



THE POLICY CENTER
FOR THE NEW SOUTH
**A BREEDING
GROUND FOR
YOUNG TALENT**



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THINK • STIMULATE • BRIDGE

The Policy Center for the New South, a breeding ground for young talent

The **Policy Center for the New South** is a multilingual incubator of ideas and breeding ground for young talent. Established in 2014 in Rabat, the Think Tank quickly emerged as one of Morocco, Africa and the global South's premier applied research institutions in economics and social sciences. An accomplishment all the more remarkable given the fact that the team-member average age stands at around 30.

"OCP Group, our Think Tank initiator, granted us full autonomy to ensure continued success and still supports this project, a collective asset", states **Karim El Aynaoui**, Executive President of the Policy Center and Dean of **the Faculty of Governance and Economic and Social Sciences** (FGSES) at Mohammed VI Polytechnic University (UM6P) in Rabat.

In its seven-years existence, the Policy Center attracted a number of employees from prestigious institutions including the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Goldman & Sachs, Jacobs Engineering, Bank Al Maghrib (BAM), the Ministry of Economy and Finance, OCP Group and UM6P. Mobility also occurs geographically, with positions in the United States and as far away as Bogota, where Instiglio, a major anti-poverty Colombian NGO, hired the former employee **Dalal Azzouzi**, holder of a Master's degree in Public Affairs and International Development.

“Leaders of Tomorrow”



Mouhamadou Ly, recruited by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Senegalese economist **Mouhamadou Ly**, another bright mind, joined the IMF's Africa Department in 2020 after three years at the Policy Center. In another life, he was a professor of economics at the University of St. Louis in Senegal, where he aspired to devote himself entirely to research, free from faculty teaching duties. The Policy Center, he says, gave him *"the opportunity to work across disciplines, moving away from mathematical economics to social sciences, with policy recommendations always at the forefront"*.

The Think Tank by virtue of the breadth of its activities, enables development of a wide range of skills, both academic and practical. It produced 209 research publications in 2020, including 17 books and reports. Notwithstanding Covid-19 pandemic that was extensively addressed in both writings and conferences, the Think Tank attended over 20

international events in 2020, from Rio to Riyadh, Abuja and Bamako, in addition to 35 national events held in Morocco. It hosted 74 webinars and transitioned its two flagship international 2020 conferences the **Atlantic Dialogues** and the **African Peace and Security Annual Conference** (APSACO) to digital online format.

The bi-annual **Dialogues stratégiques**, held in partnership with HEC Geopolitics Center in Paris, also moved to online format. Switching the conferences online saw audience numbers soar, with over 275,000 views (+175% over 2019) and the website attracting 530,000 unique visitors from 175 countries (+160%).

Partnerships, numbering 47, further expanded, with the alliance forged between the Policy Center, J-PAL, and Evidence for Policy Design (EPoD) at the Harvard Kennedy School, in collaboration with Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) for Morocco in launching the Morocco Employment Lab. This initiative seeks to build scientific data evaluation and utilization capacity in support of public employment policies.

The research offer continued to expand in recent years, as did the 120-strong workforce, organized along three main lines. Staff members now include some 50 employees, 50% of whom are women - gender parity also being a Policy Center hallmark. These teams are in charge of organizing events, monitoring partnerships, promoting research, publishing and communication.

Over 30 permanent researchers, split into two distinct teams, International Relations and Economics, produce research year-round. In addition, some 40 Senior Fellows of 12 nationalities are seasoned **experts from both South and North**. Senior Fellows take part in publications, major conferences and the elaboration of the research program, while sharing expertise with Junior Fellows.



Marcus de Freitas, Brazilian political analyst and Senior Fellow.

"This is an excellent space for public policy in the South, says Brazilian political scientist **Marcus Vinicius de Freitas**, Senior Fellow and Visiting Professor at the China Foreign Affairs University and the Armando Alvares Penteado Foundation in Sao Paulo. The point is that think tanks are usually located in the North and concerned with the North's interests. It is an admirable idea to build a network among people of different regions and to go South to discuss the South. Even Brazil does not have a structure that plays this role! Effective involvement of young people is evident, and their presence in discussions is substantial. Again, this is a good idea, as these are the leaders of tomorrow".

