SCIENCE GRANTING COUNCILS INITIATIVE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

PROSPECTUS

This Prospectus is for organizations such as research institutes, university research and academic centers, Think tanks, NGOs, science academies, and stakeholder organizations to express their interest in collaborating in a new Initiative that aims to strengthen capacities of Science Granting Councils in Eastern, Southern, Central and West Africa to support research and evidence-based policies that will contribute to economic and social development. This 5-year Initiative is jointly funded by the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID), Canada’s International Development Research Centre (IDRC), and South Africa’s National Research Foundation (NRF).

The Initiative background, context in which it is emerging, the objectives and expected outputs, eligibility and pre-qualification criteria, and application procedure are provided below.

1. ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

Developments throughout Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) over the last ten years or so suggest a changing landscape, where science, technology and innovation (STI) are emerging as key drivers in social and economic development. These changes include enhanced research funding commitments from national governments, increases in the rate of scientific production and innovation activities, the emergence of new organizations that fund science, technology and innovation, and increasing cases of collaboration on cross-regional research. For example, many African governments have made commitments to increase their gross domestic expenditures on research and development (R&D) to 1% as outlined in the Lagos Plan of Action. While progress has remained slow, there is a discernible upward trend in the budgetary allocations to R&D with countries such as Kenya having already made commitments to reach 2% by 2015 (STI Act, 2013). At the regional level, the newly established East African Community Science and Technology Commission (based in Rwanda) aims to identify the major issues relating to science, coordinate and promote technological activities in member states, and facilitate relations among scientists across all disciplines. In agricultural R&D, a number of regional organizations (for example, the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa) have been formed to coordinate and promote sub-regional partnerships.
Despite these positive trends, STI landscapes across developing regions still suffer from a number of challenges including low capacities in research and research management. **Science Granting Councils** and related organizations such as science academies, boards, commissions, and foundations are central to funding and catalyzing research and innovation across Africa. A recent scoping study supported by IDRC in 17 SSA countries underscored the increasingly important role of these intermediary actors in national science systems. However, that study also identified a set of interrelated challenges facing them, including limited capacity, inadequate funding, overlapping roles and poor coordination with other agencies, lack of appropriate legislations, and poor implementation of science and research funding policies.

2. **OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED OUTPUTS**

The objectives are to strengthen the ability of **Science Granting Councils** to: 1) manage research; 2) design and monitor research programmes based on the use of robust STI indicators; 3) support knowledge exchange with the private sector, and; 4) establish partnerships with other science system actors. These objectives will be achieved through a number of modalities including customized regional exchange and training, regional forums, on-line training, individualized on-site coaching, and collaborative research.

The Initiative’s principal outputs will include 1) more effective research management practices among Councils, 2) strengthened ability of Councils to design and monitor research programmes based on the use of robust science, technology and innovation indicators, 3) increased knowledge exchange with the private sector, and 4) increasingly coordinated and networked Councils. More effective Councils will strengthen national science systems, and ultimately lead to nationally led research that contributes to development in East Africa and other participating countries.

**Objective 1 — Strengthen the ability of Science Granting Councils to manage research**

This objective will support staff of Councils to further develop research management in a number of key areas, such as: grant-making systems and procedures; principles of scientific merit review; STI policy analysis and research priority setting; design and management of science and technology cooperation agreements; effective communication of research results; mapping of science and innovation funding; aligning publicly funded research with the needs of the private sector; and implementation of new modes of scientific practices, such as open access and open science. The areas will be agreed in consultation with participating Councils.
Participating Councils will also be supported in encouraging and incentivising research uptake and communication.

**Objective 2 — Design and monitoring of research programmes based on the use of robust science, technology and innovation (STI) indicators**

This objective will strengthen the ability of participating Councils to design and monitor research programmes based on the development, collection, analysis and use of STI indicators. The capacity to use foresight and scenario-building techniques to identify and prioritize future STI needs will also be strengthened. Work under this objective will build on and be coordinated with the ongoing work under the AU/NEPAD observatory on STI indicators (AOSTI).

**Science Granting Councils** are in a unique position to contribute to public policy through the collection, analysis and use of indicators in a number of important domains. For example, many Councils train young researchers, promote collaboration between academic and non-academic organizations, and encourage the commercialization and/or application of publicly-funded research. Understanding the effects of these efforts and changes over time can provide important insights into a country’s socio-economic progress, its current and future STI and human resource needs, and feed into industrial and economic growth strategies. The ability to identify, measure and communicate the results of public investment in training, research and innovation will enhance the capacity of participating Councils to track progress towards attainment of the country’s socio-economic development visions and make the necessary adjustments supported by evidence, thereby demonstrating the benefits of sustained public investments in STI.

Councils have expressed the need to convince elected officials and taxpayers about the importance of investing in science. Government support for Councils tends to grow and decline based on the convictions of particular leaders and political parties. This has created uncertainty in the planning and operations of Councils. A further drawback of failing to take up such investment opportunities is that the potential benefits tend to dissipate quickly when neglected. Thus, this objective will assist Councils in making their case and sustaining support over the long-run, namely by strengthening the capacity to use indicators.

**Objective 3 — Strengthen the ability to support knowledge exchange with the private sector**

This objective will support projects designed to promote the linkages between public sector research organizations (universities and national research institutes) and the private sector. Participating Councils will be involved in identifying the priority
research areas relevant to the needs of the private sector. Potential areas may include agriculture, energy, and health and life sciences. These partnership projects will ensure that the priorities of public sector research organizations are better aligned with the needs of the private sector, thereby enabling knowledge exchange and use of research findings. Lessons and good practices from these projects will be synthesized and shared with all Councils. These activities will enable the Councils to develop policies and action plans that promote innovation by strengthening the linkages with the private sector.

