



**SCHOOL for
THINKTANKERS**

On Think Tanks

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Key global
challenges:
how and what can
think tanks do to
make a difference?





Peter Taylor

Director of Research

Institute of Development Studies

United Kingdom

www.ids.ac.uk

p.taylor@ids.ac.uk

Outline of presentation

1. What global challenges need knowledge, data and evidence?
2. What functions can think tanks play in response to these needs?
3. How can think tanks help level the global research-knowledge playing field?

**responding to the
disruptions and
shocks of our era**

Environment

Economies

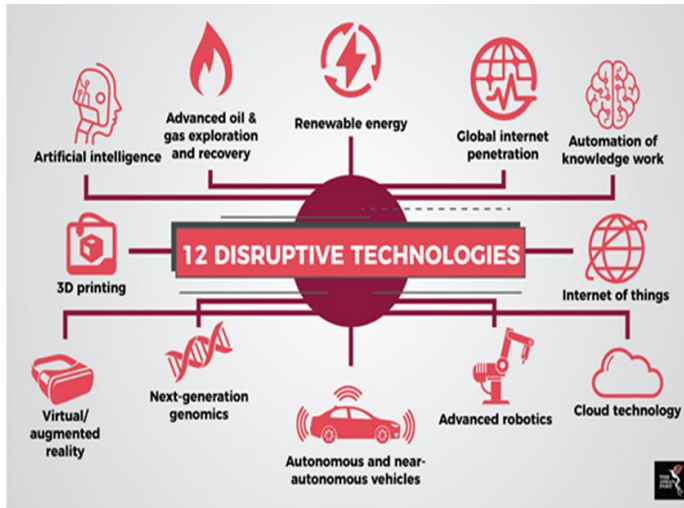
Health

Politics

Societies

Technology

What global challenges need knowledge, data, evidence

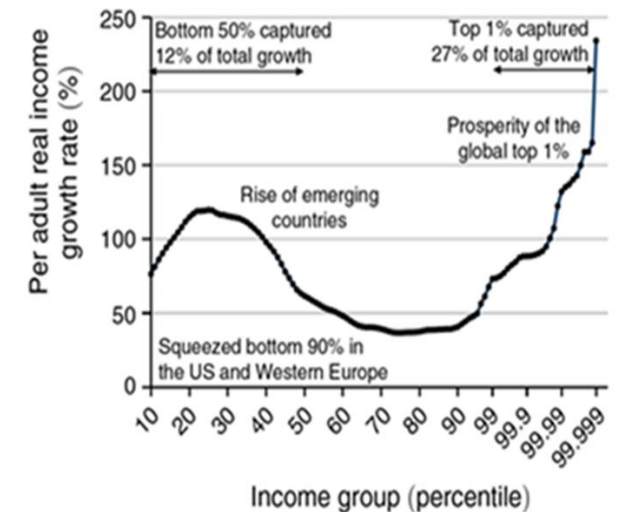
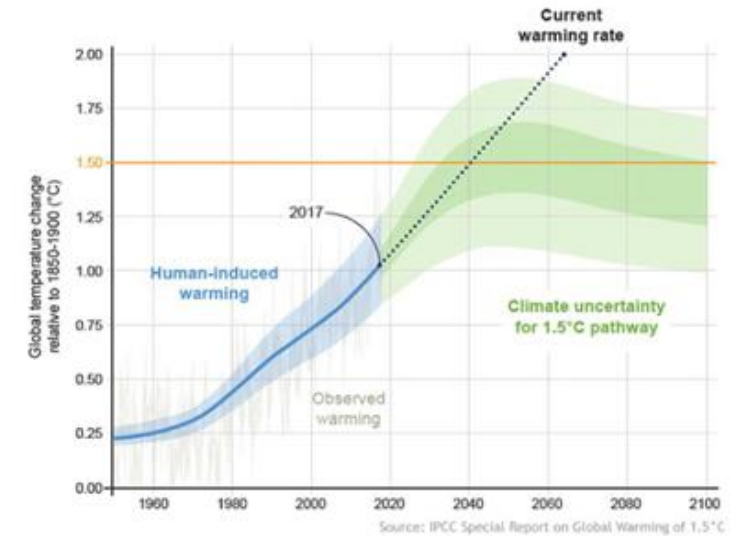


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How close are we to 1.5°C?

Human-induced warming reached approximately 1°C above pre-industrial levels in 2017



Poll Question #1

Which global challenges are most relevant to your work?

