



## Assessing the Impact of Think Tanks in the GCC: Mechanisms of Impact Measurement Setting Standards<sup>1</sup>

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## **1. Abstract**

The overall aim of this paper is to provoke and add to a discussion on setting regional standards for policy impact assessment by think tanks in the GCC region. It argues that policy impact assessment is a necessary component for an institute's strategic planning to effectively impact policy. The paper draws on original data gathered on the current state of policy impact assessment by GCC think tanks which reflects that for the most part, think tanks in the GCC are not systematically measuring or considering their impact. Without dedicating time and resources to policy impact assessment, GCC think tanks are potentially missing opportunities to increase communication and access to constituencies, improve efficiency of their work, and develop better relationships with stakeholders. The paper also draws from the current literature, including existing international handbooks, guides, and some regional think tanks initiatives, on policy impact assessment and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. It synthesizes the information to highlight the most salient mechanisms that can be used to measure the impact of think tanks on decision-makers and society in the GCC region. It addresses the main issues and challenges of assessing think tank policy impact, especially in societies where more transparency, accountability, and civic participation is needed. Further, it proposes an overarching mechanism, in the form of a matrix of measurements, indicators, and evaluation methods, to assess the policy impact of GCC based think tanks intended to be subject to debate by experts in the field. The matrix is also meant to serve as the first attempt in a practical solution to identify and enhance a think tank's policy impact. It may also be used for other types of civil society organizations or non-governmental organizations that would like to impact society and policymaking, such as advocacy groups and various associations.

## 2. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to explore the challenges and opportunities related to measuring the policy impact of think tanks in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region and offer practical solutions. It does not propose to measure the actual policy impact of these think tanks, which is a much larger topic for a different study. There appears to be a dearth of information on this topic, though the think tank industry in the GCC is growing and merits investigation.

In order to explore impact assessment mechanisms, the paper must also consider impact methods. It draws on the different mechanisms used by GCC think tanks to evaluate impact and examines how these actors define the different variables. To determine this, data was collected from a short survey sent to think tanks throughout the GCC. An analysis of the data uncovers methods that GCC think tanks use to measure their impact, and those methods are incorporated into the evaluation strategies and mechanisms suggested in this paper.

Many toolkits, handbooks, and “best practices” have been written on the subject of measuring the policy impact of research conducted by non-government organizations (NGOs) or civil society organizations (CSOs) in other parts of the world, mainly for development programming. There are very few designed specifically for less democratic, less transparent, and relatively developed setting such as the GCC setting. Fewer are specific to think tanks, and hardly any are specific to the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region. The existing literature on policy impact assessment is mainly designed by international donor or governmental aid organizations that intend to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of programs and projects that they fund. However, that does not mean that the only reason to conduct an impact assessment is to ensure the effective financing of international donors.

Without dedicating time and resources to policy impact assessment, GCC think tanks are potentially missing opportunities to increase communication and access to constituencies, improve efficiency of their work, and develop better relationships with stakeholders.<sup>3</sup> In

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<sup>3</sup> David Streatfield, and Sharon Markless, "What is impact assessment and why is it important?" , *Performance Measurement and Metrics* , 10, no. 2 (2009): 134-141, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/14678040911005473> (accessed June 23, 2012).

citing their reasoning for not evaluating the policy impact of their work, some organizations simply stated that they do not believe their work necessitates measurement beyond quality control. But quality of research and efficiency of an institute to produce quality work does not necessarily translate to policy impact, especially not in the GCC. Conducting regular impact assessments would help ensure that an organization's work reaches the intended audiences and stakeholders.

An overview of major policy impact assessment mechanisms will be explored in this paper but only to inform the design of an overarching impact assessment mechanism for GCC think tanks, proposed in the form of an assessment matrix. It considers the constraints and opportunities of policy impact in the GCC and how an impact assessment of think tanks would be possible under the circumstances. The paper also reports the results of the short survey conducted on impact assessment measures by GCC think tanks. Based on an analysis of these results and the literature, it suggests the most used, recommended, and effective methods for assessing policy impact of think tanks in the GCC. The matrix of recommendations is intended primarily for think tanks but can also be used to measure policy impact of other civil society, non-governmental, or university-affiliated associations.

## **2.1 Methodology**

The following are the three main research questions this paper aims to address:

1. How is the policy impact of GCC think tanks currently assessed?
2. What are the obstacles and opportunities to measuring policy impact in the GCC?
3. What are the most used, recommended, and easily implementable methods and strategies for impact assessment for the GCC context?

In order to address these questions, the study relies on three points of data gathering and analysis. The first is a literature review to gather information on existing think tank impact assessment mechanisms globally along with an overview of the GCC context. The second is an online survey that was sent to representatives of think tanks to gather information on the following points:<sup>4</sup>

1. impact assessment mechanisms
2. knowledge of the local policymaking process
3. how impact is defined
4. impact targets

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<sup>4</sup> For complete survey questions, please see page 31 in the annex.

## 5. methods for impact

The answers to these questions are necessary to do a general analysis of impact assessment in the GCC; one must know beforehand how the subjects of the study define the terms of the study. It is also necessary to know the important mechanisms that are used for impact and who they are targeting. More explanation on why these subjects are important can be found in the following sections of this paper.

Approximately 35 think tanks from throughout each of the GCC countries were targeted to participate in the survey. The target list was compiled from a Policy Research Institute (PRI) database created by the Issam Fares Institute, accessible online.<sup>5</sup> The list taken from the PRI database was added to a contact list gathered by the host institute of this study, Tawasul.<sup>6</sup> These two lists were cross-checked with James McGann's "Top Think Tanks 2011" list and The Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program directory of Security and International Affairs Think Tanks.<sup>7</sup>

Initially, each institute was approached with a preliminary phone call and email inviting them to participate in the study. When personal email contacts were available, the email was addressed directly to the contact; when they were not, an email was sent to the general email address of the institute from its website. Many emails were returned and phone calls unanswered. Three rounds of phone calls and emails were completed to each of the institutes to request the completion of the survey. Some declined while others never responded.<sup>8</sup>

Ultimately, of the approximately 35 targeted institutes, 13 responded from the following countries: Oman-2, Qatar-6, United Arab Emirates (UAE- 4), and Kuwait-1. Think Tanks or research centers approached in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia were either unreachable or unwilling to respond.

The types of think tanks varied. Some of the think tanks were new; some have been in existence for years and some internationally recognized or "foreign-created". However, since some of them asked to remain anonymous, none of their names or descriptors will be used in this paper.

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<sup>5</sup> Online database available: <http://www.arabpolicyresearch.com/>, last updated January 2012.

<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.tawasul.co.om/>.

<sup>7</sup> The Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program directory of Security and International Affairs Think Tanks online: <http://www.fpri.org/research/thinktanks/directory/about.html> and McGann, James G. "2011 Global Think Tank Go To Rankings," Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program Working Paper no. 5, International Relations Program, University of Pennsylvania, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> For more information see "Limitations of this study" in the next section of this page.

The final point in the methodology of this study is to analyze both the existing literature and collected data and design a matrix of suitable indicators and mechanisms for measuring think tank impact in the GCC context. Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected from the surveys and form part of the analysis and findings of this paper.

