



**TTCSP**

THINK TANKS AND CIVIL SOCIETIES PROGRAM  
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA



# Global Think Tank Town Hall Report

*Saving Lives and Livelihoods*

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**April to July 2020**

**Draft Report**

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## Executive Summary

### Introductory Remarks

I am pleased to share with you the Draft Report for the Global Think Tank Town Hall Meetings to Save Lives and Livelihoods. The report documents the extraordinary effort and people who have crossed borders, party lines and disciplines to address a global crisis. The attached Report provides easily accessible copies of the videos, PowerPoint presentations and reports for all the Town Hall meetings and the five Working Groups. We welcome your comments and suggestions.

On April 7th, May 18th, and June 30th think tanks from around the world came together in a series of Town Hall meetings to demonstrate their commitment to beating the COVID19 pandemic. I want to thank the International Planning Committee, the Working Group Co-Chairs and the global think tank community for their willingness to join with their colleagues to make a difference at the critical moment in world history. Participants from 87 countries attended each of the three Town Hall meetings.

Your participation in the Global Think Tank Town Hall to Save Lives and Livelihoods underscored the value and importance of think tanks and the tremendous responsibility we share as a community of institutions that value experts, ideas, and action.

I also want to recognize the over 1200 think tank scholars and executives for participating in this global effort to support the policymakers, health care professionals and other essential workers who are on the front lines of this crisis and the elderly, poor and vulnerable who are suffering through it.

We are living in an era of sustained uncertainty where the threats are not easily identifiable or traceable (Coronavirus, cyber threats, bots, etc.). These new and daunting challenges will require our undivided attention, sustained cooperation, and innovative thinking---that is the bad news. The good news is the Global Town Hall meetings have convincingly demonstrated that international cooperation is possible and experts from a range of disciplines can work together in a short period of time, to produce innovative policy solutions to address an unprecedented crisis. We must continue to harness the associational and intellectual energy in the global think tank community for public good.

Stay safe, well and connected,

**Dr. James G. McGann**

*Founder and Director of the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program*

Lauder Institute, University of Pennsylvania

Over the past few months, the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has emerged as an unprecedented threat to the lives and livelihoods of people across the globe. COVID-19 has had devastating health and economic consequences on countries and their residents. More than 12 million people have contracted COVID-19, and the virus has claimed the lives of over half a million people worldwide. An increasingly global world has facilitated the spread of the virus across borders. However, it is this globalization which has prompted opportunities for collaboration among leaders and policymakers. Now more than ever, think tanks are positioned to serve policymakers and the public as they grapple with the consequences of COVID-19.

In response to the global crisis precipitated by COVID-19, Dr. James McGann, Director of the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP), took action to mobilize the think tank community to respond, rather than sit idly by.

TTCSP organized the series of Global Think Tank Town Halls to Save Lives and Livelihoods. In this moment, think tanks are not only tasked with providing digestible strategies for government, civil society and private sector decision makers, but also with ensuring their own survival as institutions. The Town Hall meetings served as a forum for conversation among think tanks about how to produce actionable responses and solutions to the problems posed by COVID-19.

1226 think tank executives, scholars and policymakers from over 540 institutions in over 87 countries met over the course of the three Town Halls. The first Global Think Tank Town Hall was centered around the idea of solidarity and initial policies and proposals. At the second Global Think Tank Town Hall, five Working Groups were formed to prepare responses to issues posed by COVID-19. These responses were then shared at the third and final Town Hall. Overall, the goal of the Town Halls was to produce specific strategies for think tanks to deal with COVID-19. Think tanks help form the link between knowledge and policy, and thus must be ready to provide support in the face of this crisis.

TTCSP would also like to thank CIGI for providing the staff and technical know-how that made a global, virtual conference with a lot of moving parts and 31 speakers look easy. On TTCSP's end, the Town Halls were organized and run by Dr. McGann's volunteer research interns Mariko Lewis, Alisa Wadsworth, Mariana Garcia and Benjamin Kosko. This report was written with the help of the Town Hall and Publications teams: Lucy Popko, Andrew Orner, Italia Messina, Jordan Brodeur, Micah Getz, Bianca Serbin, Samyak Leekha and Caroline Condon.

All reports, presentations and recordings can be found at [gotothinktank.com/town-hall-reports](http://gotothinktank.com/town-hall-reports).

***1226 people and institutions  
participated across all Town Halls***

***539 distinct organizations  
participated across all Town Halls***

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“In this moment, when political leadership is being literally crippled by COVID-19, think tanks have a critical role to play in informing policymakers and, ultimately, guiding humanity towards a safer and brighter future.

Indeed, our community has never been more important than it is today, and as with so many things, we're stronger together. The severity of the global COVID-19 crisis is unprecedented, and we must – together as a community – rise to the occasion.”

**John Allen**

President, Brookings Institution (United States)

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“The COVID-19 pandemic is a health crisis of massive proportions and will have major long-term social, economic and political impacts in countries all over the world. Think tanks globally have an absolutely vital role to play in generating the diverse and collaborative knowledge, action and leadership needed to bring an end to the outbreak and build back more equitable and sustainable societies.”

**Professor Melissa Leach**

Director, Institute of Development Studies (United Kingdom)

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“With the spread of COVID-19 to Europe and the USA, many are reacting late and with a sense of panic. While national governments must act, consultation and dialogue are critical in managing cross border flows of people, medical equipment and other essentials. In our region, ASEAN needs to move and work with other partners in the global effort against a global pandemic. Think tanks are nudging governments to give attention to priority issues and to take the right steps.”

