



Summary Report of the Annual Forum 2017
22-23 November 2017, Livingstone, Zambia

Prepared by the African Technology Policy Studies Network (ATPS) and the Scinnovent Centre



INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the key issues and messages from the 2017 Annual Forum on “Effective public – private partnerships in Research and Innovation” held from 22 – 23 November, 2017 in Livingstone, Zambia. The Forum brought together about 120 people from 25 countries, including Heads of Research Councils (HoRCs), SGC Coordinators, Researchers, Policymakers, Private Sector actors and Civil Society representatives.

The highpoint of the opening ceremony was the address delivered by Her Excellency, Prof. Nkandu Luo, the Honourable Minister for Education, Science and Technology, Zambia. In her address, the Minister noted that “time has come for Africa to give priority to research, science and technology” and emphasized that research creates knowledge which is turned into policy and practice. She observed that time for making policies based on extrapolation and interests were long gone and that over time, Africa has built capacity to use research evidence in policymaking. She further emphasized the important role of sharing research results and challenged participants to “develop a roadmap on how their research will find their way into the policymakers’ offices”. While responding to the perceived lack of interest and capacity to use evidence by the policymakers, Prof. Nkandu Luo asserted that “there is a higher appreciation of scientific evidence in government” and urged the scientific community to be more proactive in dealing with the government and policymakers. To do so, she

advised that the research agenda needed to change to be more forward looking and relevant to national needs and priorities.

On the role of the private sector, the Minister observed that unfortunately “the private sector is not a critical player in contributing to national development on the African continent” and quipped, “What sort of private sector are we welcoming to our countries?” In response, she noted that most of the private companies flocking in Africa were merely interested in resource abstraction. She emphasized the need to call and hold the private sector to account and demand that they “put in place technologies that help our countries”. She concluded that, “it is in our interest that we partner with people who can help us translate research results into friendly technologies for our use”. In promoting public – private partnerships in research and innovation in Africa, the Minister implored the participants to consider two critical questions in their deliberations: what should we be doing and why are we not doing it?

The Annual Forum was guided by the Commissioned paper on the topic, “Effective public – private partnerships in Research and Innovation: Perspectives for African Science Granting Councils” by Prof. Banji Oyeyinka and his team. The paper was presented by Dr. Bertha Vallejo and two key discussants, Dr. Kamal Battacharya, the Chief Innovation Officer, Safaricom Ltd, Kenya and Prof. Stuart Tarbener, Research Council, United Kingdom (RCUK) gave their perspectives on the paper. While the intervention by Dr. Battacharya focused more on the private sector experiences with setting up of IBM research labs in Kenya and South Africa, Prof. Tarbener brought in the UK experience detailing the role of RCUK in catalyzing public – private sector partnerships. To bring in more perspectives from the SME component of the private sector, Mr. Francis Ndilila, an architect from Zambia with extensive practical experiences in banking, energy and real estate discussed the challenges of mobilizing domestic financing for research and development (R&D), the role of funding for national competitiveness and the need to recognize and deal with vested interests.

To bring African voices into this debate, HoRCs from 5 countries (Kenya, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Botswana, and Cote d’Ivoire) and the African Union/NEPAD were requested to respond to some of the key issues, questions and gaps raised by the commissioned paper. Following these initial interventions, there were interactive open Q&A plenary discussions facilitated by Dr. John Kachimba (Deputy Board Chair of Zambia’s National Science and Technology Commission, NSTC).

KEY MESSAGES FROM THE COMMISSIONED PAPER AND PLENARY DISCUSSIONS

1. Research prioritization and agenda setting

It was observed that a key issue undermining the PPPs is the different focus and priorities of research interests from both the public and private sectors. In some cases, there is complete lack of priorities and each sector pulls in their own direction. Findings from the commissioned paper as well as experiences shared by the discussants and during the plenary showed that this problem is widespread and affects both developed and developing countries alike. However, key differences were highlighted on how countries are dealing with the challenge. For example, in the Netherlands, the government through a “Top Priority Sectors Approach” identified the country’s top 9 sectors and created incentives and support structures to facilitate the competitiveness and position them as global players in their respective value chains. In Costa Rica, the Ministry of Science and Technology and ICT champions agenda setting and leads other sectoral ministries in scouting for private sector research needs before making international calls to address them.

In the UK, the Research Councils work closely with businesses to understand business needs and priorities and offer the required support systems. The Councils work in tandem with Innovate UK to implement a sectoral approach towards supporting businesses. Notable amongst the RCUK initiatives is the role of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) which facilitates partnerships that impact businesses and the private sector. In Africa, Botswana shared their experiences on how they are currently in the process of developing a national research agenda and a PPP engagement strategy. The country is also considering context relevant approaches including foresight studies and scenario building to inform its future research direction and priorities. A number of other African SGCs are in similar situations and were glad to learn of these experience and international best practices in research prioritization and agenda setting.