### **3. Limitations of the Study**

It must be noted that this paper suffers from a number of weaknesses that should be addressed and adjusted for a future study. To begin, it was completed in less than two months which limited the scope of the researcher's ability to conduct more in-depth field work in each of the GCC countries. It is presumed that think tank representatives would have been more willing to respond to a personal visit than an online survey.

In addition, the study is limited to English-only literature resources and English-only communications with GCC think tanks. Since English is not the native language of most survey respondents, it is possible that the questions were not fully understood and that responses were not thoroughly or accurately written. A future study would be best carried out either in Arabic or with an option to select between Arabic and English.

The design of the study also encountered some challenges. One challenge is the definition of the term "think tanks" in the GCC. A section is dedicated to explaining this in more detail, but as the definition is still not clear and quite subjective, it will evoke some debate and potential criticism of selection bias of the sample of institutes that participated in the survey.<sup>9</sup> For instance, it is often contested whether university-affiliated research institutes that conduct research which may be relevant and useful to policymaking, but is not designed as policy-oriented research, should be considered a "think tank".

Another limitation of this study is the access and ability to contact think tanks in the GCC via only phone calls and emails. Ideally, the questions would have been posed in the form of an interview. This would be easy to correct in a future study with a greater time allowance. Many websites were also no longer operating or not updated which made it more difficult to identify and contact the proper person to fill out the survey.

In addition, the design of the study does not allow a means to control the person in the organization who fills out the survey. It was suggested that the director or communications managers take the survey when possible, but often the decision was left

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<sup>9</sup> See "problem of defining think tanks" in the next section, on page 9

to the contact person who received the email to decide who would fill it out. This also caused confusion and even reluctance of an institute to participate on the grounds that they do not have an appropriate person to do it. Communications responsibilities were also divided among different people, meaning that those that knew about, for example, the institute's dissemination strategies may not be the same that knew about websites or relationships to policymakers.

Given the time constraints of the study and of those responding to the survey, the questionnaire was designed to be short and only solicit brief explanations and answers. More details could have been retrieved from a longer questionnaire, but in that case fewer institutes may have been willing to respond.

Willingness to participate was also a significant challenge: some organizations declined without stating reasoning. Reasons given included that they did not feel their institute, though producing policy-relevant research, should be categorized as a "think tank" because they also did other activities such as trainings and advocacy. Other reasons stated for not participating in the survey were that evaluation practices were not uniform for all of the institute's projects; therefore it would be impossible to answer such general questions. Another hesitation expressed was that the survey was not anonymous. Asking for the name of the institute was necessary to follow up with those who had not yet responded, while the paper's discussion of survey results is anonymous.

Other reasons for the lack of desire to participate could be due to the following explanations:<sup>10</sup>

1. They have not thought about impact assessment
2. They do not consider it necessary
3. They do not wish to be 'evaluated' or compared to their peers
4. There is nobody in the centre with the responsibility to do it
5. There may be a fear of repercussions by the local/host government

These were all challenges of designing a survey which would, identify the impact assessment definition, methods, and targets of a GCC think tank.

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<sup>10</sup> Enrique Mendizabal, e-mail message to the author, June 5, 2012.

## 4. Background Overview and Literature Review

### 4.1 The problem of defining think tanks

To begin, one must agree upon a definition of think tanks. In the Arab world, the term “think tank” is often ill-received and associated with predominately Western-educated elite circles because it does not have a meaning, translation, or clear understanding in the local context. Many still see think tanks as an imported concept from the West which suggests a kind of imperialistic intervention.

This was discussed in the first regional GCC workshop on think tanks, Tawasul’s Afkar 1- *The First GCC Think Tank Development Dialogue*, in which it was quickly recognized that without a clear definition or understanding of the role, the only impact that think tanks have could be weak. A working group was assigned the task of trying to define “think tank” in the Arab context. They came up with the following criteria: a think tank must be policy oriented, produce evidence-based research, and target and engage with public.<sup>11</sup>

A globally accepted definition of a public policy research institute, or think tanks, is an organization that conducts and translates evidence-based research which serves the needs of the public for the comprehension and implementation by policymakers.<sup>12</sup> However, such a definition comes from, and may be more readily implemented in, more transparent and democratic societies in which policymakers are accountable to the public, there is greater public participation in decision-making, and the policymaking processes are more well-known and understood.

In the GCC, and MENA region more generally, there exists a greater presence of think tanks as GONGOS (Government-organized NGOs) and QUANGOS (quasi-governmental NGOs). Although it was beyond the scope of this study to review the specific type of governmental affiliation of the GCC think tanks, it can be deduced that many were somehow organized by or affiliated to a government.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Bekdash, Hania, 2011. “Afkar 1- 1st GCC Think Tank Development Dialogue: Potentials, Challenges and Benefits- Workshop Summary.” Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, American University of Beirut. Report. Unpublished.

<sup>12</sup> See McGann, James G. *Best Practices for Funding and Evaluating Think Tanks and Public Policy Research*. Pennsylvania: McGann Associates, 2006; 17.

<sup>13</sup> See Khodr, Hiba. “The Dynamics of Policy Innovation and Diffusion in the Gulf Cooperation Council: A Case Study of Three Specialized Cities,” Research, Advocacy, and Public Policy-Making in the Arab World (RAPP) Working Paper Series no. 7, Issam Fares Institute of Public Policy and International Affairs, American University of Beirut, 2012.

In the new transitional period engulfing the Arab world, some argue that the role and definition of think tanks should be even more critically refined to meet the needs of a new generation of policymaking for the public good. Naouss argues that there needs to be a “plurality at the decision-making level” and that think tanks can do more than just inform the ruling elite, but rather advocate for reforms to free themselves from political and financial constraints.<sup>14</sup> He adds that part of their task is to infuse the public debate through the media and CSOs, and suggests that in this stage of transition and age of technology a think tank’s role in the MENA is also to engage the youth to express their ideas and thoughts with the use of social media tools and cyber space which have been pivotal to the transformations thus far.<sup>15</sup>

#### **4.2 The difficulty of measuring policy impact**

Measuring think tank policy impact is highly subjective, especially since the definition of a think tank in the GCC is still debated and perhaps even transforming along with the Arab transitions. It follows that defining the methods for having and measuring policy impact is also subjective. Reaching a more objective mechanism would require the agreement by a peer group on regional standards for measuring impact, which is the main motivating factor behind this paper.

There are two main useful functions of think tanks that should be explored in relation to “policy impact.” First is direct impact, or the adoption of a law or set of policies based on a think tank’s researched recommendations, or due to the commissioning or appointing of the think tank as an official advisor for a certain problem or issue by policymakers. The other is indirect impact, by informing the public debate on public policy issues through lectures, appearances in media, and dissemination of research through various mediums. The indirect impacts of think tanks are more easily and commonly measured.

