

FINAL TECHNICAL REPORT / RAPPORT TECHNIQUE FINAL M&E SYSTEM SUPPORT PROJECT FINAL TECHNICAL REPORT

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SCIENCE GRANTING COUNCILS INITIATIVE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

THEME 3: STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS AMONG AFRICA'S SCIENCE GRANTING COUNCILS AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Monitoring and Evaluation Support

FINAL PROJECT TECHNICAL REPORT

IDRC GRANT NUMBER: 109159-001

IMPLEMENTING AGENCY (IES): AFRICAN CENTRE FOR TECHNOLOGY STUDIES (ACTS) AND PARTNERS

NAME(S) OF PROJECT TEAM:

ACTS: Rebecca Hanlin, Aschalew Tigabu, Winnie Khaemba, Tom Ogada

African Association of Universities: Jonathan Mba, Nodumo Dhlamini, Ruth Dickinson

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BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

In sub-Saharan Africa, Science Granting Councils (SGCs) are central to funding and catalysing research and innovation. These organisations are both agents of government and represent the interests of a country's scientific community. They disburse funds for research and development; build research capacity through appropriate scholarships and bursaries; set and monitor research agendas and priorities; advise on science, technology and innovation policies; manage bilateral and multilateral science and technology agreements; and assess the communication, uptake and impact of publicly funded research.

Despite the critical role played by the SGCs in supporting the consolidation of a country's national system of innovation, they still grapple with a number of challenges including limited capacity, inadequate funding, overlapping roles, and poor coordination with other agencies, lack of appropriate legislation, and poor implementation of science and research funding policies¹. In order to effectively conduct their activities, well designed and functioning monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems are required.

Specifically, SGCs engaged in the Science Granting Councils Initiative (SGCI) are enhancing efforts to manage research grants through collaborative efforts with other Councils and with the private sector. Such efforts require M&E systems to be in place to enable effective management and analysis of these activities. However, a recent needs assessment survey conducted by Southern African Research and Innovation Management Association (SARIMA) revealed that with the exception of the Ethiopian and Namibian Science Granting Councils, the majority of the Science Granting Councils in sub-Saharan Africa do not have a robust Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) System to design and monitor research programmes. Also, most of the SGCs indicated that they do not have adequate training and expertise in MEL, grant management and Policy influence level- M&E for National Programmes on Research, Science and Technology.

To fill this gap, the Theme 3 Consortium (led by the African Centre for Technology Studies, ACTS), in collaboration with the members of the Theme 1 (led by SARIMA)² and Theme 2 (led by the New Partnership for Africa's Development, NEPAD)³ collaborative technical agency (CTA) consortiums, organised a M&E systems support exercise targeting all the SGCs through a peer-learning workshop in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in June 2019. This was followed by targeted support to SGCs as requested.

This set of planned activities contributed to the achievement of Theme 3's objectives to enhance long term collaborative activity by providing SGCs with knowledge and one-to-one guidance on how to develop M&E systems that enable them to track progress of collaborative research (grant) agreements within the wider context of their organisational wide results matrix and national level STI indicators. This is particularly pertinent at this time as SGCs consider what impact they would like to see from Phase II of the SGCI. In particular, the peer learning workshop provided SGCs with a template for developing a results based matrix on which they will be able to assess Phase II and collect indicators which can act as individual SGC level baselines for Phase II activities.

¹ These challenges were identified in a scoping study supported by IDRC in 17 Sub-Saharan African countries. <https://www.idrc.ca/en/initiative/science-granting-councils-initiative-sub-saharan-africa>

² SARIMA is one of the SGCI collaborating technical agencies based in South Africa.

³ NEPAD is one of the SGCI collaborating technical agencies responsible for supporting Councils to design and monitor research programmes and to formulate and implement policies based on the use of robust science, technology and innovation indicators.

SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED

- The ACTS' consortium facilitated the monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) systems support workshop in Ethiopia during the regional forum meeting in June 2019 and produced a workshop report with clear action plans. This workshop aimed at Promoting knowledge sharing and networking among the SGC MEL Officers
- A study on monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) capacity needs in Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso and Senegal was conducted. This activity was followed with an online survey in Botswana, Ghana, Malawi, Uganda, Kenya and Mozambique. We produced a MEL capacity needs report for the three francophone countries and a presentation was made in June 2019 at the Regional Forum on the findings from all 8 SGCs.
- AAU strengthened the capacities of 6 SGCs in the area of MEL and ensured that these SGCs have designed robust MEL systems using organizational theories of Change, MEL frameworks and Plans. These SGCs are Burkina Faso, Kenya, Botswana, Malawi, Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal.
- We successfully collaborated with SARIMA to conduct technical MEL strengthening visits to Ivory Coast, Kenya, Uganda and Botswana. We produced learning reports from these. There were additional, successful MEL support visits to Malawi, Burkina Faso and Senegal.
- AAU identified a capacity need in the Digitization of systems of SGCs. This need was identified during the M&E capacity needs assessment activities with the SGCs. To meet this need, there was a dedicated session at the Regional Forum on Digitization where presentations were made on Uganda and Burkina Faso Systems and what its take to digitize a system in order to extent it to the remaining SGCs.
- AAU team members have contributed a book chapter on monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) for Science Granting Councils to the forthcoming publication 'Building Science Systems' to be published later in 2020 by The ACTS Press.

LESSONS LEARNED

SPECIFIC LESSONS LEARNED FROM SGCI PHASE 1

1. Some SGCs are undergoing review and repositioning by their governments. This led to uncertainty when it came to discussions on MEL plans and frameworks that are specific to the SGC. These SGCs were currently using MEL frameworks developed at a national level – but not customized to the specific deliverables that the SGCs are accountable to.
2. Some of the SGCs felt that more time should be spent in customized needs gathering to ensure a tight fit between the technical support provided and their needs.
3. There is a lot more the initiative can focus on in order to achieve substantial result for better impact.
4. Funding should be increased to specifically tackle some demands and needs of the SGCs

GENERAL LESSONS LEARNED FROM SGCI PHASE 1

1. SGCS would greatly benefit from technical support for improving their funding streams and implementing sustainable funding models. Skills in advocacy, financial planning and management would be useful so that SGCs are not reliant on donor funding.
2. Francophone SGCs require experts that are proficient in French and are familiar with the francophone Africa institutional cultural issues – this facilitates useful coaching and technical support.
3. The complexity and diversity of the African national science systems require innovative and customized approaches and solutions.
4. Public, Private Partnerships are fundamental for strengthening African national science systems. Such partnerships facilitate identification of priority research themes and strategies for working together towards funding research and building capacities for quality research.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The implementation arrangements must discourage the implementing institutions working in silos. The design of implementation must force collaborative implementation.
2. There is a need to promote collaboration between the Information Technology (IT) support teams and the MEL teams within SGCs so that the IT teams support the development of the digitized grants management systems.
3. Capacity building of SGC MEL Officers and technical assistance in monitoring, evaluation and learning is fundamental for the strengthening of the SGCs. This capacity building will ensure that they can design, develop, implement and own their MEL tools, frameworks and digitized grants management systems
4. At times the release of funds seemed to delay. This affected potential additional activities to support the SGCs – e.g. digitization of MEL system.