word “correct” next to the arrow.

1. How do you rate the depth of your understanding of each presentation topic before and after the conference?
   For the following questions, please give one answer to assess the level that you had just before you started the conference and one answer to assess your level now (after you heard the substance of the conference).

   a. The regulation of the economy  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   1 2 3 4 5

   b. Fiscal decentralization  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   1 2 3 4 5

   c. The evaluation of think tank programs  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   1 2 3 4 5

   d. Building a development network of think tanks worldwide  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   1 2 3 4 5

   e. The role of think tanks in the cross-national transfer of ideas  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   1 2 3 4 5

   f. How think tanks can tap into philanthropy and the private sector for funding  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   1 2 3 4 5

   g. Transparency in the budget process  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   1 2 3 4 5

   h. How to develop online communication strategies  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   1 2 3 4 5

   i. Education sector reform  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   1 2 3 4 5

   j. An internet, "virtual" association of think tanks in the region  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   1 2 3 4 5

   k. How the past affects future development in the region  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   1 2 3 4 5
II. Your opinion of the course:

To answer, please completely fill in the red circle corresponding to your response, like this: ⭕ and not like this: ✘ ☐ ☑. If you made a mistake in marking an answer (that cannot be erased), please do the following to correct it: 1) fill the circle indicating your preferred answer, 2) draw an arrow to it, and 3) write the word “correct” next to the arrow.

Please rate the items below on the scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is the minimum and 5 is the maximum. Please fill only one circle per question.

If you feel that a question does not apply to you, or that you do not have enough information to express an opinion, please fill the “no opinion” option.

2. To what extent did the conference meet the following objectives?

   a. to expand the regional network to include new organizations
      [1 2 3 4 5] ☐

   b. to increase the institutional capacity of think tanks in key areas of their operations (mobilizing public opinion, access to funds, evaluation of activities, etc.)
      [1 2 3 4 5] ☐

   c. to facilitate collaborative projects among think tanks in the region
      [1 2 3 4 5] ☐

   d. to identify "best practice" strategies for think tanks to contribute to the policy process in key issue areas.
      [1 2 3 4 5] ☐

   e. to strengthen existing linkages between think tanks
      [1 2 3 4 5] ☐

   f. to develop a consensus regarding the key constraints to economic growth in the region which can benefit from think tank intervention
      [1 2 3 4 5] ☐

   g. to facilitate information sharing among think tanks in the region
      [1 2 3 4 5] ☐

   h. to expand the regional network to include new countries
      [1 2 3 4 5] ☐

3. To what extent, for you personally, did the conference:

   a. focus on the issues you hoped would be addressed?
      [1 2 3 4 5] ☐

   b. allocate enough time for constructive participation?
      [1 2 3 4 5] ☐

   c. treat issues in sufficient depth for your own learning?
      [1 2 3 4 5] ☐

   d. enhance the creation or the strengthening of your own network of contacts?
      [1 2 3 4 5] ☐

4. Overall, to what extent has the conference been a worthwhile use of your time?

   [1 2 3 4 5] ☐
Indicate what you believe to be the correct answer by filling the corresponding red circle like this ● and not like this X

5. a. Did day one identify policy topics which you or your staff will study in greater depth?
   ○ Yes    ○ No

b. If your answer is Yes, what are these topics?

6. a. Will you implement in your organization any of the capacity building skills discussed in day two?
   ○ Yes    ○ No

b. If your answer is Yes, please specify:

7. a. Has this conference allowed you to develop new collaborative initiatives between your organization and other participants?
   ○ Yes    ○ No

b. If your answer is Yes, can you describe them?

8. a. Can you identify any feature of this conference that you feel especially contributed to its effectiveness?
   ○ Yes    ○ No

b. If your answer is Yes, please specify:

9. a. Can you identify any feature of this conference that you feel limited its effectiveness?
   ○ Yes    ○ No

b. If your answer is Yes, please specify:

10. a. There will be a global conference on think tanks in Washington in September '99. Can you identify any topic discussed in this regional conference that deserves further discussion at a global meeting?
    ○ Yes    ○ No

b. If your answer is Yes, please specify:
III. Your written comments:

11. What topics in this conference did you want to spend more time on?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

12. What topics in this conference did you want to spend less time on?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

13. Any other comments or suggestions?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please put it in the "Questionnaire Box" by the door before leaving.