Attempting to measure the first one, whether in the US, Latin America, Africa, or the MENA, has led many researchers and analysts to come to the same conclusion: it is impossible. The first step would be to understand and carefully track a proposed policy’s progress throughout the policymaking process, which is always non-linear and made up of a variety of vague, indirect, or informal processes. Even under the assumption that the policymaking process in a given context is well understood, linear, and direct, not subject

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<sup>14</sup> Naouss, Robert. “Redefining The Role of Think Tanks in a Changing Middle East,” online article, *PolicyMic* (2011), <http://www.policymic.com/articles/1495/redefining-the-role-of-think-tanks-in-a-changing-middle-east&op>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

to confusion of other variables, and that “entry points” are clearly defined, there would still be no guarantor that a think tank’s proposed policies were the sole or main influential factor in a policy decision. Such direct “impact” cannot be measured in any scientific terms since there are many other factors related to the work of think tanks and their effectiveness which would be translated to impact. Policy impact through research is a long-term process that could take years or decades to surface in some cases. It is impossible to isolate their own work on one issue from other administrative and political structures.<sup>16</sup>

The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI) at The American University of Beirut (AUB) initiated a “policy-tracing” project three years ago for this reason. Case studies are the essential mode of analysis for the project which seeks to trace the origins of a policy back to the players, processes, and debates that brought it to passing.<sup>17</sup> Until now these policy-tracing studies have only tackled Lebanese policies and the Lebanese policy-making process, which is quite unique in its multi-polarity and degree of public participation in the Arab world. More studies of its kind would be beneficial throughout the Arab world.

Even if the goal of a study is to measure a think tank’s indirect impact, there is still considerable risk that “impact” is not actually what is being measured, owing to the problem of attribution.<sup>18</sup> For instance, the frequency of media appearances or website views, popular indicators, may only be an indication of low to high visibility or awareness of the institute. Visibility and awareness are not truly indicative of the translation of a think tank’s ideas to policymakers or policies.<sup>19</sup> Another measure frequently misinterpreted for impact is an institute’s level of activity. If an institute is very active and frequently publishes papers and hosts events, it does not automatically translate to discernible policy relevance. The audience for such outputs must factor into the degree to which activity and visibility are measured, and this is addressed in the proposed matrix.<sup>20</sup>

Weidenbaum, a scholar of think tank impact, likens the conceptual framework for analysis in economic terms. He delineates between measuring efficiency in terms of inputs and

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<sup>16</sup> Salman, Lana, 2009. “Impacting Policies in the MENA region: the role of think tanks.” Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, American University of Beirut. Report. Unpublished.

<sup>17</sup> For published policy-tracing papers, see:

[http://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/public\\_policy/rapp/rapp\\_research/Pages/home.aspx](http://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/public_policy/rapp/rapp_research/Pages/home.aspx)

<sup>18</sup> Salman, Lana, 2009. “Impacting Policies in the MENA region: the role of think tanks.” Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, American University of Beirut. Report. Unpublished.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Weidenbaum, Murray. “Measuring the Influence of Think Tanks,” *Society* 47, no. 2 (2010): 134-137, doi: 10.1007/s12115-009-9292-8

outputs on the one hand and “intermediate products” on the other.<sup>21</sup> Intermediate products are described as “comparable to the engineering and marketing that goes into the production and sale of an automobile,”<sup>22</sup> including things such as number of publications, frequency of staff’s media appearances, number of citations, and activity in print media. Weidenbaum cautions against the different levels of measuring an intermediate good, mainly depending on audience: books, meetings, lectures and media appearances can range dramatically on what medium of output.<sup>23</sup>

In Abelson’s major work on the subject, he comes to the same conclusion as Weidenbaum and one of the most well known scholars on the topic of think tanks, David Ricci.<sup>24</sup> The conclusion is that it is impossible to measure the impact of think tanks. He proposes two conceptual frameworks on think tank policy impact: elite theory and pluralist theory of how political power is wielded. The elite theory assumes that just knowing and influencing people in power is sufficient to influence policy, while the pluralist theory assumes that there is a relatively even playing field for competition of ideas.

Finding that both theories fall short, Abelson proposed a new one. He calls for an “intuitionist approach” because “not only do think tanks vary enormously in terms of the resources they have at their disposal, but they assign different priorities to participating at various stages of the policy cycle...This becomes particularly clear in comparing how think tanks function in different political systems. It also becomes important in interpreting data such as media citations and testimony before legislative committees that can be used to evaluate think tank performance.”<sup>25</sup> Still, even the measure of media citations and legislative testimonies and advisory roles appointed in government may only contribute to an institute’s ability to “set the agenda” and the limits of respectable debate on policy issues. This may be seen as an indirect form of policy impact, but falls short of delivering a practical formula for assessing direct policy impact. Abelson concludes, “We cannot even say for certain how much impact specific think tanks have had at particular stages of policy debates or whom exactly they have influenced. At best, by assessing their involvement in specific policy areas, we can obtain a better sense of how relevant or irrelevant they were.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 135.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Steelman, Aaron. Review of *Do Think Tanks Matter? Assessing the Impact of Public Policy Institutes*, by Donald E. Abelson. *Cato Journal*. Abelson, Donald E. *Do Think Tanks Matter?: Assessing the Impact of Public Policy Institutes*. Quebec City: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 164.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid 165.

That is why overall think tanks scholars and practitioners recommend that it is better to attempt to measure a think tank's "effectiveness", "relevance" or "awareness and usefulness" to stakeholders and other policy actors, rather than attempting to measure "impact". As one prominent scholar on think tanks, Mendizabal, argues "by focusing on think tank's 'policy impact' you ignore other important functions of think tanks."<sup>27</sup> Sometimes measures such as performance assessment reports are used which would measure these more realistic goals of think tank relevance and effectiveness, though it should not be confused with policy impact.

Other indicators of a think tank's success beyond direct "policy impact" might include:<sup>28</sup>

1. Establishing an issue on the policy agenda (even if specific policy prescriptions are not adopted)
2. Increasing the use of research and evidence in decision-making process (long-term)
3. Informing the debate on certain policy issues
4. Increase the participation of civil society in policy discussion and definition processes
5. Monitoring and evaluating policies

However, The GCC context falls far more clearly within Abelson's "elite theory" parameters which will be further explained in the section on "Challenges of GCC impact on policymaking."<sup>29</sup>

### **4.3 The Role of Stakeholders and Constituencies**

Another problem related to policy impact assessment is that impact depends on knowing clearly whom to impact. If we accept the definition of a think tank as a policy research institute accountable to the public, then we assume that the public plays an important role in the policy-maker's decision-making process. Stakeholders are thus those invested in the outputs of the think tank's work such as government agencies but also civil society organizations, media, and most importantly, the public.

Policy impact that engages civil society, the media, and the general public is simpler in the GCC in relation to development policies, such as health, education, and environmental

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<sup>27</sup> Enrique Mendizabal, e-mail message to the author, June 5, 2012.

<sup>28</sup> See Weyrauch, Vanessa, Julia D'Agostino, and Clara Richards. *Learners, practitioners, and teachers: Handbook on monitoring, evaluating and managing knowledge for policy influence*. Buenos Aires: CIPPEC, 2010.

<sup>29</sup> See "Challenges of GCC Impact on Policymaking" on the next section of this paper, page 14

policies. This may be because they are deemed benign as they do not challenge the authority or sustainability of regime structures. The public's needs and desires may play a far less instrumental role in a policymaker's decision-making process on social, economic, and political policies in regime structures that are less accountable to the public. In some cases, it may even play a contrary role in order to ensure the sustainability of the regime.

Another problem is that local, regional, and international policy issues are addressed by think tanks. Some focus on one target audience while others target different groups depending on the subject of their study. In effect, the success of some think tanks relies on their ability to influence the policies of international governments and audiences rather than local ones. With a diverse spectrum of policy actors and external factors, it would be very difficult to wholly assess an institute's policy impact without deriving different measures based on policy targets.<sup>30</sup>

#### **4.4 Challenges of GCC research impact on policymaking**

Most findings in the literature agree that there is always a "gap" between research and policymaking.<sup>31</sup> In a specific context, like the GCC, the question is how large the gap is and what causes it. Several factors could contribute to this gap in the GCC.