**Simon Tay**

Chairman, Singapore Institute for International Affairs (Singapore)

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“The COVID-19 pandemic is resulting in unprecedented social, economic, and political dislocations across Africa. The ensuing security and development challenges will be complex and will require accurate information and knowledgeable analysis. Think tanks will therefore have to be at the forefront of providing evidence-based research, analysis, and policy advice to allow decision-makers to respond proactively and timeously to save lives and manage scarce resources.”

**Vasu Gounden**

Founder and Executive Director ACCORD (South Africa)

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“Think tanks and global thought leaders like those in the Global Think Tank Town Hall play a critical role in informing and assisting policy makers in developing solutions to save both lives and livelihoods during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. It’s reassuring to know there’s a global network that shares their expertise to address the tough issues we face.”

**Kay James**

President and CEO, Heritage Foundation (United States)

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"Our world is being tested by the unprecedented crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Whether or not the international community can overcome this challenge in the spirit of cooperation and partnership will speak volumes about the future world we will live in. It is heartening that the global network of leading think tanks and thought leaders assembled at the Global Think Tank Town Hall are committed to pooling their expertise and resources in search of a truly collaborative response."

**Wang Dong**

Executive Director, Institute of Global Cooperation and Understanding (iGCU), Peking University (China)

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"This crisis has brought out both the best and the worst amongst peoples and nations. Our job as committed citizens of the world must be first to hold our own governments to account, but secondly never to lose sight of the simple but obvious fact that the only solution to this crisis - and the many others we face - is through greater international cooperation and a recognition of our common humanity, rather than retreat behind ever higher walls and closed borders."

**Michael Cox**

Founding Co-Director of LSE IDEAS and Professor of International Relations (United Kingdom)

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"With COVID-19, Africa is learning many lessons. Among the most crucial lessons, there is the need to deeply rethink the continent's development models. This necessarily involves a change in development paradigms and original models that are better fitted to the realities of the African continent. In this sense, Think Tanks have a central role to play. But this role can only be truly assumed as a group. It is in this way that this Global Think Tank Town Hall initiative makes sense. I have confidence in the future thanks to this group philosophy."

**Gountiéni Damien Lankoandé**

Executive Director, Groupe de recherche et d'analyse appliquées (GRAAD Burkina), Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso)

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“The importance of the G20 became more pronounced in a fight against a different kind of contagion, financial contagion. There will be no bigger challenge than the economic fallout from coronavirus. While it is an imperfect organization, the G20 will need to balance discussion and action. It is a grouping of the most significant economies in the world, and has two that must speak to each other to make progress – in this time of crisis they may have no choice.”

**Rohinton P. Medhora,**

President, The Centre for International Governance Innovation (Canada)

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“The Covid-19 crisis should prompt us in the think tank community to act as leaders in our countries’ civil societies, by engaging in partnerships which can provide structure and voice to those organizations that are not well-positioned to speak to the policymakers. By gathering the voices of citizens and civil society organizations directly engaged with citizens, we can turn their concerns into policy proposals which can in turn help (or make) our governments improve their response to this crisis, whether we speak of crisis-management, economic relief or social protection measures. At the same time, this crisis is also our opportunity to check how adaptive, how financially resilient, and how well-organized and well-managed our think tanks are. In sum, we should harness this big disruption to become less detached from our civil societies, more responsive to the needs of the citizens and become better employers for our staff.”

**Milena Lazarevic**

Program Director and co-founder, European Policy Centre (Serbia)

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“Humans are part of both the natural and the social environment. We have an obligation to create and protect an environment that fosters well-being and resilience. We have to do so in the face of the Corona crisis, in the face of the climate crisis, in the face of the many challenges this modern, crowded, beautiful planet faces. This is why the recovery and stimulus packages around the world must be forward looking, embrace the changes we want to see, and build a future we want to live in.”

**Camilla Bausch**

Scientific and Executive Director, Ecologic Institute (Germany)

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“In most countries, existing inequalities and the urgent need to reduce them have been exposed. The crisis caused by COVID-19 is an important call to Think Tanks around the world to work hand in hand with governments and other sectors of society in the formulation and implementation of public policies and programs to face the damage and achieve the resilience that sustainable development demands.”

**Gabriell Duarte**

Researcher, ASIES (Guatemala)

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“T20 Saudi Arabia is committed to bringing evidence-based policy recommendations to the attention of the G20 leaders on timely and relevant issues for G20 and non-G20 countries. To that end, the T20 community has responded to the current crisis, precipitated by this ongoing pandemic, by creating a special task force that will investigate the impact of COVID-19. As the T20 platform is formally nested within the G20 framework, it provides global think tanks with the opportunity to present multiple perspectives to G20 leadership, while

respecting everyone's views. I would like to emphasize that the T20 has always valued an inclusive, democratic and open process of collating ideas, which is what makes it credible and legitimate.”

**Fahad M. Alturki**

Chair, T20 Saudi Arabia (Saudi Arabia)

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“The COVID-19 pandemic is a universal threat to the Earth. Figuratively speaking it could be compared with extraterrestrial attack. This provides a unique opportunity for promoting cooperation in a post-Corona world. However, blindly following the old “end of history” narrative could bring the world order to the new bipolarity of the XXI century. This path dependence substantially decreases not only post-Corona economic growth recovery, but also humanity resistance to the future pandemics, as well as climate change prevention. Forthcoming online and planning offline meetings of G5 leaders (Permanent members of UN SC) could potentially reverse this counterproductive trend towards a divided world.”