Versatility and a cross-functional approach

Typical Policy Center profiles turn out to be quite eclectic. **Youssef El Hayani** for instance, left the world of finance in London, Casablanca and Bahrain to join the Think Tank in 2016, at the age of 32. As a Program Officer, he was in charge of partnerships and project management. In late 2018, the Central Bank of Morocco, Bank Al Maghrib (BAM), entrusted him with its' International Cooperation Department, and its' Department of Cultural Relations with stakeholders in Moroccan heritage and the arts since March 2021.

"The Policy Center enabled me to work on a variety of issues and interact with a diversity of experts, he says. This transversality helped me juggle with mediation between the Central Bank and cultural actors, developing a measure of versatility. The Center empowers people without the verticality of traditional institutions and allows ownership of initiatives and projects with full involvement in coordination between partners, senior fellows and other stakeholders. It inspires one to give one's best and showcase one's work and skills - a boost that lifts everyone with no sense of generational disconnect. All at an intense pace! "



The Atlantic Dialogues, the flagship international conference of the Policy Center, an annual meeting point in Marrakesh.

"Unique Managerial Expertise"



Soulaiman Jiddi, a Policy Center for the New South alumnus, is now the managing director of Medina Heritage, a Marrakesh-based three-pronged art exhibition, craft promotion, and gourmet dining space. He helped launch the Think Tank, hired in 2014 after graduating from the University of Grenoble and FGSES with a degree in political science and economics.

He then became part of *“a young, dynamic and driven team, positioning the Policy Center as a platform for the production of scientific thought and assistance to public policy decision-making, for better development in the South”*. Immediately, he points out, the challenge was to establish the Center as a national, continental and then international authority. *“This was soon accomplished, thanks to unwavering dedication by the entire team and modern, participatory and inclusive management”*.

Initially, he was in charge of event operations and the implementation of procedures as Event & Program Officer. He then took over responsibility for a monthly newsletter, and later for a number of international partners.

“This is what makes the think tank so special, he explains. The versatility, multi-tasking and 'learning by doing' culture enriches skills and shapes managers. I acquired specific skills that helped me a lot. The way I lead my team today is largely-inspired by Policy Center management”.

An incubator with an academic scope

The Policy Center is not only a research center, but also an "academy" in its own right. *“The Center is a breeding ground for young multilingual people who know how to work well and fast”*, says Senior Fellow and President of the Emergence Institute **Moubarack Lo**, who is also Director General of the Senegalese Bureau of Economic Forecasting and former Chief Economist to the Prime Minister of Senegal.

The international scope prevails again, through young researchers such as **Salma Daoudi**, who starts her thesis at Oxford in the fall of 2021.



Headquarters of the Policy Center for the New South in Rabat.



Amal El Ouassif, working on a PHD at UM6P about migrations.

Amal El Ouassif, 29, is one of the Think Tank's eight doctoral students encouraged to further their studies. She begins her dissertation in September 2021 at the **Africa Institute for Research in Economic and Social Sciences** (AIRESS) at UM6P with applied prospective methods to migration issues as her topic.

After a Master's degree in International Relations and European Diplomacy at the FGSES, in “co-degree” with Pierre Mendès-France University in Grenoble (France), she obtained a second Master's degree at the College of Europe in Bruges (Belgium), and then worked successively for the European Commission, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and the German cooperation agency GIZ in Morocco.

“As soon as I joined the Policy Center in February 2018, I was mentored by Senior Fellow Abdelhak Bassou, and encouraged to write and co-write with other Fellows”, she said. I gained discipline and confidence in public speaking. We enjoy extensive autonomy and take responsibility for deliverables”.