Perhaps the greatest factor contributing to the research-policy gap is the poor comprehension of the policymaking process and entry points to it. Khodr, who did a study on policy innovation and diffusion in the GCC, describes the policymaking process as "mostly exercised by the leadership in power. The decision-making process was repeatedly described in all the interviews as a predominantly centralized top-down process."<sup>32</sup> Accordingly, much informal and non-transparent policy maneuvering takes place.

Another characteristic is that political leaders are the most influential in deciding and they are only subject to the agenda of few. Therefore their agenda could change quickly, without warning, and sometimes even seemingly arbitrarily, such as with a sudden change of leadership. Khodr describes the general policy model of all the 6 GCC countries to be

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<sup>30</sup> Zeidan, Tarek, 2011. "Memo on Measuring the Impact of Brookings Doha Center." The Brookings Institute Doha Center. Unpublished.

<sup>31</sup> Mainly from Hovland, Ingie. "Making a difference: M&E policy research." Working Paper 281, Overseas Development Institute, London, 2007.

And Stone, Diane. "Getting Research Into Policy?" Paper presented to the third Annual Global Development Network Conference on "Blending Local and Global Knowledge," Rio De Janeiro, December 2001.

<sup>32</sup> Khodr, Hiba. "The Dynamics of Policy Innovation and Diffusion in the Gulf Cooperation Council: A Case Study of Three Specialized Cities," Research, Advocacy, and Public Policy-Making in the Arab World (RAPP) Working Paper Series no. 7, Issam Fares Institute of Public Policy and International Affairs, American University of Beirut, 2012.

similar with the following characteristics- “it starts with a ‘leadership vision’, general policies become part of the vision, a decision is taken and policies are formulated, adopted, implemented, and often evaluated,” however she does go further to state that communication between the public and government are diverse and often related to the country’s specific political traditions and developments.”<sup>33</sup>

A major concern in GCC countries is the lack of transparency and access to data and information necessary to conduct research. Even in trying to conduct research for this paper, government-affiliated institutes were less willing to agree to participate in a short survey related to their impact assessment and refused to share their information. This is one small example of a much larger problem of transparency and information sharing. A research institute should, in theory, want to contribute to knowledge creation and participate in research, but the nature of such closed governments may make them more suspicious and reluctant to participate.

Another factor contributing to the research-policy gap is policymakers who do not seek or appreciate the research of think tanks. This is especially noticeable when private consultancy firms are more frequently contracted to conduct studies for policymakers. Ibrahim notes that in the GCC “research centers that do exist are directly affiliated with the ruling party or dominant political organization. They do not have the ability to suggest policy alternatives that may clash with the interests of the dominant political elite.”<sup>34</sup> Another report goes further to posit that “in the many authoritarian countries in the Middle East, ideas coming from outside the political elite are not considered very important and can easily be silenced. Therefore, think tanks do not play a significant role in either making policy decisions or in even just formulating policy options.”<sup>35</sup> Of course, this paradigm is now changing as a result of the transformations taking place in the Arab world, including in the GCC.

Nevertheless, state control over research institutes and setting proverbial “red lines” is rampant among the Arab Gulf States. As Young notes, power relations are a major barrier to policy research impact on policymaking in less democratic and transparent settings.<sup>36</sup> In

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibrahim, Ezzat. *Arab and American Think Tanks: New Possibilities for Cooperation? New Engines for Reform?* Working paper. Doha: Brookings Institution, 2004. Print. Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World.

<sup>35</sup> Sa’id Aly, Abudl Mun’im, Khalil Shikaki, Ahmad Fakhr, Mustafa Harmaneh, Moshe Ma’oz, and Yossi Alpher. “Ideas and Influence in Middle East Politics: The Role of Think Tanks.” The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Analysis, Policy #207 (1996),

<sup>36</sup> Young, John. “Research, Policy, and Practice: Why Developing Countries Are Different,” *Journal of International Development* 17, no. 6 (2005): 727-734, doi: 10.1002/jid.1235; 730.

order to be sustainable and have impact under such constraints, research centers are described as operating with a “conciliatory approach” toward the state’s requirements which limits the ideas, human capacity, and potential growth and innovation of think tanks’ operations.<sup>37</sup> Further, because of the highly centralized top-down nature of policymaking, think tanks or individuals working within them must have close relationships to the ruling elite. As Khodr describes, “These individuals have the following common characteristics: they are in the ruler’s circle of trust, they have access, they have vested interests, they have connection ...otherwise they won’t see the need.”<sup>38</sup>

Those who do not follow, whether purposefully or inadvertently, the limitations of the state may be forced to close. In the past year three policy research institutes relocated from the UAE on the grounds of not being renewed a license by the state or directly asked to leave with short notice: The Abu Dhabi Gallup Center, The Gulf Research Center, and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. None of these institutes were given clear reasons for their forced closures.

One institute which was even created and supported by the state of UAE, The Zayed Center for Cooperation and Follow-up, was closed by the state 6 years later for their involvement in “international controversial activities.”<sup>39</sup> They were noted to have engaged in activities which embarrassed the interests of the UAE government. Even though they were not charged with challenging the authority or control of the state, their ideas and agenda still crossed a red line. It has also been noted that organizations which achieve autonomy from the state may be regarded as being puppets of Western governments or organizations which would damage their local credibility.<sup>40</sup>

Conversely, think tanks may also be ignorant of the needs of policymakers and how to “translate” their findings to make them more accessible.<sup>41</sup> This is a problem of think tank capacity and perhaps also related to the fact that think tanks are a relatively new concept in this region. Many may perceive of their role as an advisory role to the governments and not primarily one of linking evidence-based research findings to policymaking to inform policymakers for the public good.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibrahim, Ezzat. *Arab and American Think Tanks: New Possibilities for Cooperation? New Engines for Reform?* Working paper. Doha: Brookings Institution, 2004. Print. Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World.

<sup>38</sup> Khodr, Hiba. “The Dynamics of Policy Innovation and Diffusion in the Gulf Cooperation Council: A Case Study of Three Specialized Cities,” Research, Advocacy, and Public Policy-Making in the Arab World (RAPP) Working Paper Series no. 7, Issam Fares Institute of Public Policy and International Affairs, American University of Beirut, 2012; 7.

<sup>39</sup> Ibrahim, Ezzat. *Arab and American Think Tanks: New Possibilities for Cooperation? New Engines for Reform?* Working paper. Doha: Brookings Institution, 2004. Print. Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World; 9.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Stone, Diane. “Getting Research Into Policy?” Paper presented to the third Annual Global Development Network Conference on “Blending Local and Global Knowledge,” Rio de Janeiro, December 2001.

Thus, it was necessary to create a matrix of recommendations for policy impact that could address these conditions in the GCC.