**Alexander Dynkin**

President, Primakov IMEMO, (Russia)

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“In these challenging times, we have all had to adapt to the role that befalls us to protect the health and welfare of our communities and nations. This collective responsibility has come at a dire cost, but one I am certain we are all prepared to bear. I am inspired by the way in which the think tank community has come together, with kindness, strength and concern for the common good. Such an initiative as the Global Think Tank Town Hall gives me great confidence that we will get through this, together – as we always have.”

**Karim El Aynaoui**

Managing Director, Policy Center for New South PCNS (Morocco)

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## Global Think Tank Town Hall I

Countries across the globe are struggling with the destructive health and economic consequences of COVID-19. However, unlike the devastating pandemic of 1918, there are opportunities in the current context to rapidly share information and collaborate across borders. Think tanks are positioned to serve policymakers and the public as they grapple earnestly with the current and future health and economic consequences of a pandemic on this scale. When stakeholders look to think tanks for research and innovative policy solutions, organizations must be ready with information and easily digestible strategies for government, civil society and private sector decision makers. In such a scenario, there was broad-based support to issue a joint communiqué, highlighting think tanks' commitment to improving people's lives and livelihood through evidence-based policy recommendations.

A proposal was also made to establish three interdisciplinary international Working Groups on:

1. The best ways to accelerate and augment multinational cooperation in research and development of drugs, vaccines, testing devices and other medical products;
2. The ways to advance policy frameworks that allow technology to be used in a manner that mitigates the spread of COVID-19, while respecting human rights, limiting potential abuses and combatting disinformation campaigns; and
3. The ways of facilitating both domestic and global economic recovery as quickly as possible.

In addition, there was also support for holding joint virtual events and webinars. This culminated in the first Global Think Tank Town Hall which took place on April 7, 2020, where the purpose and importance of the Global Think Tank Town Hall to Save Lives and Livelihoods was set out. This collaborative discussion, bringing together close to 400 participants from 278 institutions and 85 countries provided a space for think tanks to connect and collaborate on the procedural and substantive effects of COVID-19. Participants provided input on how institutional resources can be directed to research pandemic response, recovery and resilience in a post-COVID-19 world. Following the first Town Hall, Marlos Lima, the Director of International Affairs at the Getulio Vargas Foundation (Brazil) perfectly described the intent of this meeting by stating "It's time for think tanks to show that they really matter when it comes to solving people's problems. If think tanks want to survive this major crisis, they must show capacity for rapid adaptation in order to deliver immediate and effective solutions. This is what the first edition of Global Think Tank Town Hall to Save Lives and Livelihoods has delivered: a great opportunity to fulfill our goals."

The video recording of the Town Hall I meeting can be accessed using the link provided:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mccHE03mbGw>

### Opening Panel

During the opening panel discussion, leaders from think tanks based in North America, South America, Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Southern and Southeast Asia provided proposals for addressing health, economic, social and security issues raised by the COVID-19 pandemic and suggested strategies for how think tanks can continue their existing work and reorient to make a difference in these difficult and uncertain times. This panel dealt with the following themes:

1. Think About Today, Plan for Tomorrow,
2. Create New Relationships and Maintain Virtual Communities,
3. Advocate for International Responses to Conflict, and
4. Address Inequality.

### Panel Two

The second session focused on the policy responses and programs that will be required to tackle the growing social and economic challenges of the COVID-19 crisis. Experts who represented countries such as Italy, the United Kingdom, Guatemala, the United States, Pakistan, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, France and Spain were convened in an effort to foster creative solutions that seek to build global solidarity for the current and future needs of society. This panel dealt with the following themes:

1. Building Resilient Global Policy Responses and
2. Proposals to Create Social Cohesion.



## Panel Three

The third panel focused on solutions think tanks can implement to adapt and survive the institutional effects of COVID-19. The conversation featured panelists from think tanks around the world, including India, Slovakia, Serbia, Haiti, Israel, China, the United States and the European Union. One persistent theme shared was the need for global solidarity both now and post-COVID-19. This panel dealt with the following themes:

1. Use of Technology,
2. Importance of Networking,
3. Relevant and Responsive Research,
4. Fundraising and Relationships, and
5. People-Centered Management.

## Closing Panel

The Global Think Tank Town Hall and its fourth panel concluded by focusing on five central themes for think tanks to prioritize in their ongoing work plans: leadership, communication, technology, security and resiliency. It was noted that as information and policy “tsunamis” spread at warp speed, think tanks must become stronger, smarter, and faster in responding to the crisis and helping the most impacted sectors of the global population. Highlighting this sentiment, Samir Saran, President of the Observer Research Foundation (India), exclaimed, “Even as we struggle to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic, the world is also confronted with an ‘infodemic.’ Fueled by old and new media platforms, a flurry of misinformation has made it virtually impossible to get to the truth. It is crucial for Think Tanks such as ours to double down on their principle responsibility, cut the clutter, and ensure public discourse remains rooted in evidence.” There was a resounding consensus among participants that think tanks can and will rise to meet this challenge. The panel made the following recommendations:

1. Think tanks must overcome the inherent competition structure in order to unite and support the common goal of creating concrete solutions for policymakers. Interdisciplinary focus and strong leadership signals from think tank founders, directors and their communications departments will be key to the success of any joint initiatives that are undertaken.
2. Think tanks must be mindful not to inundate audiences with communications that amount to white noise. Streamlining communication channels is a necessary effort for all think tanks to undertake.
3. COVID-19’s effects on work should be reviewed and researched by relevant think tanks, and policy recommendations made readily available. Vis-a-vis surveillance technology, think tanks must take a closer look at the civil liberty tradeoffs and erosions, and how these powers can be rolled back at the appropriate time.
4. Think tanks can be instrumental in providing early warning to governments and civil society regarding online and physical threats to national and personal security. Think tanks need to help governments and institutions to reprioritize spending.
5. Investing in staff, ensuring they feel valued and investing in their mental and physical health is crucial for think tanks. Models for resiliency should be studied as an area of policy insight.