Bridges between the Policy Center and UM6P are plentiful, states the Sahel security specialist, **Abelhak Bassou**. *“The Policy Center sees itself as a breeding ground for future executives, and young researchers support Senior Fellows, including in teaching missions”.*

Fatima Ezzahra Mengoub, 30, an agricultural engineer specializing in economic and social development, is about to defend her completed thesis. Trained at the Hassan II Agronomic and Veterinary Institute (IAV), she joined the Policy Center in 2017, two years after enrolling in graduate school, finding it a great opportunity to “immerse herself in research”, which she has done since with delight.



Fatima Ezzahra Mengoub, a PHD agricultural engineer.

Interested in exploring topics outside her own - water economics - in agriculture, Fatima Ezzahra Mengoub used the Policy Center's international network to not only meet researchers she only knew by name, but also to initiate in-depth, technical debates with a number of them. She interacted intensively with Senior Fellow **Isabelle Tsakok**, a rural development, food security and poverty reduction specialist, and former World Bank economist and assistant professor at the School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) at Columbia University in New York.

This guidance saved her precious time, she says, by pointing her to key references. *“I was also able to open up to the outside world, with many missions to Africa, Europe and Asia enabling me to better understand arid and tropical agriculture. I was lucky enough to observe these in Mali, Senegal, Gambia, Gabon, Rwanda and Pakistan. In summary, this is an environment conducive to growth”.*

“A space for young researchers to thrive”



Economist and Senior Fellow **Larabi Jaïdi**, who oversaw the latest edition of Policy Center flagship publication, the African Economic Report, discusses how interaction between Senior Fellows and young researchers works.

How does selection work at the Policy Center?

Young people are selected on the basis of skill. The Policy Center picks the best candidates in terms of research potential, with a mix of young people from a variety of social backgrounds, an approach we share with UM6P and FGSES. The Think Tank is rigorous enough not to give in to the temptation of recruiting young people based on social support and family or friendship networks.

What incentives do you have to attract the best?

The Policy Center's research agenda for upcoming years drives the selection process. This screening process ensures we attract promising researchers, then offered proper conditions: material status, access to relevant documentary resources, and contacts with outside and international think tanks. Policy Center sustainability hinges on this, as the Center cannot function solely with its pool of Senior Fellows. We seek to retain young people, enable them to produce research papers and fulfill a moral contract. It is a mutual commitment that of course allows freedom to branch out elsewhere.

How does researcher supervision work?

It is a two-tiered system of supervision, first within the Economics or International Relations team, but also by means of experimental "laboratories". These are small teams led by one, two or three permanent researchers, with a defined research program over a set period. We recently set this agenda for the coming three years, to provide visibility to researchers, whom we call upon to be versatile, thus requiring both specialization and openness.

What do young researchers ask of you as a Senior Fellow?

When preparing a publication, they often seek my opinion or advice on methodology upstream of the work, and a review afterwards. I for example was consulted on foreign direct investment (FDI) in Morocco and the transfer of capital returns. When measuring FDI impact in Morocco, we review magnitude in both volume and value as well as sectors and job creation potential, but we often forget returns to firms making the investment. I have helped with methodology and data research. Another example: I am working with three young researchers on the informal sector, as part of a World Bank contract charging us to do so. We established a three-month work program with case studies, to produce two documents on this subject.

Proximity to public policy

*“Meeting with public decision-makers gives us perspectives on the practical side of public policy that we seek to impact, says **Amal El Ouassif**. This proximity is part of Policy Center DNA since inception”.*

Rim Berahab, 30, recruited in 2014 after graduating from the National Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics (INSEA), worked extensively with economist and Senior Fellow **Uri Dadush**. An energy specialist, she spent three months in 2016 at the IMF Commodities Research Department. The policy-oriented side of research is of great interest to her: *“It’s not just about having an academic discourse, but seeing how ideas, methods and models impact economies in a practical and concrete way. Transforming technical discourse into strategic discourse is essential in our societies”.*



Yassir Essyagi, Manager of the Research and Events Valorization Department.

When asked what his dream is, Research and Events Development Manager **Yassir Essyagi**'s answer is simple: *“To have an impact on communities, contribute tangibly to the development of Morocco and Africa, and have a sense of purpose in society”.* The main skill he acquired over the past five years at the Policy Center is leadership. A quality that is essential for him to lead over 80 people at the Atlantic Dialogues Conference, hosting over 450 people in Marrakesh prior to the pandemic.