## 5. Toward an Impact Assessment Mechanism

### 5.1 Overview of International Mechanisms

A brief overview of think tank assessment mechanisms by international organizations is warranted to provide a basis for exploration of this topic in the GCC. Two international organizations, the International Development Research Center (IDRC) and the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) are most well known for their policy impact assessment mechanisms which were used to inform this paper. Other notable organizations exist that do policy impact assessment but will not be reviewed; including USAID, Eurasia Foundation, and UK's DFID. References can be found at the end of this paper. James McGann of the University of Pennsylvania, most well known for his work in ranking think tanks in the world, authored an all-encompassing report of "best practices" for evaluating the impact of think tanks. His report reviews all major international mechanisms and highlights important similarities.<sup>42</sup>

Before reviewing international policy impact assessment mechanisms, the terms "monitoring", "evaluation" and "impact assessment" must be defined in this context. Often the terms "monitoring and evaluation" or "M&E" are used together as part of international standards and norms in development programming. According to the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), evaluation is "a systematic and objective assessment of an ongoing or completed project, program or policy, its design, implementation and results."<sup>43</sup> Monitoring is described as "an ongoing process to verify systematically that planned activities or processes take place as expected or that progress is being made."<sup>44</sup>

Institutional assessment, on the other hand, evaluates an organization's effectiveness, efficiency, and performance from more of a management perspective. Such an assessment looks at an organization's environment, motivation, organizational capacity,

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<sup>42</sup> See complete overview in McGann, James G. *Best Practices for Funding and Evaluating Think Tanks and Public Policy Research*. Pennsylvania: McGann Associates, 2006.

<sup>43</sup> Lusthaus, Charles, Marie-Helen Adrien, Gary Anderson, Fred Carden and George Plinio Montalvan. "Organizational Assessment: A Framework for Improving Performance," [http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-30224-201-1-DO\\_TOPIC.html](http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-30224-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html). Accessed 15 March 2006. In McGann "Best Practices" 2006; p. 19.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

and organizational performance.<sup>45</sup> This kind of assessment is included in the matrix of recommendations because to some indirect degree, more efficient and capable organizations are the ones who best identify and engage stakeholders and constituencies. Still, most of these policy impact assessment mechanisms delineate between institutional efficiency and policy impact.

Most international donors and governments who use forms of M&E and assessments for policy impact would recommend that an “outcome mapping” be completed at the start of a project. The “outcome mapping” project was originally designed by the IDRC which forms part of the planning of a project or program and takes into account the political context, relationship between the state and the organization, relationship with stakeholders, and the civil society landscape. The IDRC developed an “outcome mapping” tool that has been adapted and recommended by several experts including ODI’s RAPID and James McGann.<sup>46</sup>

Once this is complete, various kinds of evaluations can take place as recommended in the literature. The first kind is a “process evaluation” of policy relevance and research quality. Performance uptake, most significant change (MSD), and RAPID Outcome Assessment (ROA) are other frequently used impact assessment mechanisms.<sup>47</sup>

Policy impact assessment mechanisms also employ the use of “indicators” and “factors” to measure. “Indicators” are measurable and “factors” are non-measurable themes. Indicators may be used to measure certain factors. To do this they specify certain outputs that can be used as “indicators” of either: activity, success, or impact. Traditional Measuring and Evaluation (M&E) processes for projects and programs begin with a baseline assessment before the program/project is initiated and later use the same indicators and mechanisms afterward to track the progress. This is a bit more complicated when the unit of analysis is the institute itself and not a project or program within it. A date in time must be picked for the baseline assessment that could also be useful to be done collaboratively with other institutes at the same time to come up with some standards against which to measure impact.

Some mechanisms used to measure the indicators that are repeatedly suggested:

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<sup>45</sup> “Chapter 2: Developing and Institutional Profile,” International Development Research Centre (IDRC), [http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-28363-201-1-DO\\_TOPIC.html](http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-28363-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html). Accessed 15 March 2007. In McGann “Best Practices” 2006; p. 19.

<sup>46</sup> Hovland, Ingie. “Making a difference: M&E policy research.” Working Paper 281, Overseas Development Institute, London, 2007; 29.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 27-35.

1. Surveying policymakers for their awareness and use of a think tank's work, this would measure the factor of relationship to power.
2. Surveying think tank administrative and academic staff to ascertain their awareness of the policymaking process, relevant stakeholders, and main actors and intermediaries to policy influence
3. Tracking all media and academically cited mentions of the institute and its personnel
4. Tracking individuals and their positions in policymaking after working in the think tank

## **5.2 Findings and Analysis**

Like the international organizations described above, GCC think tanks seem to define policy impact in more broad terms that encompassed ideas of influence beyond change in laws and official policies. Some think tanks felt they had impact simply by contributing to the policy debate and raising awareness on issues, even if their recommendations are not taken. Others indicated that the level of satisfaction of their stakeholder was sufficient to define impact. While still others focused mainly on the quality of their work as the defining factor of policy impact, suggesting a very “indirect policy impact” approach. Only one organization of the thirteen who responded set a firm definition of “policy impact” to mean the implementation of their recommended policies, or what is described in this paper as “direct policy impact”.

According to the literature, a necessary aspect of having policy impact is having an understanding of the policy-making process. Without a confident understanding of the process that an organization is trying to impact, it is difficult to identify and access entry points. Most GCC think tanks, or 62% of respondents, said that they do not have a clear understanding of the policy-making process in their local or host country. Some reasons given for this include that there is too much interference from external factors or that the local policy-making environment is in the process of changing and it is no longer clear who will become new relevant actors and where new entry points may emerge. These findings are further complicated by think tanks who responded that they do not understand the local policymaking process because their goal is not to influence local, but international or regional, policymaking. Even the 38% of institutes that responded “yes” to the question regarding understanding of the policymaking process, usually qualified their answer by detailing the non-transparent, informal, and non-systematic approach to decision-making in the GCC context.

When questioned on their use of impact assessment mechanisms in the past, about 62% of the think tanks said that they have done some kind of related assessments in the past.

When they explained what methods they used to do this work, only one organization indicated the use of a systematic evaluation based on an evaluation tool. However, the one evaluation tool that was mentioned was not an impact assessment tool as described in this paper, but instead a sustainability report often used to measure the efficiency or effectiveness of work in the private sector. Most institutes defined their “impact assessment” mechanisms as tracking media appearances and references, citations and advisory in official government policy papers or in legislative discussions, and tracking the number of publications disseminated per year in an annual report. Few described their impact assessment as project-based and sporadic, depending on whether they had the impression that their project was successful. The organizations that have never done an impact assessment stated that they either do not perceive it to be their job, that they are not bound to evaluate their impact by funders, or that they are too new and therefore think it is too early to measure their impact.

According to the think tanks in this study, some of the most important indicators necessary to measure policy impact in the GCC context were mostly in relation to the ability of the think tank to interact and communicate with government. Indicators such as the number of requests by government for capacity development and policy advice, the number of commissioned research and consultations and number of incidents when a think tank’s work was adopted into policy by the government were frequently mentioned. This may suggest that they do not know how to measure those factors because in comparison to the question about what they have actually measured in the past, they said the number of citations and interviews with members in the media, the number of publications, etc. It appears as though they are measuring more the activity and visibility although they believe that interaction with government is more important. This may also be a reason why policy impact was more broadly defined.

The next question was posed in the form of a ranking. Institutes were asked to rank the different audiences they target in order of perceived importance for impact.