2. Institutional architecture/infrastructure and governance patterns

Institutions determine and condition behavior, providing parameters for social interactions by defining what is acceptable and what is not. They set the rules within which social actors operate. The architecture of the rules could be formal as in contracts or informal as in memoranda of understanding (MoUs). Each set of rules work in different contexts and have their strengths and weaknesses. For example, cases were highlighted where individuals within organizations circumvented formal structures such as outreach offices and entered into deals with private sector actors. Similarly, in some cases actors attempted to re-interpret and assign different meanings to clauses in the contracts. Still in some cases, the sheer complexity of the contracts hindered rather than facilitated the partnerships. The importance of the governance patterns – roles of different actors in decision-making and project execution – was equally highlighted with examples showing that this is an area that is often neglected but easily contested when projects take off. Examples from the PASRES programme in Cote d'Ivoire showed how the private sector is involved in decision-making including choosing new leaders. The professional agricultural organizations representing the private sector are part of the management committees and the manager is appointed competitively from the private sector. In Costa Rica, in order to cater for the interests of the SMEs in the Papaya value chain, a special window was created for targeted support and to lessen the administrative burden. This led to a differentiated governance approach that served the interests of both the big players and the SMEs.

3. Funding models/ Mobilizing domestic resources for R&I

Generally, it was observed that most SSA countries are under-investing in R&D compared to their counterparts in other regions of the world. Most are yet to reach the continental targets of 1% of GDP, even though there are ambitious declarations from countries such as Kenya to invest up to 2% of GDP. Failure to meet the targets notwithstanding, it is notable that there is an upward trend in resource allocation to research and innovation and this needs to be encouraged, scaled and sustained. Lessons from Europe showed that Horizon 2020 as a funding mechanism requires a formal MoU between the applicants and the private sector as a pre-condition for funding. It also focuses on projects that show pre-market products/technologies that are nearly ready for commercialization. Focusing back to Africa's science granting councils, and their roles in research funding, such pre-conditions could be applied to stimulate public – private partnerships. Cases from the NRF of South Africa and Kenya demonstrated that this is already being practiced and could provide good learning opportunities for other SGCs gearing to start funding research and innovation in their contexts.

4. Political economy/contexts

Reflecting on their experiences with establishing IBM offices and partnerships in Kenya and South Africa, Dr. Khamal Battacharya, the Chief Innovation Officer for Safaricom Ltd in Kenya highlighted the role of “*strong personalities versus strong institutions*” in the two countries. He noted that working with “forward-looking individuals” in Kenya, they were able to sign contracts within 4 – 6 months. However, this reliance on personalities presented challenges especially with change of governments and administrations when people either change roles or are transferred. On the contrary, South Africa exhibited well structured institutions for negotiating PPP contracts and in the end it took up to two years to enter into contracts with the government. It also emerged that same institutions (contracts) are interpreted differently depending on the countries one is dealing with. For example, in some contexts, the contracts are seen as “aspirational” – outlining what could be achieved together rather than “litigational” – providing the do’s and don’ts that could end up in legal suits. In other words, the contracts are assigned “meanings” and could be re-interpreted. These contextual issues define the stability of fluidity of the partnerships as well as the speed and predictability of the contracts, their enforcement and attendant ease of doing business in the different countries.

Another political economy question is the extent to which the PPPs for research and innovation fit in with the countries’ policies and practices. For example, it was noted that a number of countries have enacted PPP laws but these are geared more towards large infrastructure projects in water, roads, energy, etc. To what extent is research and innovation covered in these laws? Are there entry points for research and innovation? These issues were flagged as necessary for further interrogation and reflection. Participants observed the need for robust PPP engagement frameworks in countries where these were lacking and how the SGCI could support their establishment.

WAY FORWARD

The robust discussions and inputs into the draft commissioned paper as well as additional interviews conducted by the consultants with the Heads of Science Granting councils and their coordinators provided rich material and experiences to be incorporated into the final version of the commissioned paper.

Similarly, as requested by the Minister in her opening speech, the key issues and recommendations will be packaged and presented to her office for further action. It is also hoped that the SGCs will use issues raised in the Forum as well as issues highlighted in this summary report to engage the relevant agencies and government offices in their own countries.

On the whole, discussions on how to harness the potential and power of public – private partnerships for stimulating research and innovation in Africa is “an on-going conversation” and the Annual Forum as expected ignited the debate and provided the initial flames and will keep this discussion ongoing.

Finally, it is expected that through sharing lessons and best practices, the SGCs will take lead in promoting public – private partnerships. The Science Granting Councils Initiative through its four thematic focus areas will support the Councils efforts towards realizing these dreams.