Meeting knowledge and evidence needs

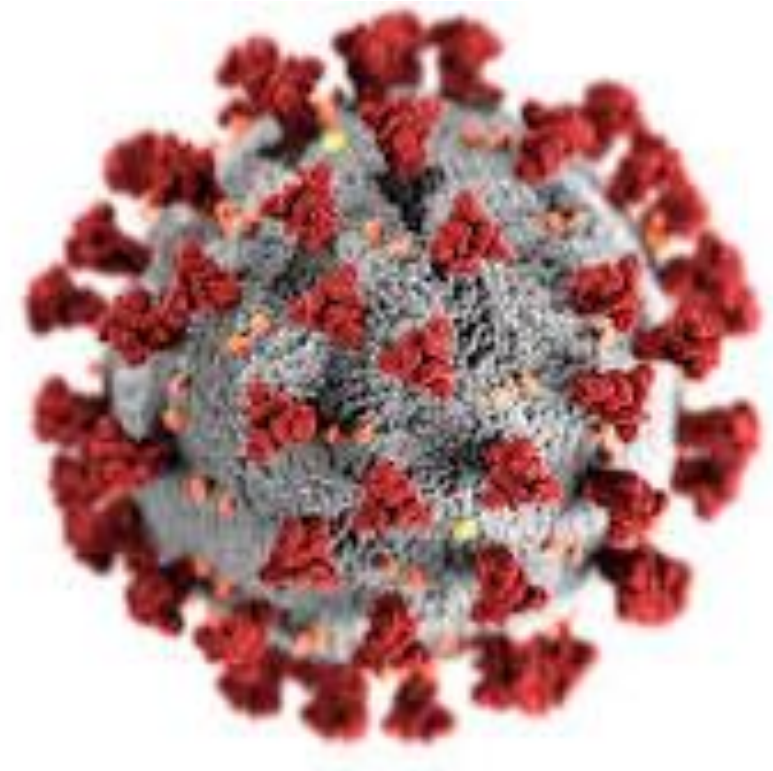
- Research on what works and doesn't - catalysing progress towards global goals, frameworks, agreements
- Identify, synthesise, analyse, make sense of data to track progress and boost accountability
- Provide evidence at the intersections of challenges - inequalities, environmental sustainability, inclusion
- Co-create knowledge via differentiated research agendas - generate pathways to sustainable development

But we're not always good at learning.....

“Many governments continue to allocate inadequate resources to their health care systems and lack the political will to improve the quality of their public health systems and the integration of those systems nationally and internationally.

If such lessons are to be heeded, global strategies to enhance the prevention and control capabilities of all nations will be important as the world prepares for future outbreaks of infectious disease.”

Webby and Webster, 2004



“Black Lives Matter and other movements show how power can shift to those historically not given power, and it is time we in global health listen and learn these lessons.”

Silvia Sax (2020)



“The climate crisis has already been solved. We already have all the facts and solutions. All we have to do is to wake up and change.

What is the point of learning facts when the most important facts clearly mean nothing to our society?”

Greta Thunberg, UN Climate Conference 2018



Need to address different expectations for learning and change

- Learning and change a complex, messy relationship
- Not everyone wants to learn
- Change influenced by “rules of the game” (turf, egos, interests, money)

Whose knowledge counts?

- Diverse, inclusive, equitable knowledge for transformation
- Evaluation, power and empowerment
- Political, not partisan

2. What functions can think tanks play in response to these needs?

- Help navigate uncertain times - combine work on urgent needs with longer-term trajectories
- Make case that outcomes from research on complex issues take time, via non-linear processes
- Demonstrate that quality matters and is multi-dimensional
- Connect research to societal needs and challenges
- Make research findings and data accessible, in hands of those who need it
- Acknowledge importance of power and politics

Poll Question #2.....

Through which functions can think tanks make a difference to global challenges?

Potential functions of think tanks

- Promote/use open data, facilitating knowledge/evidence sharing through effective communication and education
- Knowledge synthesis - demonstrating excellence, rigour, credibility
- Meta-analysis in emerging fields, foresight and scenario work
- Knowledge co-creation via multi-, trans-, inter-disciplinary research
- Doing “research with society”:
 - Finding or creating windows of opportunity
 - Engaging different communities and constituencies
 - Participatory and inclusive approaches
 - People owning evidence
 - Research leading to action and solutions

Poll question #3?

Do all think tanks have equal opportunities to make a difference to global challenges, regardless of context?

3. How can think tanks help level the global research playing field?

- Global frameworks - potential for collective effort but “Northern bias” remains
- Gender and other inequalities still constrain
- Inequities within and between nations - free and fair access/opportunity not guaranteed
- “Systemic bias” leaving researchers behind
- Academic “mobility” not equivalent to stronger research systems

What can think tanks do to address power relations?

- Collaborate on universal challenges
- Be thoughtful and intentional about relationships
- Equitable, trustful, transparent
- Address gender diversity and inclusion
- Adopt environmental responsibility - walk the talk
- Connect local and global
- Keep a focus on learning - a shared endeavour for mutual benefit

Final reflections and ideas

- Global progress on universal agendas - inequalities, environmental sustainability, inclusion
- Work at intersections and margins of challenges may hold most promise
- Excellence is currency; engagement generates change
- Politics and power at root of intractable challenges - and solutions
- Demonstrate value and use of evidence and research
- Co-create knowledge with those on journeys of transformation
- Promote praxis (reflection in action), be leaders in learning



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