Of the audiences targeted by think tanks, the following are the weighted averages from most to least important:<sup>48</sup>

1. Local governments/policymakers (Rating Average: 6)
2. Regional governments/governmental networks (Rating Average: 5.0)
3. International governments (Rating Average: 4.7)
4. Local public/civil society (Rating Average: 4.3)
5. Academics (Rating Average: 4.07)

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<sup>48</sup> See annex page 30 for graph “Main Target Audiences of GCC Think Tanks”

6. Private sector (Rating Average: 3.6)
7. Youth (Rating Average: 2.9)

This was relevant to the development of the matrix in order to ascertain what factors and indicators should be recommended for policy impact. Since the majority of think tanks perceive that governments – local, regional, and international- are their most important audience to reach in order to have impact, then the matrix must be designed with special focus on assessing the relationships and access to governments. These findings also suggest that think tanks do not perceive the ability to impact policymaking can be well reached through private sector and youth.

According to the GCC think tanks who responded to the survey, the following are the most important methods to have policy impact from most to least important:<sup>49</sup>

1. Research reports (Rating Average: 9.23)
2. Roundtable discussion (Rating Average: 8.08)
3. Public lectures (Rating Average: 8.00)
4. Policy memos (Rating Average: 7.92)
5. Think tank's website (Rating Average: 7.23)
6. Closed meetings (Rating Average: 6.62)
7. Media- newspaper, television, and magazines (Rating Average: 6.58)
8. Public campaigns (Rating Average: 4.63)
9. Facebook (Rating Average: 4.33)
10. Twitter (Rating Average: 3.82)
11. Smart phone applications (Rating Average: 1.63)

The use of social media is clearly ranked very low overall, which is a pattern consistent with recent findings on social media usage in UK think tanks.<sup>50</sup> Overall this indicates that think tanks are perhaps missing the ability to reach a far greater target audience of youth. However, it is consistent with the findings that the main target audiences of these organizations are governments and policymakers through their focus on reports, discussions, and memos. The findings on closed meetings are a little unexpected but this could be due to two factors: the sample size skewing the results, or their inability to access those that would be target of closed meetings.

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<sup>49</sup> See annex page 31 for graph on "Policy Impact Methods by GCC Think Tanks"

<sup>50</sup> Blog Admin, Harris, Michael Harris and Sherwood, Chris, in, "Think tanks are neglecting cheap and easy social media, and failing to reach out to broader audiences for their work," *Impact of Social Sciences* (blog), <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/04/13/think-tanks-are-neglecting-cheap-and-easy-social-media-and-failing-to-reach-out-to-broader-audiences-for-their-work/>.

### 5.3 Matrix of Recommendations for GCC think tank policy impact assessment

The international models previously described were synthesized into one matrix of recommendations based on the GCC context and the results of the survey responses.

One argument in this paper is that it is impossible to measure direct impact. Therefore, the suggested matrix does not aim to measure direct impact but instead to measure the factors that contribute to indirect policy impact. These factors include: relationships to power in local and international governments, relationship to the private sector, relationship to civil society and the public, the visibility of the institute and its work, the institute's activity level, the institute's effectiveness of communications, research quality, research utility, institutional capacity, and innovation.

Since the survey clearly indicates that governments and policymakers -local regional and international- are perceived as the most important factors to target for policy impact, the matrix reflects the think tank's relationship at the top. It suggests that a mapping of relationships to these power nodes is the main factor in assessing policy impact. The mechanisms and suggested tools for measuring these relationships, including proposed questions, are derived from the literature and survey results. The proposed indicators can be measured both qualitatively and quantitatively.

In terms of actors and stakeholders, the questions seek to illicit a qualitative assessment of a think tank's ability to actually impact policy. This exercise in mapping is the closest possible one can get to measuring direct policy impact in the GCC. The following questions are proposed:

1. Do they know about the think tank (TT)?
2. Are they interested in the TTs outputs?
3. Have they used the TT to inform any decision-making?
4. Do they follow the TT systematically in any way (website, twitter, mailing list, etc..)
5. Has the TT brought an issue to their attention that wasn't there before?
6. Have they solicited advice of the TT?
7. Did the TT "exert pressure" on policymakers to better articulate and substantiate their views
8. Do they believe the TT is an authority on an issue?

Next, visibility, activity level, and effectiveness of communication are all considered factors of indirect policy impact. Many of the think tanks in this study who said they have

done impact assessments focused on them. The best tools for measuring these are user surveys for things such as the browsability of website and the quality and clarity of publications. Internal monitoring of outputs and indicators are useful for keeping track of website hits and Google searches. Keeping track, in a systematic way, of attendees to events and subscribers to mailing lists will also be necessary for think tanks to fill in the gaps in this data. Focus groups can also be used to determine the effectiveness of communication to different groups within the community.

Although in the literature research quality and utility are deemed paramount for linking research to policymakers, it must be deduced that building one's reputation with solid evidence-based research does not seem to be perceived as a key entry-point for policy impact in the GCC. Think tanks who clearly indicated that they are less interested in impacting local policymaking, and more interested in regional and international policymaking, tended to rank the quality and utility of research standards as their primary forms of impact. This was deduced by identifying their main target audience as Academics and selecting research reports as their primary forms of impact. Those who are more interested in local policymaking tended to rate events and closed meetings more highly.

Finally, this matrix proposes that even though in most impact assessment mechanisms institutional and policy impact are measured separately, there is an undeniable link between the two that must be addressed in the same measurement. An institute that does not have the resources or capacity to create or update a website, conduct quality research, or sustain itself financially will have a difficult time making any substantial contribution to policy-making.

## **6. Possible GCC Comparative Advantage in Research-Policymaking**

Despite the challenges described above related to dealing with impacting and measuring the impact of policymaking in the GCC, there are some opportunities that should be highlighted and that play a role in designing an impact assessment specific to the GCC context.

First, although there is arguably no clear understanding of the policymaking process in the GCC, it is generally agreed that the decision-making is central, top-down, and implementation is more linear. This indicates that a think tank should weigh more heavily their relationship to power in an assessment of impact and focus more on reaching policymakers than civil society and other actors. Another related advantage is that the context for a good relationship to those in power and policymakers is already provided as

a natural effect of state control and oversight. Policy research institutes must receive the permission and licensing from the state and the control over their actions already indicates a level of approval without which the institute would be closed. This is also illustrated by the abundance of government-affiliated or government-organized institutions.

Second, in general, funding and relationships with donors do not appear to play as much of a role in the GCC as it does in other parts of the world or MENA. This allows think tanks a degree of freedom at least from external influences. Think tanks that are not government affiliated are usually directly financed by a foreign government or institution. That does not mean that funding for research is easily available in these contexts, but for the centers that are open, they do not have to worry about it.

The lack of political parties and actors can be seen as a facilitator to the impact of think tanks in the GCC since there are not defined competing agendas. There may be competition of ideas on specific issues by private sector and other government advisors, but the way to overcome this problem is to become an expert on an issue and provide the best advice to policymakers understanding their needs and priorities.

Another important opportunity that think tanks can seize during this time is that governments are paying more attention to social media and the concerns of the public since the “Arab Spring” era. This provides an opportunity to open the space for more expression and the rise of new actors that may impact the policymaking process like youth. The control of these forms of social networking by GCC governments at least indicates attention paid by officials which may inadvertently trigger the rise of a new policy concern on the decision-making agenda.

## 7. Conclusions & Recommendations

Although it is nearly impossible to measure direct policy impact in such opaque and informal policymaking settings, it does not mean that policy impact is not taking place. The question is how to develop regional standards and best practices for measuring this impact.