## Global Think Tank Town Hall II

The Second Global Think Tank Town Hall took place on May 13, 2020 and was designed to serve as a catalyst for evidence-based, policy-relevant, action-oriented policies and proposals to create solutions for saving lives and livelihoods in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. This collaborative discussion brought together over 303 think tank executives, scholars and policy makers from 87 countries: The Second Town Hall's mission was to create a rapid and proactive response to the growing economic, public health and welfare crisis that has engulfed countries around the world. It did this by creating 5 specific Working Groups to address key problems facing the world.

The video recording of the Town Hall II meeting can be accessed using the link provided:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cGff816TkLk>

*Average of 108 people attended each Working Group session*

*Average of 74 distinct organizations attended each Working Group session*

### Working Group 1

The first Working Group addressed the public health crisis. This group focused on issues related to the acceleration and augmentation of multinational cooperation in research and the development of drugs, vaccines, testing devices and other medical products to achieve rapid breakthroughs that will immediately benefit the international community and potentially prepare and protect the world from future pandemics. This was introduced as a solution that would allow everyone to receive healthcare, even during a crisis. Chairman Dr. Saran recommended that universal health care should be utilized to attain equitable treatment. Additionally, the "Tech for All" technology-enabled system would provide telemedicine, contact tracing and digital health insurance. The Working Group also stressed the importance of preparedness for future health crises and suggested that countries use an audit to determine their level of preparedness.

### Working Group 2

Working Group 2 focused on preparing national and international strategies for economic recovery and revitalization. Mulu Gebreeyesus, Senior Fellow at Policy Studies Institute (Ethiopia), made clear the importance of Working Group 2 by stating "COVID-19, which has appeared primarily as a health crisis, will stay with us for some time to come until vaccines or medicines are discovered and properly distributed. But the global socio-economic crisis it triggered, unprecedented in recent history, will have an even longer lasting effect." As such, the group worked towards understanding and responding to the looming global economic crises and possible inventions to rescue and rebuild the livelihoods of workers, while also stabilizing financial systems. In their presentation the team also offered six guiding questions for the characterization of the economic policy challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic to guide future studies.

### Working Group 3

Working Group 3 addressed innovative and inclusive public and private strategies to help vulnerable groups. As laid out by Sarah Rosen Wartell, President of Urban Institute (United States), "this crisis is landing unfairly and disproportionately not just on the most vulnerable among us, but also on the people who are essential to our economy and collective health. Most of all, COVID-19 reveals our nation's long history of discrimination, which is baked into the fabric of our society." Being that this pandemic has revealed and accelerated issues surrounding vulnerable populations, Working Group 3 was dedicated to providing strategies to address these problems. The team focused on how to advance policy frameworks that allow technology to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 while also respecting human rights, limiting potential abuses and combating disinformation campaigns. In their presentation, the team emphasized the role of responsible use of technology by public and private sectors in order to help vulnerable groups. Identifying the positive and negative effects of technology on vulnerable groups will be essential to mitigate the impact of COVID-19.

## Working Group 4

Working Group 4 focused on fostering international cooperation and creating resilient systems to respond to future crises. The group studied potential near-term future waves of the virus, and the likelihood of future viruses that could be even more devastating and disruptive. This group was aimed at fostering future global and local preparedness and cooperation and discussed creating social safety nets. In their presentation the group suggested that the Working Group and think tanks as an industry need to engage at three levels: with civil society and NGOs, with states, and with the WHO and other multilateral organizations.

## Working Group 5

Working Group 5 addressed the topic of new operating models for think tanks research, communications and funding. The Working Group focused on think tank survival strategies, including how think tanks can continue to operate efficiently during an economic crisis, how to manage relationships with partners, donors and allies, how to approach fundraising as a result of new circumstances as a result of COVID-19, and strategic communications. The group highlighted how think tanks have been proactively adapting in various ways through digitization efforts, communication techniques, and funding and organizational models, and how they will need to continue to adapt and change in response to this crisis.

The Working Group suggested that attendees of the Second Town Hall work to come up with strategies to fit these points and submit these strategies for discussion at the Third Global Think Tank Town Hall.

# Global Think Tank Town Hall III

## Overview and Objective

On June 30, 2020 think tank executives, scholars and policymakers came together for the largest of the three Town Hall meetings with 560 participants from over 80 countries. During this meeting, the five Working Groups established at the previous Town Hall presented their research findings from the past month. At this Town Hall, strategic, action-oriented recommendations were presented by these Working Groups, as well as positive interventions occurring in various countries. These action-oriented recommendations were at the center of The Third Town Hall, as key proposals were presented during the Town Hall, and a more detailed list of recommendations was made available through reports by each respective Working Group. As the final event of the Virtual Town Hall series, the Third Town Hall was essential in establishing what the role and next steps of think tanks should be during this COVID-19 pandemic.

