

STRATEGY TO FACILITATE AND MONITOR UPTAKE OF KNOWLEDGE OUTPUTS

The Scinnovent Centre;

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Appendix 7

SCIENCE GRANTING COUNCILS INITIATIVE **SGCI**  **IOSRS** INITIATIVE DES ORGANISMES SUBVENTIONNAIRES DE LA RECHERCHE SCIENTIFIQUE



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SUMMARY

The Science Granting Councils Initiative in sub-Saharan Africa (SGCI) generates a number of knowledge products from its activities. These include good practice guidelines, standard operating procedures, templates, toolkits, new methodology and approaches, and reports of commissioned studies. The Initiative Collaborating Technical Agencies (CTAs) have developed various course modules that needs to be adopted by the Councils. Some of these include products on special topics such as “communications with the private sector”; grants management templates and guidelines, prospectus for research calls. Moreover, as new projects are being implemented under the Public – Private Partnerships (PPP) and Cooperation (CP) grants, more knowledge products are anticipated including technical reports, working papers, policy briefs and journal articles. There are also plans to produce video documentaries of the PPP projects to highlight experiences that could be shared with a much broader audience beyond the SGCI community. Under Theme 4 (enhancing networking and collaborations amongst the Councils and with other actors in the innovation system), a key activity is the commissioning of a paper to inform a Masterclass held during each Annual Forum. Besides informing the Forum, these commissioned papers have resulted in policy briefs and journal articles.

The Initiative recognizes that the true value of knowledge outputs from its activities lies in their uptake and utilization – the extent to which they inform and influence behavior and practices amongst the Councils and their affiliates. It is in this context that this strategy provides a framework for tracking the outputs, their uptake, use and influence.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Countries are transitioning to knowledge-based economies. This has renewed the attention of policymakers and practitioners to the generation, diffusion, uptake and utilization of knowledge. In Africa, as elsewhere, the role of science, technology and innovation is gaining new momentum and countries are experimenting with various policy options, institutional and organizational reforms, new partnerships, practices and processes. All these changes are occurring in a context of limited knowledge and guidance for policy- and decision-makers. While there are pockets of success, lessons have not been distilled and shared for wider uptake and replication. Moreover, in some cases, the lessons are so context-specific that emulation and direct replication is not possible. In most cases, countries have not prioritized and at times are not able to fund large scale, comparative studies that could yield valuable lessons for policy action.

Why is this an issue and why should we care?

When countries design and experiment with new policies, approaches, practices and processes without the requisite evidence to support their decisions, the outcomes are subject to conjecture and the results are likely to be sub-optimal. When policymakers and implementers lack the “how – to – guides” that are informed by experiences and lessons from other partners and regions, they are prone to make similar mistakes or duplicate efforts. When countries emulate and copy context specific approaches from elsewhere and try to replicate them in their contexts, the political economy, histories and path dependence will most likely undermine the good intentions.

What is the Initiative doing about it?

The challenges outlined above lend credence to the SGCI’s approach to supporting Africa’s Science Granting Councils (SGCs) in addressing these key issues. Through its thematic activities, the Initiative contributes to the long-term goal of enhanced use science, technology and innovation for Africa’s socio-economic transformation. More specifically, the Initiative is keen on a situation where the knowledge products lead to:

- Better research management practices and processes;
- Better use of evidence and STI indicators for policy planning and implementation;
- Enhanced knowledge transfer to the private sector and increased scientific cooperation between countries; and
- Enhanced networking amongst Africa’s Councils with opportunities for joint learning and collaborations.

Who are the target and what are their needs?

The primary targets for the SGCI are the SGCs (their leadership, staff and management). In most cases, the SGCs are creations of the law/statutes and have specific mandates. Even when they are Departments or Directorates within Ministries, their mandates and responsibilities are clearly spelt out. Their success or failure is therefore determined on the extent to which they have achieved their objectives and executed their mandates. Whereas the list of mandates and responsibilities is long, the following stand-out:

- a) Research funding: including resource mobilization and disbursement; priority setting and grant management amongst others.
- b) Quality assurance: including research excellence, merit, ethics and standards.
- c) Policy advice: balancing facilitation with regulation; risks and benefits.
- d) Knowledge exchange/uptake: transfer, commercialization and other impact pathways.

- e) **Training/Capacity building:** Supporting innovation system actors in achieving their mandates.

In all the above, the SGCs are keen on gaining new knowledge, experiences and lessons that (i) Improve their efficiency (ii) Are cost-effective (iii) Enhance service delivery.