A good start would be to first agree upon a definition and translation of “think tanks” in Arabic. The suggested definition in Tawasul’s Afkar 1 workshop: policy oriented, produce evidence-based research, and target and engage with public is a good start. Two translations are frequently used: Marakez Buhuth wa Dirasat (مراكز بحوث و دراسات) and Markez Buhuth fi Al Seyasat Al A’mma (مركز بحوث في السياسات العامة). The second one, translated literally “Public Policy Research Center” may best capture the proposed definition.

Next, it is promising that many GCC think tanks define “policy impact” in more broad terms because measuring “indirect impact” is the most feasible and useful measure of an institute’s work. Systematically keeping track of press clippings, citations, and online indicators is the quickest and easiest way to measure this kind of impact.

Attempting to measure the “direct impacts” is largely overlooked in impact assessments and should be better developed in the region. Because of the specific nature of the policymaking processes in the GCC, focusing on mapping and analyzing power relationships is the most important factor for assessing policy impact. A good practice that many respondents in this study did not indicate using, is that of keeping “impact logs” or noting each interaction they have with the different actors and stakeholders either via telephone, email, or meetings.

Another recommendation would be to incorporate “outcome mapping”, or a review of the policymaking context and actors, at the start of a project and as an institution. If several institutes got together to do such a mapping then it could become a regional standard and basis for future assessments and perhaps transition to become a regional “baselines assessment”. This would be helpful for other institutes to get an idea of how to measure their work and progress.

GCC think tanks could also benefit from collaboration opportunities in designing and conducting policy-tracing studies which would help more clearly define the policymaking process, actors, and entry points.

All the findings suggest that the role of youth and communication via youth-focused methods such as social media is undervalued in the region. Better websites, more innovative outreach and use of social media will help engage a target audience that will become decision-makers and leaders of all sectors of society in the future.

Ultimately, impact assessment mechanisms and impact methods should be individualized to fit the specific country context and institute's needs and agenda. That does not mean that a set of measurement standards cannot be agreed upon regionally. Using the proposed matrix in this paper as a basis to develop regional standards is one step in increasing the policy impact and efficiency of think tanks in the GCC.

## 8. Annexes

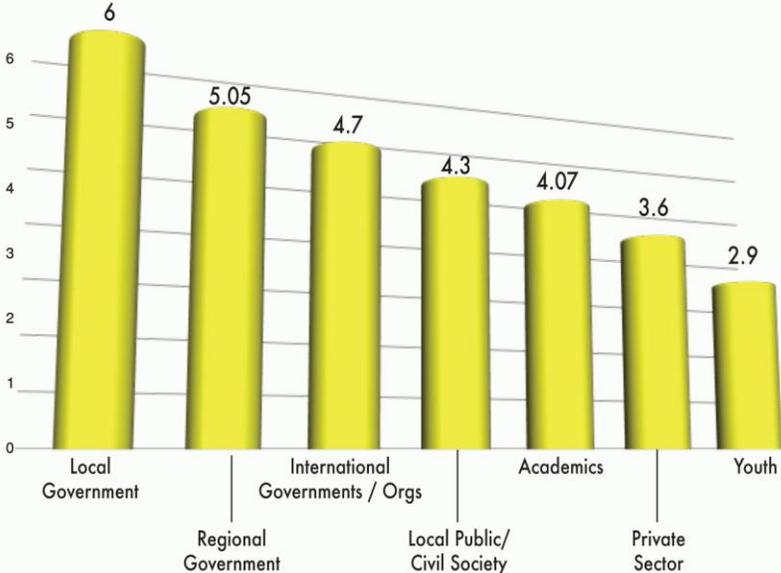
### Annex 1: Matrix of Recommendations to Measure Impact