The aim is to help participating Councils to increase their current allocations towards development-oriented research. The ability of the Councils to co-fund this activity will be the main criterion for participation. Participating Councils will be involved in identifying priority research topics as well as selecting and managing the projects.

**Objective 4 — Strengthen partnerships among Science Granting Councils**

This objective is designed to create opportunities for sharing of information and lessons among Councils in the broader SSA region on a regular basis. Interaction and collaboration will also be enabled with other science systems actors, such as universities and industry. Partnerships will accelerate learning, while coordination will improve synergies with other science system actors. This objective will support three main activities.

**Collaborative agreements.** The first activity will support Councils interested in designing focused partnership with others for the purposes of strengthening specific areas. The nature of such cross-border cooperation will be determined and supported by the Councils themselves.

**Learning Forums** will be held for Heads of Councils and other senior staff in participating countries to meet once or twice a year to share experiences and lessons. Each Forum will be organized around a specific theme determined jointly with participating Councils.

**A Virtual Hub/Learning Platform** will facilitate resource sharing, community building, collaboration and mentorship, archiving of results and data, access to relevant resources, and dissemination of the Initiative’s results.

**5.  PRE-QUALIFICATION OF COLLABORATING TECHNICAL AGENCIES**

The Initiative’s objectives will be achieved through various activities such as customized regional training courses and workshops, regional forums, on-line training, individualized on-site coaching, and collaborative research. These activities
may vary by objective and council. The Initiative will conduct an initial assessment to
determine the capacity strengthening interests and needs of individual participating
Science Granting Councils.

Selection will be in two steps. Collaborating technical agencies will be pre-qualified
based on the criteria outlined below. In the second step, individual collaborating
technical agencies will be selected from the pre-qualified pool to engage with
participating Science Granting Councils through a competitive process based on a
number of criteria including submitted budgets, and the outcome of an institutional
assessment.¹ Please note that budgets are NOT required at this pre-qualification
stage. Also note that each applying organization is not expected to provide capacity
strengthening in all thematic areas. Applicant organizations are therefore advised to
apply only for the theme(s) that fit(s) best with their expertise/ experience.

Pre-qualification will be competitive and guided by the following:

General criteria

- Knowledge of the science, technology and innovation (STI) landscape in Sub-
  Saharan Africa;
- Interest in forging long-term relationships with Science Granting Councils in
  Sub-Saharan Africa;²
- Experience in working with Science Granting Councils in Sub-Saharan African
  countries;
- Experience in overseeing capacity development programmes, using evidence-
  based methods and demonstrating learning outcomes (including, but not
  limited to customized mentoring and training, learning forums, on-line
  training, individualized on-site coaching); and;
- Ability to work in English (Anglophone countries) and/or French
  (Francophone countries).

One or more of the following specific criteria

- Experience, and capacity development, in scientific research management
  (e.g., grant-making systems, policies and procedures, costing);
- Experience, and capacity development, in the use of STI indicators to design
  and monitor research programmes;

1 Institutional assessment includes evaluation of audited financial statements, list of current external donors and their contributions, latest annual report, and organization setup structure and chart. Contracting details will be provided to pre-qualified organizations.
2 The initiative is keen to engage with organizations with a shared vision of nurturing long-term relationships among various national science system actors including science granting councils
• Experience in promotion of public-private research and innovation partnerships;
• Experience in providing capacity strengthening in other areas of the Initiative’s thematic focus areas: STI policy analysis; research priority setting; design and management of science and technology cooperation agreements; evidence into policy; mapping and tracking of science and innovation funding; implementation of new modes of scientific practices, such as open access and open science; and;
• Experience in overseeing regional workshops or forums.

This call is open to organizations with a legal corporate registration. Organizations based in Sub-Saharan Africa are strongly encouraged to apply. Applications must include an official letter of endorsement, signed by an authorized officer from each applicant organization.

The Initiative will engage directly with successful applicant organizations. Partnerships between organizations will not be allowed at the pre-qualification stage but may be considered at the second stage when the specific needs of individual science granting councils have been determined.

Each applicant organization must identify a Coordinator who will be responsible for financial administration, reporting and other contractual obligations.

6. APPLICATION PROCEDURE AND DEADLINE

Interested organizations should submit an Expression of Interest letter (in English using the Expression of Interest Form provided). Submissions should be via e-mail to SGCSSA@idrc.ca by the deadline of 17:00 East Africa Time, on 31st August 2015.

Any enquiries should be directed to SGCSSA@idrc.ca on or before 17:00 hours, East African Time on 15th August 2015 in order to receive a response prior to the deadline date. The results will be announced by the 15th September 2015.

7. ABOUT THE FUNDING PARTNERS

The Department for International Development (DFID) is the United Kingdom government department responsible for administering overseas aid. DFID leads the UK’s work to end extreme poverty.

South Africa’s National Research Foundation (NRF) is an independent government agency, established to promote and support research to facilitate the creation of knowledge, innovation and development in all fields of science and technology,
including indigenous knowledge, and thereby contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of all South Africans.

**International Development Research Centre (IDRC)** is a Canadian Crown corporation which supports the generation of knowledge and innovation for positive change. IDRC generates, identifies, and tests scalable ideas and innovations, connects solutions with actors who can help to achieve large-scale impact; and examines early wins in scaling up, in order to identify and share critical success factors.