

Compiled by Sarah Abdel Rahman

# The Egyptian-German Think Tanks Conference

## Toward an Innovative Approach to Think Tanks Management



Photo courtesy of IDSC

Maged Osman, chairman, IDSC, addressing the audience about the challenges that face worldwide think tanks during the plenary session of the Think Tanks Conference. On the panel from left: H.E. ambassador Hussein El-Kamel, international co-operation senior advisor, IDSC, H.E. ambassador Ramzy Ezzeldin, current Egyptian ambassador to Germany, H.E. ambassador Brend Erbel, German ambassador to Egypt, Andreas Jacobs, resident representative of Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.

From June 30 to July 1, 2008, the Egyptian-German Think Tanks Conference convened in Cairo, Egypt, with the aim of supporting the development of Egyptian public policy institutes with innovative managerial tools. Over the long term, this is expected to help generate the kind of policy research and analysis needed to push Egypt's social, economic, and political reforms forward.

In an effort to help improve the effectiveness and sustainability of both established and newly developed Egyptian think tanks, the conference discussed innovative approaches to fundraising, management, public engagement, policy analysis and research, drawing upon the innovative strategies, best practices, and technologies developed by German think tanks.

Organised by the Information and Decision Support Centre (IDSC), the Egyptian Cabinet think tank, the conference aimed to raise the awareness of local think tanks in a number of areas including organisational and procedural designs, effective use of knowledge and issue networks to facilitate the creation, dissemination, and utilisation of policy-relevant information and ideas, innovative strategies for engaging the press, policymakers, and the public, successful resource development and sustainability strategies, and creative approaches for recruiting, motivating, and retaining key personnel for think tanks, as well as in the enterprising use of technologies, products, and programmes that increase policy impacts.

The conference was attended by a number of dignitaries including German Ambassador Brend Erbel and Ambassador Ramzy Ezzeldin Ramzy, assistant minister of foreign affairs and nominated new ambassador of Egypt in Germany, professors from leading universities, and representatives of Egyptian and German think tanks, including Andreas Jacobs, resident representative of Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS), as well as the private sector.

"Worldwide think tanks generally face some challenges whether in developed countries or developing ones. For IDSC, there are some challenges that require full consideration from the organisation to grow and continue its role in influencing and shaping public policy. ▶

These include sustainable funding, staff recruitment, and coordination with ministries and other public entities," remarked IDSC Chairman Magued Osman.

President and CEO of Siemens Egypt Mohammed El-Mahdy, commented that the private sector also has a role to play. "The private sector will need to cooperate with think tanks by providing information on relevant (future) trends and risks, deriving strategic "issues" from specific trends, analysing potential (business) impact, outlining potential future scenarios, preparing recommendations for action, and voicing implications," he stated.

On the conference's second day, the first session tackled 'Innovative Strategies for Engaging the Press, Policymakers, and the Public.' Drawing on his experience as head of the research division for Middle East and Africa at Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), an independent academic research centre that advises the German Parliament and the Federal Government on foreign and

security policy issues, Muriel Asseburg explained that media relations are not only a form of consultancy to the public through the sharing of information, but are also an important part of policy consulting because analyses and ideas often only get the attention of policy makers when they are publicised or reproduced in the media. "Quite often, visibility in the media triggers a concrete demand for consultation by decision makers. It can therefore have an influence on agenda setting," clarified Asseburg.

Sherif Kamel, associate dean, Executive Education, School of Business, Economics, and Communication at the American University of Cairo, stressed the importance of ICT as an enabling platform for think tanks in another session. "Knowledge is rapidly becoming the key factor of production. The rapid increase in knowledge provides an evolving competitive edge for corporations and societies to grow faster. Knowledge dissemination requires investing in people, institutions,

and networks that will permit them to tap the growing global knowledge base and harness knowledge for their needs," he stated. ICT is a key driver in developing a knowledge-based society and a vital catalyst for socioeconomic development.

In the last session of the think tank conference, Edgar Göll, a senior expert and researcher at the Institute for Future Studies in Berlin, Germany, shared a few examples of sustainability processes, one of which involved a study conducted on behalf of the German Parliament on the experience of seven other European countries with new innovative institutions for sustainable development. The outcome of the study was the establishment of a council on sustainable development in the German Parliament. According to Göll, "Sustainable development represents the most important, innovative, advanced and authoritative concept for solving basic problems and saving mankind. It is an ambitious strategy for survival and well-being." ▲