	ASPECTS	INDICATORS	METHODS	KEY QUESTIONS
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">To be measured on spectrum</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Invisibility or difficulty of Access</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">1</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Low or no visibility</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">5</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Moderate visibility</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">10</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">High visibility</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Possibility to directly interact</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Possibility to already interact</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Case advisory role</p>	1. Relationship to Local Government-Policymakers and Agencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commissioned research.</li> <li>Official advisory appointments/requests.</li> <li>Advises solicited on certain issues.</li> <li>Quotes in legislative sessions (GCC equivalent)?</li> <li>Honors/awards granted from government.</li> <li>Meetings with policymakers.</li> <li>Have governments based their decision-making on advice/input of TT?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviews with policymakers.</li> <li>Surveys.</li> <li>Questionnaires.</li> <li>Focus groups.</li> <li>Map relationship of TT scholars/staff with people in power.</li> <li>Impact logs.</li> <li>Offering relevant and well-founded advice in a way policy makers consider it beneficial.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do they know about the TT?</li> <li>Are they interested in the TT's outputs?</li> <li>Have they used the TT to inform any decision-making?</li> <li>Do they follow the TT systematically in any way (website, letter, mailing list, etc.)?</li> <li>Has the TT brought an issue to their attention that wasn't there before?</li> <li>Have they solicited advice of the TT?</li> <li>Do they convince policymakers to better articulate and substantiate their views?</li> <li>Do they believe the TT is an authority on an issue?</li> </ul>
	2. Relationship to Civil Society/Public.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>TT research part of CSO campaigns.</li> <li>TT events attended.</li> <li>Number of references in blogs.</li> <li>Number of references on twitter.</li> <li>Relationship with media.</li> <li>Reputation/Perceived relevance of TT work.</li> <li>Level of stakeholder engagement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviews with different sectors of civil society associations and non-for profit organizations: women, youth, etc.</li> <li>Focus group discussions.</li> <li>Survey/questionnaires.</li> <li>Impact logs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Perceived utility of TT work.</li> <li>Perceived relevance of TT work.</li> <li>Do they believe the TT is an authority on an issue?</li> <li>Perceived ability of the TT to respond to their needs.</li> </ul>
	3. Relationship to Private Sector.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kind and Quality of commissioned research.</li> <li>Official advisory appointments/requests.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interview with various parts of private sector.</li> <li>Focus group discussions.</li> <li>Surveys/questionnaires.</li> <li>Impact logs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Perceived utility of TT work.</li> <li>Perceived relevance of TT work.</li> <li>Does the TT add value to their work?</li> <li>Perception of TT is an authority and reliable asset.</li> </ul>
	4. Relationships to International Governments/ Organizations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participation in international networks</li> <li>Participation in international campaigns.</li> <li>Participation in international conferences and symposia.</li> <li>Partnerships/funding from international sources.</li> <li>Relations with national/local governments and policy makers.</li> <li>Reputation/perceived relevance of TT work, degree of cooperation with governments.</li> <li>Access to local and international information/data.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviews with international NGOs.</li> <li>Interviews with Embassies and foreign officers assigned to the region.</li> <li>PR/offering benefits of improved decision-making-gain trust as authentic partners.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Awareness of the TT</li> <li>Do they consent to the TT to participate or advise them on local issues?</li> <li>Perception of organization's contribution in local and international governments.</li> <li>What kind of information have they shared with the TT in the past?</li> <li>Do they attend collaborated with the TT to gather data/information?</li> <li>Do they rely on the TT's data/information to inform their decision-making?</li> </ul>
	5. Visibility - high to low.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reference in media.</li> <li>Number of website visits.</li> <li>Number of subscribers on social media.</li> <li>Number of local/regional/international partners (institutional or project-based).</li> <li>Number of subscribers on mailing list.</li> <li>Number of "members" if applicable.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Media analysis.</li> <li>Focus groups with public and civil society.</li> <li>Surveys with stakeholders.</li> <li>Press clippings.</li> <li>Internal monitoring.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How frequently is the TT cited or mentioned in different media sources?</li> <li>Who is the audience for these sources?</li> <li>How many users per period- week, month, year- view the website on average?</li> <li>How many organizations hold formal or informal partnerships with the TT?</li> </ul>
	6. Activity -active to inactive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of events.</li> <li>Number of people who attend events.</li> <li>Number of publications and number of kinds of publications.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Internal website and social media monitoring.</li> <li>Sign in sheets and registration for events.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How many people attend events?</li> <li>Who attends the events? (Target audiences reached?)</li> <li>How many kinds of publications does the TT produce?</li> <li>What is the amount of each produced in a period?</li> </ul>
	7. Effectiveness of Communications-effective to ineffective .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ranking in Google search.</li> <li>Statistics of web analytics (website visits, etc.).</li> <li>Speed of uploading new content.</li> <li>Ease of browsing and searching the website.</li> <li>Number of dissemination mediums.</li> <li>Quality and clarity and design of publications and web content.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Online user surveys.</li> <li>Systematic internal monitoring.</li> <li>Regularity of updates, tracker of website views.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Why do you access the website?</li> <li>How easy is it to find information you are looking for on the website? What information do you look for?</li> <li>How often do you access the website?</li> <li>How did you hear about the TT?</li> <li>Do you feel that the information provided on the website is relevant to you?</li> <li>Is it up to date?</li> </ul>
	8. Research Quality - (high vs. low).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Publications by TT fellows, researchers and staff outside the institute in: - international standards, government policy documents, operational guidelines issued by governments or professional associations, training manuals, newspaper articles, websites, academic and academic-related articles.</li> <li>Citations in peer-reviewed sources.</li> <li>Invitation to participate in conferences/symposia.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Citation Analysis.</li> <li>Review by a panel of local and international experts.</li> <li>Systematic review.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does the research meet international standards?</li> <li>Is it properly cited?</li> <li>Is the methodology sound? Are research questions and outcome practical and relevant to decision makers?</li> <li>Does the research review and contribute to the existing literature on the topics?</li> <li>Is the TT an expert on any topic?</li> </ul>
	9. Research Utility - strong to weak utility.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Citations in government policies papers.</li> <li>Number of books/publications sold/solicited by people.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviews and surveys of stakeholders.</li> <li>Citation analysis in key stakeholder sources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does the research offer practical prescriptions to "real problems"?</li> <li>Do the solutions proposed demonstrate an understanding of the policymaking process and actors?</li> <li>Do the policy recommendations offer practical and applicable solutions?</li> <li>Are they innovative and introduce new ideas?</li> <li>Are they replicable?</li> <li>Can results be made accessible to broad public to engage stakeholders from all actors and educate population at large?</li> </ul>
	10. Institutional Capacity - more or less capable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Financial resources/stability.</li> <li>Human Capital- experience of researchers.</li> <li>Strategic Planning in developing programs/projects.</li> <li>Use of outcome mapping techniques.</li> <li>Number and diversity of national scholars/staff included in decision-maker's advisory committees/meetings.</li> <li>Number of scholars/ staff from the TT that have gone to take positions where they would be responsible for setting the agenda in governmental and non-governmental institutions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Systematic internal or external review.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knowledge of local policy-making process?</li> <li>Knowledge of social media?</li> <li>Knowledge of local blogs?</li> <li>Recruit and retain quality scholars and analysts?</li> <li>Access to information/data?</li> </ul>

## Annex 2: Graphs

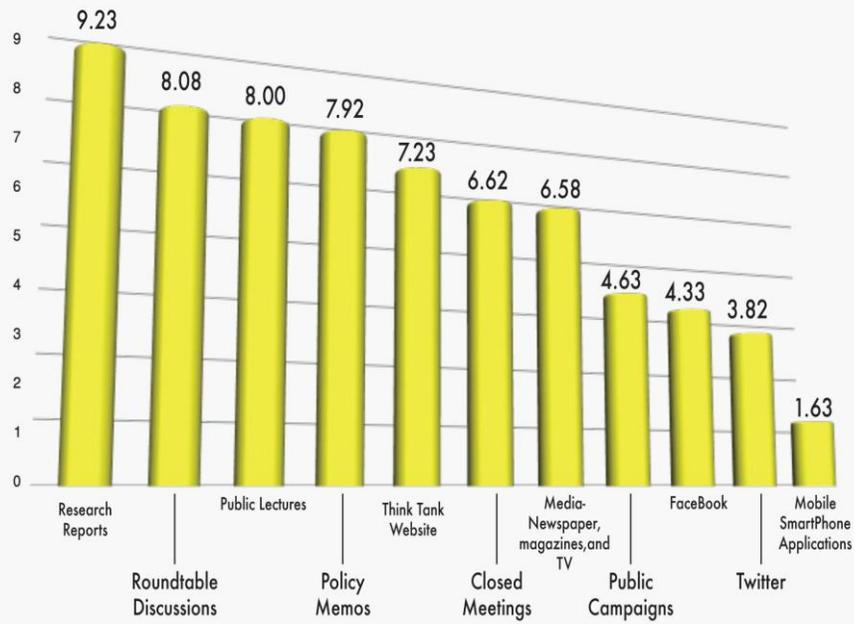
### 2.1 Main Target Audiences of GCC Think Tanks

TARGET AUDIENCE - PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE FOR POLICY IMPACT BY GCC THINK TANKS



## 2.2 Policy Impact Methods by GCC Think Tanks

GRAPH 2 - POLICY IMPACT METHODS BY GCC THINK TANKS



### Annex 3: Survey Questions

1. How do you define your organization's impact?
2. Do you believe you have a clear understanding of the policy-making process in your country?
  - a. If so, could you briefly describe it?
  - b. If not, why not?
3. Has your think tanks, or policy research institute, evaluated the impact of your work on policy-making in the past?
  - a. If so, can you describe any assessment techniques, mechanisms, or toolkits you used for the evaluation?
  - b. If not, why not?
4. What are the most important indicators that should be considered to assess think tank impact in your country?
5. Please rank the main target audiences that your think tank is trying to impact. (1 is most important for impact, 7 is least important, and N/A is not important at all or your think tank does not target)
  - a. Local Government/Polycymakers
  - b. Regional Governments/Governmental Networks
  - c. International Governments/Organizations
  - d. Academics
  - e. Local Public/Civil Society
  - f. Youth
  - g. Private Sector
6. Please rank your think tank's outreach and dissemination methods from most important (1) to least important (11) for impact, "N/A" for methods not used at all:
  - a. Public Lectures
  - b. Roundtable discussions
  - c. Closed meetings
  - d. Policy memos
  - e. Research reports
  - f. Think tank website
  - g. Facebook
  - h. Twitter
  - i. Public Campaigns
  - j. Media- newspaper, magazines, and TV
  - k. Mobile SmartPhone Applications

## 9. Recommended Further Reading

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<http://www.arabpolicyresearch.com/>