Prior to the Working Group presentations, prominent speakers emphasized the importance of social cohesion and cooperation during this pandemic. Carlos Ivan from the Getulio Vargas Foundation (FGV) advocated that the role of think tanks right now is to bring back rationality within human relations and policy making. On a similar note, speaker Rohinton Medhora from the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) articulated that while COVID-19 is a tragic crisis, it also presents an opportunity. This pandemic has shown the importance of science, leadership, and social cohesion, and *now* is the time for think tanks to practice those exact values that they espouse. Finally, both Adam Posen from the Peterson Institute and Sven Smit from the McKinsey Global Institute underscored the severity of the virus from an economic perspective. The virus is dictating human behavior and thus the economy. In this time of uncertainty, these speakers believe that it is imperative for leaders and government actors to take swift action in order to bring about economic recovery. The above speakers all stressed the need to lead, cooperate, and above all, take action during these uncertain times. The following sections detail the action-oriented approaches suggested by the five Working Groups during the Third Town Hall.

The video recording of the Town Hall III meeting, along with selected PowerPoints and reports can be accessed using the links provided: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7tYbCw-rg8>, [gotothinktank.com/town-hall-reports](https://gotothinktank.com/town-hall-reports)

## Working Group 1: The Public Health Crisis

The members of Working Group one offered action-oriented recommendations to assist policymakers and healthcare professionals currently engaged in the fight against COVID-19. Co-chaired by Aaron Shull of the Centre for International Governance Innovation (Canada) and Samir Saran of the Observer Research Foundation (India), this Working Group's goal was to develop an assessment system and framework to address future public health crises at all levels of society. The group presented policy recommendations across multiple key sectors. The specific sectors and recommendations are as followed:

1. *Knowledge and Information Sharing* focused on collecting large quantities of reliable data that can be shared rapidly among the many institutions that are involved in the fight against COVID-19. Through partnerships between governments, the private sector and academia, new innovations can be brought rapidly from concept to implementation and best practices for addressing COVID-19-related problems can be shared and replicated.
2. *#Tech4All-Bridging the Digital Divide* suggested that policymakers should promote the use of technology to enhance health ecosystems. The Working Group notes that telemedicine is a promising method of lightening the burden for healthcare systems. They also advocated for the creation of a central information authority that gathers relevant local data to create a comprehensive global picture of the pandemic.
3. *Treatment of Non-COVID Patients* recommended reserving some hospitals as infectious disease hospitals to protect other patients and perform targeted health care deliveries so that patients receive treatment more efficiently. Over the long-term, the type of disruptions experienced by non-COVID patients should be addressed through increased funding and training, as well as developing better regulatory regimes to ensure adequate care is available for all.
4. *Accelerating Progress to Universal Health Coverage* included increasing public spending on healthcare, building up local healthcare capacity, and optimizing and digitizing health care delivery to make its provision more effective.
5. *Equitable Distribution of Vaccines, Medicines, and Capabilities* asserts that think tanks should support both public and private programs that provide vaccines, medicine and other healthcare needs regardless of a patient's

socioeconomic status. It is also proposed that media platforms are used to ensure that all sections of society are informed about the most up to date information about COVID-19.

6. *Health Preparedness and Resilience* focused on developing a comprehensive system to evaluate the capacity for countries to respond to similar future crises. The Working Group recommends that governments conform to previously created WHO public health evaluation standards, and that disease spread early warning systems are improved. Further, governments at all levels should integrate the principles of anticipatory governance into their decision-making processes.

At the conclusion of their presentation, the Working Group expressed their hope that their work would serve as a contribution to the global public good created by the global think tank community. The video recording of the Town Hall III meeting, along with the PowerPoint and report of this Working Group, can be accessed using the links provided: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7tYbCw-rg8>, [gotthinktank.com/town-hall-reports](http://gotthinktank.com/town-hall-reports)

## Working Group 2: Preparing National and International Strategies for Economic Recovery and Revitalization

Co-chaired by Karel Lannoo of the Center for European Policy Studies (Belgium) and Abla Abel Latif of the Egyptian Center for Economic Studies (Egypt), this Working Group's mission was to prepare national and international strategies to recover from the economic crisis caused by COVID-19. Dr. Abla Abel Latif first emphasized that all suggestions made by the group must be utilized in a way that accomplishes social development goals (SDGs) and builds a better society rather than rebuilding the current one. The Working Group then proceeded to present their specific recommendations to spur economic recovery, starting with short-term and long-term monetary policies. The recommendations are as followed:

1. *Sustainable Economic Policies*: In the short-term, governments must provide aid efficiently while ensuring the aid is not provided in a manner that is unjust. In the long-term, governments should not let COVID-19 delay institutional and structural reforms that could advance future growth and lessen the burden on businesses.
2. *Informal Economy as Agent of Recovery*: Government policies should ease the transition between the informal and formal economies. It is important for countries to reduce the inflow of informal employment and eliminate it over time by spurring private sector job growth, social mobility, and the elimination of premature entrance, among others.
3. *Partner with Civil Society Groups*: During COVID-19, stakeholders should partner with civil society groups, and the private sector should focus on safe practices and maintaining supply lines. This collaborative effort will sustainably provide goods and services to communities.
4. *Use Technology to Assist Global Economic Recovery*: Global leaders should mitigate adverse labor market impacts of digitalization, address bias concerns, and pursue digital inclusion through training programs. While doing this, leaders should prioritize the reduction of cyber threats and privacy invasion.
5. *Support Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)*: SMEs may need additional government aid, like the reduction of taxes and bureaucratic burden, to survive this pandemic. Linkages between smaller enterprises and larger companies should be encouraged to ensure the safety of supply lines.
6. *Reinvigorate International Organizations*: This group advocated for the creation of a Global Healthcare Stability board to integrate healthcare policy, that would be composed of members of The World Bank, OECD, WHO, and the IMF. Reforms to make the G7 and G20 economic policy coordinating body more representative should also occur.