Akram Zaoui, 29 years old, arrived at the Policy Center in January 2020 after a flawless career path: Preparatory classes at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand, HEC Paris, Science Po and a degree in history at the Sorbonne. After 18 months as the right-hand person of a researcher working on the banlieues and Islam in France, he applied to the Policy Center. Hired as an international relations specialist, he recently was promoted to head the Public Policy Lab, an experimental structure of four people. The goal is to increase the number number of interlocutors both in Morocco and in Africa, who contribute to the public policy cycle. *“A world where complexity has its place, and where theorizations can obscure the understanding of issues, because the world is connected and porous, explains Akram Zaoui. I meet senior civil servants and diplomats that I would never have met without the Policy Center”.*

The Atlantic Dialogues Emerging Leaders (ADEL) program, which Senior Fellow and former Moroccan Ambassador to the United Nations **Mohammed Loulichki** describes as *“an essential component of the Policy Center’s approach”*, also aims to give young people a voice and strengthen their leadership skills. *“Fifty professionals, both men and women, are invited to the annual Atlantic Dialogues conference with prominent figures to broaden their horizons. They also contribute, through their writings, to enhancing Policy Center visibility, enabling dissemination of its pro-African and pro-Great South approach. The Policy Center is deeply committed to the emerging international issue of youth. This goes beyond rhetoric and concrete action is taken”.*

The Policy Center thus contributes to building skills and feeding the labor market *“at the confluence of a number of universes, including academia, which only makes sense to us in its applied dimension”*, explains **Karim El Aynaoui**. Real-world exposure entails intense interaction with decision-makers, public policy analysis in its various dimensions, strong international exposure, and understanding of civil society. The Policy Center's ecosystem and diversity also allow for *“accelerated learning and maturity, thanks to intergenerational proximity to Senior Fellows”*. In the end, young professionals passing through the Think Tank emerge best armed to meet Africa's challenges in the 21st century.

The Atlantic Dialogues Emerging Leaders (ADEL), a Community of Impact



Engaging in frank and open intergenerational dialogue is part of the Policy Center's mission, indeed its very essence. Education and youth are top priorities in the current context of demographic transition. Today's youth, who are the decision makers of tomorrow, make up over half of Morocco's population as they do in many countries across Africa. They should have a voice, if only to contribute to public policy and shape their own future.

That is why, each year, in advance of the Atlantic Dialogues, the Policy Center's flagship international conference, a cohort of 50 young professionals aged 23-35 converge on Marrakesh from all-around the Atlantic (Africa, Europe, the Americas and the Caribbean). These select bright young entrepreneurs, civil servants, researchers, journalists, and civil society activists follow the **Atlantic Dialogues Emerging Leaders (ADEL)** program. The program's reputation and uniqueness have attracted thousands of applications over the past few years.



Lilia Rizk, Program Officer in charge of the ADEL.

*“We don't bring together young people from just one region, but from all over the Atlantic, explains Program Officer **Lilia Rizk**, in charge of ADEL. We select them based on the complementary of their profiles, even if they have very different perceptions of development priorities and public policy. In bringing them together, the Policy Center enables them to build bridges”.*

Another distinctive feature of the program is its focus on youth during the three-day conference. Following two days of coaching and exchanges led by prominent experts, ADELs are able to speak at the podium and network freely with the 450 experts and policymakers attending the conference.

ADEL also runs year-round, inviting some of its 350 alumni to contribute to other conferences worldwide, as well as to Policy Center publications. Brilliant young leaders sign and co-author chapters of major Policy Center annual reports, while others receive support in their social impact projects.

“We are looking to build more than a network: an inclusive Atlantic community that includes young leaders as well as established Atlantic Dialogues experts, continues Lilia Rizk. The goal is to positively impact communities, change the narrative and improve policy across all sectors. Over the years, the community has grown, driven by the Policy Center activities and relationships that naturally develop. Many ADELs, after meeting in Marrakesh, stay in touch and collaborate on their own projects”.



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