OBJECTIVES AND APPROACH

The SGCI strategic response is underpinned by efforts aimed at:

- a) **Ensuring relevance** by prioritizing key issues/ topics of immediate interest and relevance to Councils. Extensive consultations with Councils often precede topic/theme selection. Interviews with HORCs and country coordinators are augmented with further input from a wider audience during the ARMs and Annual Forums.
- b) **Enhancing quality** by generating policy-relevant knowledge and evidence through commissioning studies and reviews on the prioritized themes/topics. Renowned experts, specialists and thought leaders in various fields have been commissioned to ensure top quality outputs. There have been deliberate efforts to balance theory with practice; international and local contexts, public and private sector interests, gender and other minorities. In the same vein, the Initiative has supported research that enhance partnerships and cooperation amongst actors and countries and promotes knowledge transfer and exchange.
- c) **Generating the evidence** by supporting new knowledge generation through co-funding research projects and commissioned studies with the Councils. This helps to provide the state-of-the-art thinking on topical issues. It also supports analysis and sharing lessons and experiences from Africa and around the world on knowledge transfer and partnerships with the private sector.
- d) **Facilitating access** to the knowledge products through packaging and dissemination using both online and print media channels. Through the SGCI virtual hub, partner websites (including the funders, CTAs, Councils and other collaborators such as universities), the annual forums, regional meetings as well as face to face meetings with key government officials, knowledge products have been shared.
- e) **Improving capacity to use** through targeted training (e.g. on research management and use of indicators), coaching and mentorship (a key feature of theme 3) as well as by facilitating sharing of lessons and experiences through forums and platforms.

MONITORING OF PROGRESS

The Initiative has developed a project-wide Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) framework. This monitoring for the uptake and use of knowledge products complements the overall MEL strategy and framework. It responds to the strategic objectives outlined above:

- 1. Relevance:** There are always competing interests, theories, evidence and the recommendations from the knowledge outputs must be workable and cost-effective.

Progress/Result: This consultative priority setting has resulted the in (i) sustained interest and participation of the Councils in the choice/prioritization and topics/themes for the Commissioned Papers on topics such as political economy, research excellence, Public – Private Partnerships etc. (ii) buy-in from stakeholders and platforms such as the Annual Forum (AF) and the Regional Meetings (RM) have provided opportunities for input and dialogue amongst key stakeholders (iii) Lessons and experience sharing with Councils participating in panel discussions during the Masterclass and providing country specific examples and feedback to the commissioned papers. These have helped shape the final outcomes and advance African voices on topical issues and regional priorities.

- 2. Quality:** From the way the question is framed, the methods of data collection and analysis to the presentation, packaging and communication of results, the quality of the knowledge products must be highest.

Progress/Results: The Initiative has commissioned papers on political economy, research excellence, public – private partnerships and New approaches to financing research and innovation. To ensure quality, (i) the selection of the authors, execution and analysis for these papers is subject to a rigorous review and oversight (ii) the papers are shared, presented and debated during the Masterclass at the Annual Forums and feedback incorporated into the final versions (iii) During the Masterclass, at least two discussants with international experience and drawn from different regions are always commissioned to provide ‘additional perspectives’ on the topic/paper and provide additional input into the papers (iv) to provide contextual thrust, members of selected Councils are always incorporated to respond to specific issues and gaps raised in the paper (v) the findings of the paper are distilled into policy briefs and journal articles published in international refereed journals. The SGCI has already generated a number of journal articles and policy briefs from commissioned papers.

- 3. Access:** Policy windows open and close very rapidly and availability of the evidence/research finding in the right place, format and time matters.

Progress/ Results: Knowledge products have been packaged for the different audiences e.g. policy briefs, journal articles, toolkits, manuals etc. All the knowledge outputs are available on the [SGCI](#) website. Besides, the Initiative has been active on social media through its Twitter account (@SGCIAfrica).

- 4. Evidence:** To be useful to the Councils, knowledge products should provide evidence of (i) how impacts take place and why (ii) demonstrate how thing should be done differently (iii) offer practical guidance

Progress/Results: Papers have been commissioned on the Political Economy of SGCs, Research Excellence, Public-Private Partnerships and New Approaches for funding Research and Innovation; Research projects have been co-funded under the PPP grants scheme in Uganda, Malawi and Mozambique. Similarly, a total of 7 projects have been co-funded under the CPs involving Mozambique-Namibia; Senegal-Burkina Faso; Uganda- Côte d'Ivoire; and EAC countries. Three regional commissioned studies have also been funded under Theme 3.

- 5. Capacity (and readiness) to use:** The capacity to use the knowledge products is sometimes a major hindrance to uptake and utilization. This may stem from a number of factors including the skills, facilities and infrastructure, attitudes and the prevailing organizational culture and practices.

Progress/ Results: several training sessions have been conducted through Themes 1&2; specialized training on 'communication with the private sector'; a joint training with all the CTAs held in Botswana; several in-country coaching/ technical visits, annual forums and annual regional meetings; masterclass and MEL workshops at each AF to solicit and obtain feedback from Councils on knowledge products. Further to institutionalize learning, manuals, toolkits and 'how-to-guides' have been developed.