This group ended their presentation by emphasizing the need for prioritizing inclusivity, resilience, and sustainability when addressing policies for economic recovery in the midst of COVID-19. The video recording of the Town Hall III meeting, along with the PowerPoint and report of this Working Group, can be accessed using the links provided: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7tYbCw-rg8>, [gotthinktank.com/town-hall-reports](http://gotthinktank.com/town-hall-reports)

## Working Group 3: Identifying Innovative and Inclusive, Public and Private Interventions Strategies to Help Vulnerable Groups

The objective of Working Group 3 was to help vulnerable populations that are especially affected by COVID-19. The co-chairs were Klaus Stier of the Getulio Vargas Foundation (Brazil) and Winnie Stachelberg of the Center for American Progress (United States). During the third Town Hall, this Working Group detailed strategies to assist five vulnerable subgroups in the areas of clothing, food, and shelter. These five subgroups include children and youth, elderly populations, women in vulnerable conditions, migrants, and racial/ethnic minorities. The group began their presentation with an overview of the social impacts of the COVID-19 crisis as detailed by the UNDP, World Bank, ILO, and World Food Programme. These impacts highlight the declining Human Development Index, declining global per capita income in 2020, an increase of 20 million people pushed into extreme poverty, expectations of mass unemployment, and the real risk of a world hunger crisis. The presentation then outlined several challenges and recommendations for each subgroup:

1. *Subgroup 1: Children and Youth*, addressed the challenge of ensuring the continuous functioning of food supply chains during the pandemic in order to protect children from hunger. Positive interventions include establishing Green Lanes for transports of goods and medical supplies at the European Union level and establishing programs for providing food or other necessary allowances through vouchers/e-vouchers.
2. *Subgroup 2: The Elderly*, addressed the challenges of the COVID-19 morbidity rate. The morbidity rate has been greatest among the elderly aged 60s, 70s, 80s, and beyond, accounting for nearly 27.5% of current deaths. These casualties take a particularly harsh toll among communities and families in informal settlements. One key recommendation provided by this subgroup is to undertake robust analyses of the risks associated with different underlying health conditions so that countries can identify the highest risk groups and develop targeted shielding policies to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. The second key recommendation is to increase funding and resources for long-term-care patients to allow for the rapid response and prevention of the spreading of COVID-19 infections.
3. *Subgroup 3, Women in Vulnerable Conditions*, addressed the challenge of financial stability and access to justice for female victims of gender-based violence (GBV). Vulnerable women include women trapped in abusive relationships, women living in poverty, malnourished women, and pregnant women; COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated the conditions that were precarious for these groups prior to the pandemic. One positive intervention includes app-based educational and advocacy campaigns for women and girls that enable access to on-time, specific, and relevant knowledge around GBV and intimate partner violence. A second positive intervention includes self-employment training of rescued women to enable their immediate financial sustainability. This training would include standard operating procedures to connect to networks dedicated to marketing the products of women-owned micro businesses.
4. *Subgroup 4: Migrants*, focused on the challenge of prioritizing health, sanitation, and economic protection in locations where migrants and displaced people are concentrated. In such overcrowded locations, social distancing is nearly impossible. A key recommendation for immediate action is an emergency response in the MENA region by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and intergovernmental organizations (IGOS) delivering humanitarian assistance to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and to proliferate COVID-19 testing. A succeeding key recommendation is aimed at the NGO Earth Her to utilize empowerment methods for refugees from Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Syria to produce PPE sets. This recommendation also encourages inclusive methods by the International Organization on Migration (IOM) to assist with remittance flow.
5. *Subgroup 5: Racial/Ethnic Minorities*, concentrates on the reality of disproportionate COVID-19 mortality rates for ethnic and racial minorities. The Working Group emphasizes that these populations should be prioritized for public health intervention and economic support programming. One positive intervention is to prioritize the work of Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs) to continue the implementation of public health protocols such as social distancing, mask wearing, and limits on gatherings. A second positive intervention includes the development and prioritization of local government support in housing, employment stability, and technology/internet access.

Co-chair Klaus Stier concluded the presentation by remarking that the COVID-19 crisis has exposed a number of threats facing vulnerable populations on a daily basis. He stated that immediate action is imperative and think tanks must show their capacity to act productively. Collaboration and communication are critical, and the above key recommendations will be pertinent when countries re-open in a “new normal.” The video recording of the Town Hall III meeting, along with the PowerPoint and report of this Working Group, can be accessed using the links provided: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7tYbCw-rg8>, [gothinktank.com/town-hall-reports](http://gothinktank.com/town-hall-reports)

## Working Group 4: Fostering International Cooperation—Creating Rapid, Responsive, and Resilient Systems to Respond to Future Crisis

Co-chaired by Gustavo Martinez and Pablo Ava from the Argentine Council for International Relations (Argentina), Working Group 4 was focused on fostering future global and local preparedness and cooperation from both health and economic system perspectives. The Working Group noted that the COVID-19 crisis did *not* strengthen international cooperation networks, but rather, was an example of the crisis of multilateralism that can be observed in areas such as trade, finance, and climate change. Thus, members of the Working Group emphasized the following recommendations:

1. *Resilient Supply Chains*: Emergency inventory and stockpiles should be available in the private and public sectors (e.g. ASEAN Rice Reserve). This Working Group also advocated for greater regulatory coherence in the areas of logistics, production, manufacturing, and distribution.
2. *Global Health Cooperation*: Countries should openly communicate about their epidemiological situations and share data with the WHO to provide accurate information about the spread of the disease. Simultaneously, countries should collaborate to increase testing capacities worldwide, improve diagnostic tools and further raise awareness on means through which the spread of the virus can be halted.
3. *Global Socioeconomic Cooperation*: Global political leadership must be mobilized to coordinate economic and monetary policies mitigating the impacts of the pandemic, as well as devise new strategies to align short-term emergency responses to long-term economic and social objectives.
4. *Global Platform for Cooperation*: A global platform for cooperation is needed. This platform would be built based on scientific evidence and trust and would introduce artificial intelligence and data mining systems. The Working Group sustained that the global financial system should be able to build a package of aid and assistance to the least developed countries.

In conclusion, this Working Group stressed the urgency of an international and cooperative response to the economic, job and social destruction caused by the pandemic. The final and most ideal solution proposed by the Working Group was the creation of a new, international, welfare state. The video recording of the Town Hall III meeting, along with the PowerPoint and report of this Working Group, can be accessed using the links provided:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7tYbCw-rg8>, [gothinktank.com/town-hall-reports](http://gothinktank.com/town-hall-reports)

## Working Group 5: Being Fit for an Uncertain Future: New Operating Models for Think Tanks—Research, Communications and Funding

Co-chaired by Paolo Magri of the Institute for International Political Studies (Italy) and Milena Lazarevic of the European Policy Center (Serbia), Working Group 5 focused on finding new operating models for think tanks in order to prepare for an increasingly uncertain future. The leaders of this group stressed that there will be dramatic shifts in areas such as funding, communication, and technology. The co-chairs recommended four major areas of focus for think tanks moving forward:

1. *Reinventing communication*, with the goal of standing out. This means prioritizing “highly visible” forms of communication, it also entails partnering with the most influential media actors. T
2. *Reinventing events*, by reimagining engagement in the digital arena by using shorter and more dynamic meetings and presentations to hold attention. Think tanks can also host hybrid events in the future, in which one part of the event is online and another part of the event is in-person.
3. *Diversify funding sources and engage donors*. The Working Group proposes that including the private sector more in research will allow for more meaningful and engaging partnerships for both parties. Think tanks should also consider building partnerships with civil society partners.
4. *Move cooperation with other think tanks beyond singular projects*. This would allow for enduring relationships and long-lasting projects with a wider scope.

The combination of these recommendations can be used to move in tandem with the ever-developing COVID-19 crisis. The Working Group hopes to encourage longstanding unity amongst their peers and partnerships that withstand the pandemic. The video recording of the Town Hall III meeting, along with the PowerPoint and report of this Working Group, can be accessed using the links provided: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7tYbCw-rg8>, [gothinktank.com/town-hall-reports](http://gothinktank.com/town-hall-reports)

## July Sessions

From July 6-10, 2020 each Working Group held a breakout session with 30-80 attendees each to further discuss their findings and recommendations. Unlike the previous Town Hall events, which covered many different topics regarding COVID-19, these July debriefing sessions focused on the singular topic specific to the Working Group hosting the event. This allowed for participants of the Town Halls to not only gain more information from the Working Group they were especially interested in, but also interact with the members of that Working Group. These July sessions were interactive and spurred conversation and productive debates amongst members and participants.

The Working Groups were able to present longer versions of their PowerPoints, as they had a full hour and a half to discuss their topic. Thus, the July Sessions were critical in gaining a fuller understanding of the intricacies involved in addressing the issues advanced by COVID-19.

## Conclusion

Bringing together over 1,200 participants and 500 think tank executives, scholars and policymakers from over 200 institutions in 150 countries, the Global Think Tank Town Halls fostered cooperation and a spirit of cohesiveness in the international research community. Spearheaded by Dr. James McGann, institutions from every corner of the world looked to solve the immediate consequences of the pandemic through their presentations, while also creating a comprehensive guide that could address future repercussions of the crisis. The five Working Groups from the Town Halls proposed strategic, action-oriented interventions that think tanks and governments across the world can implement to address the COVID-19 crisis. Separated by time zones and computer screens, the attendees of the Virtual Town Halls aimed to generate granular solutions that could produce outcomes at the macro level. While the COVID-19 crisis has transformed the manner in which think tanks can operate on a daily basis, secure funding, and promote their research, the Virtual Town Halls allowed participants to work together to address problems that have been accelerated as a result of the pandemic.

The speed at which the Town Halls were organized and hosted was unprecedented. All of the Working Group members and participants of the Town Halls engaged in a special moment of unity. Paolo Magri, Executive Vice President and Director of the Italian Institute for International Political Studies (Italy) provided a concluding thought: “In dramatic times when international cooperation appears next to impossible we should always remind ourselves that the League of Nations, the UN and the Bretton Woods institutions were all the product of deeply dramatic periods. We emerged from those crises stronger, with the renewed sense that cooperation is crucial if we want to avoid, or at least limit, tragedies. Think tanks play a critical role in assisting policy makers in developing sound and feasible patterns of cooperation. The Town Halls showed that the incredible value and intellectual richness of our community is just a starting point, but all great journeys start with a single step.” Consequently, these events illuminated the future of international events in the age of COVID and beyond. The utilization of technology will continue to be a key aspect of think tanks in a post-COVID-19 world. Think tank operations will continue to metamorphosize in the future; those that can best incorporate technology into their daily operations will be able to further conduct research and influence global policy. Most importantly, the Global Think Tank Town Halls illuminated the significance of encouraging cooperation, rather than competition, among think tanks globally. When think tanks are given channels to cooperate and work collaboratively, positive solutions emerge, which ultimately greatly benefits the international community at large.



