

Science Granting Councils Initiative Spotlights the Importance of Developing Research and Development Roadmaps as Catalysts of Development

A recently-concluded meeting has highlighted strong multistakeholder partnerships as key for accelerating research-driven development in Africa

The Science Granting Councils Initiative (SGCI) held its Virtual Regional Meeting on 29-30 June, 2021 to facilitate cross learning, experience sharing, and networking amongst the Science Granting Councils (SGCs) and with other continental and global Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) actors. The meeting also discussed pathways for developing research and development (R&D) roadmaps that can influence national research agendas. Participants included representatives of selected African Science Granting Councils, the United Kingdom's Department for Business, Energy and Strategy (BEIS), funding partners of the SGCI and its implementing partners.

In his opening remarks, Tom Ogada, the Executive Director, African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS), noted the importance of R&D roadmaps in Africa. "It is an important framework which governments can use to inform resource allocation, research priorities and support implementation of related policies", Ogada emphasized.

How countries are progressing in developing their R&D roadmap

Lucy Absolom, the Head of R&D Strategy at BEIS, shared her experiences in the process of developing UK's research and development roadmap. She highlighted that it is paramount to get the process right to ensure that the outcome is embraced by all key actors. Absolom emphasized that intentional engagement of multiple stakeholders from the onset is fundamental to the success of a viable R&D roadmap that can influence national research agendas and enhance development.

Lessons from Uganda, Burkina Faso and Namibia demonstrated progress and challenges faced by African countries in developing research and development roadmaps. Burkina Faso, has allocated a percentage of the revenues collected from its telecoms and mining industries to R&D. Inoussa Zongo, the Director General for Research and Innovation at Burkina Faso's Development Funding Agency emphasized that intentional resource allocation for R&D is critical to ensure prioritization of national research agendas.

Namibia's STI policy has a sharp focus on increasing and enhancing strategic partnerships to leverage more resources towards its R&D agenda. Vincent Nowaseb, the General Manager for Innovation and Technology Development at Namibia's National Commission on Research, Science and Technology provided an overview of the country's STI policy which is anchored on nine objectives that are entrenching the application of STI across various sectors.

Institutional frameworks and policies critical in facilitating research-driven development

Uganda has developed its national research agenda and a draft STI policy. These policies have enabled the government to commit an increase in its gross expenditure on science, encourage private sector to invest in research and innovation for development, and is working to increase the number of annual internationally registered patents from two as recorded currently to 50 by the year 2025. Uganda is further exploring the potential of indigenous knowledge systems to contribute to and enhance its R&D strategy.

The meeting highlighted the need for collaboration across sectors, early multi-stakeholder engagement, and contingency planning as important in developing a robust roadmap. Namibia for example, embarked on the review of its STI policy in 2015, through a highly consultative process with ministries and agencies, Non-Governmental Organizations, academia and civil society organizations.

SGCs play a critical role in driving research and development, given their mandate of advising governments on STI-related strategies, and shaping national research agendas.

Strong SGCs contribute to effective R&D hence the need to continue investing in strengthening them. IDRC's Ellie Osir noted that over the last five years, the SGCI had made remarkable progress towards its objectives of supporting the SGCs, organized around five thematic areas including strengthening ability to manage research; strengthening capacity to enhance evidence-based policy and decisions; supporting research management; supporting strategic communications and knowledge uptake; and strengthening capacity to achieve gender balance and inclusivity.

Advancing research and development requires strong linkages between the research agenda and the national development plan. The meeting enhanced the Councils' knowledge on how to align their research and development agendas with national development plans and strengthen this linkage for STI in Africa.

About the Meeting

The 2021 Virtual Regional Meeting was hosted by the SGCI in partnership with the Scinnovent Centre. The SGCI aims to strengthen the capacities of Science Granting Councils (SGCs) in sub-Saharan Africa to support research and evidence-based policies that will contribute to economic and social development. The Initiative is jointly funded by the United Kingdom's [Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office](#), Canada's [International Development Research Centre \(IDRC\)](#), South Africa's [National Research Foundation \(NRF\)](#), [Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency \(Sida\)](#) and the [German Research Foundation \(DFG\)](#).