## Appendix

### Summary of Town Hall Participation

Total number of people and institutions who participated across all Town Halls	1226
Total number of distinct organizations that participated across all Town Halls	539
<b>TOWN HALL I</b>	
Total number of participants	363
Total number of distinct organizations participating	278
Number of countries represented	85
<b>TOWN HALL II</b>	
Total number of participants	303
Total number of distinct organizations participating	303
Number of countries represented	87
<b>TOWN HALL III</b>	
Total number of participants	560
Total number of distinct organizations participating	345
Number of countries represented	87

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Danny Russel	Asia Society Policy Institute (United States)
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	Carnegie India (India)
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**Gina E. Wood**, Atlantic Council, United States

## Participants for the Working Group Sessions (Held July 6-10, 2020)

### *Working Group 1*

Total number of participants	99
Total number of distinct organizations that participated	72
Number of countries represented	23

### *Working Group 2*

Total number of participants	118
Total number of distinct organizations that participated	87
Number of countries represented	44

### *Working Group 3*

Total number of participants	80
Total number of distinct organizations that participated	54
Number of countries represented	28

### *Working Group 4*

Total number of participants	92
Total number of distinct organizations that participated	68

Number of countries represented	34
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*Working Group 5*

Total number of participants	149
Total number of distinct organizations that participated	91
Number of countries represented	45



## **About the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program**

The Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP) at the Lauder Institute of the University of Pennsylvania conducts research on the role policy institutes play in governments and civil societies around the world. Often referred to as the “think tanks’ think tank,” TTCSP examines the evolving role and character of public policy research organizations.

Since its formation, TTCSP has laid the foundation for a global initiative that will help bridge the gap between knowledge and policy in critical policy areas such as international peace and security, globalization and governance, international economics, environment, information and society, poverty alleviation and health. This international collaborative effort is designed to establish regional and international networks of policy institutes and communities that will improve policy making as well as strengthen democratic institutions and civil societies around the world. TTCSP at the Lauder Institute works with leading scholars and practitioners from think tanks and universities in a variety of collaborative efforts and programs.

## **About the Lauder Institute**

Founded by brothers Leonard and Ronald Lauder in 1983 in honor of their father, Joseph, the Joseph H. Lauder Institute for Management and International Studies provides a fully integrated business education to a new generation of leaders coming of age in a rapidly globalizing world.

## **About the University of Pennsylvania**

The University of Pennsylvania (Penn) is an Ivy League school with highly selective admissions and a history of innovation in interdisciplinary education and scholarship. As a world-class research institution, Penn boasts a picturesque campus in the middle of Philadelphia, a dynamic city that is conveniently located between Washington, D.C. and New York, New York. Penn was founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1740 to push the frontiers of knowledge and benefit society by integrating study in the liberal arts and sciences with opportunities for research and practical, pre-professional training at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Penn is committed to meeting the full demonstrated need of all undergraduates with grant-based financial aid, making this intellectually compelling integration of liberal and professional education accessible to talented students of all backgrounds and empowering them to make an impact on the world.

## **About the Director**

James G. McGann, Ph.D., is a Senior Lecturer at the Lauder Institute of the Wharton School and the School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania. He is also the Director of the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP) at the University of Pennsylvania. He conducts research on developments and problems that think tanks and policymakers around the world face, and offers guidance and technical assistance to think tanks, governments and public and private donors on how to enhance the quality and effect of policy analysis. He is also a Senior Fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, a think tank based in Philadelphia. Prior to joining the University of Pennsylvania, Dr. McGann was an Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Villanova, where he taught international relations, international organizations and international law.

His main research priorities include: analyzing global developments in research on safety and international affairs; influencing United States’ foreign and domestic policies through think tanks; strategic advice to BRICS and G20 countries from think tanks and transnational and regional public policy challenges. He is the creator and author of the annual Global Go To Think Tank Index which ranks think tanks in every region of the world.

Dr. McGann has served as a consultant and advisor to the World Bank; the United Nations; the United States Agency for International Development; the Soros, Rockefeller, MacArthur, Hewlett and Gates foundations; the Carnegie Corporation; and foreign governments on the role of nongovernmental, public policy and public engagement organizations in the US and developing and transitional countries. He has also served as the Senior Vice President for the Executive Council on Foreign Diplomats, the Public Policy Program Officer for the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Assistant Director of the Institute of Politics, John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. He has also served as a Senior Advisor to the Citizens' Network for Foreign Affairs and the Society for International Development.

## *“Helping to bridge the gap between knowledge and policy”*

The mission of TTCSP is to increase the profile, capacity and performance of think tanks at the national, regional and global levels so they can better serve policymakers and the public.

TTCSP conducts research on the relationship between think tanks, politics and public policy, produces the annual Global Go To Think Tank Index, develops capacity-building resources and programs, manages and supports a global network of over 8,000 think tanks and trains future think tank scholars and executives. TTCSP is often referred to as the “think tanks’ think tank.”

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