



Strengthening the National Research and Innovation Funding Agencies in West Africa (SRIFA)

REPORT ON VALIDATION, CO-DEVELOPMENT AND CO-DESIGN OF TRAINING PROGRAMME AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT WORKSHOP IN SIERRA LEONE

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Prepared by:

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Justification

The Science Granting Councils Initiative (SGCI) in sub-Saharan Africa recognizes the critical role of Science Granting Councils (SGCs) in driving research and innovation (R&I) for social and economic development. In West Africa, efforts are underway to strengthen existing SGCs and establish new ones to bolster regional R&I capacities. Partnering with the African Technology Policy Studies Network (ATPS) and the African University of Science and Technology (AUST), the SGCI aims to provide training and technical support to SGCs in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, and Sierra Leone. Preliminary studies conducted through desk reviews, surveys, interviews, and focus groups have informed the development of draft reports for each participating country, with inputs sought from respective SGCs. A proposed 2-day validation and co-development workshop will refine and finalize a training program tailored to the needs of SGC staff, facilitating their capacity-building efforts and accelerating regional R&I progress.

The landscape of R&I funding, policy, and practice is dynamic, requiring Councils or their equivalent in West Africa to continuously adapt and build their capacities. Despite their dedication to R&I, these Councils or their equivalent encounter challenges such as limited resources, policy inconsistencies, and knowledge gaps among staff. Existing training programs often lack regional specificity and fail to address the unique needs of West Africa. Worse still is the fact that the Councils in some of the countries have not formally been established. Therefore, the proposed workshop aims to validate and refine training program content by engaging the Council staff or equivalent (in countries that do not have formal Councils) in reviewing and providing feedback on designed modules, prioritizing topics relevant to emerging R&I trends and specific West African contexts. Additionally, the workshop seeks to co-develop and tailor training delivery approaches in collaboration with the Councils and stakeholders, integrating innovative methods like blended learning and peer-to-peer exchange. It aims to foster ownership and commitment among participants through active participation, open discussions, and shared decision-making, while also developing strategies for long-term engagement and knowledge sharing. Furthermore, the workshop aims to strengthen regional collaboration and partnerships by facilitating networking and communication between Council representatives and identifying opportunities for joint research projects, policy initiatives, and resource mobilization within the region.

1.2 Goal of the Validation and Co-Development of Training Programme Workshop

The goal of the workshop was to validate the preliminary results on policy and institutional landscape, comprehensive stakeholder mapping and analysis, and needs assessment of the research and innovation funding ecosystem in the participating countries and co-develop a tailor-made training and/or technical support programme for each of the Councils/funding agencies. Specifically, the Workshop seeks to:

- Validate the content and structure of the training programme designed to strengthen Science Granting Councils in West Africa.
- Facilitate collaborative refinement and prioritization of needs in order to develop the training programme through inputs from key stakeholders.
- Foster knowledge exchange and peer learning among participants to enhance the effectiveness of capacity-building efforts.
- Generate actionable insights and recommendations to ensure the relevance and impact of the training programme.

1.3 Methodology for the Workshop

The workshop was held physically in Freetown, Sierra Leone at Bintumani Hotel. The workshop involved a two-day engagement session with the Council members and other relevant stakeholders including institutions of higher learning and agencies in research and innovation funding. The first day involved presentation and the validation of results and prioritization of training needs and technical support while the second day involved the co-development of training and technical support programmes with the Council members. This 2-day workshop employed highly interactive and collaborative approaches. The project team actively participated in the workshop led by the Co-PI of the project Prof. Peter Onwualu, president of AUST supported by the Project Officer, Dr. Cynthia Nwobodo. Other project team members included Wentland Muhatiah (Research Officer, ATPS) and Susan Mburu (Communication and Outreach Officer). The team reviewed and refined the reports through presentations, group discussions, and brainstorming sessions. The focus was on co-developing training delivery methods and tools tailored to the councils' preferred learning styles, national, and regional contexts. The workshop was expected to foster ownership and commitment by encouraging open dialogue, shared decision-making, and strategies for long-term engagement. Additionally, the networking opportunities are expected to facilitate regional collaboration and knowledge exchange among SGCs and stakeholders, strengthening R&I ecosystems across West Africa.

1.4 Expected Outputs and Outcomes of the workshop

- Validated and refined training programme tailored to the needs of Science Granting Councils in West Africa.
- Enhanced collaboration and mutual learning among stakeholders involved in research and innovation capacity building.
- Actionable recommendations for the effective implementation and sustainability of the training initiative.

DAY 1: UNDERSTANDING THE RESEARCH AND INNOVATION FUNDING LANDSCAPE

5.1. Policies in Research and Innovation Funding in Sierra Leone

A number of policies on research and innovation funding were identified by the participants in Sierra Leone. These policies, their respective years of gazettelement and objectives are presented in Table 6 below:

Policies in research and innovation funding in Sierra Leone

S/N	Policy	Year gazetted	Objectives
1.	National Science, Technology and Innovation (NSTI) Policy	2023	Build a strong science, technology and innovation capability and capacity needed to evolve a modern economy” while taking cognisance of leadership, funding, partnership, indigenisation, and acculturation.

2.	National Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Policy	2015	Regulate open and distance learning programmes in the TEIs in Sierra Leone based on the statutory mandate of the TEC, adopting the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) or internet for effective delivery of the programme.
3.	Sierra Leone National Research for Health (R4H) Policy (2021-2030)	2021	Provide guidance on research for health, knowledge generation and technological innovations to improve health and wealth being. Importantly, this policy seeks to promote outstanding research for health and health related activities and contribute to productive strategic relationships with partners in academia and private research for health, as well as industry, commerce, government and communities in Sierra Leone.
4.	National ICT Policy	2009	1) promote transparency and effective communication through e-governance, 2) facilitate and support freedom to affordable access to information, as well as to identify and implement all relevant procedures related to cyber security, electronic security and data protection to protect ICT users, and 3) improve efficiency in the public sector through the use of ICT infrastructure, applications and services.
5.	Sierra Leone National Innovation and Digital Strategy (NIDS) (2019-2029)	2019	Guides the country to focus on effective service delivery, citizen engagement, and digital economy driven by innovation and entrepreneurship, thereby reducing the cost of governance and corrupt practices, while also increasing productivity.
6.	Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Act	2022	Provides for the promotion of gender equality in employment and training, for implementation of gender mainstreaming and budgeting, and for financial institutions to prescribe procedures for the empowerment of women's access to finance.
7.	Sierra Leone Basic and Senior Secondary Education Act	2023	This Act informs the adaptation of the education system such that the basic and senior secondary education will be more inclusive, accessible and rights based.
8.	Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2020-2026	2020	Developed for all learners in Sierra Leone to have equal opportunity to access quality basic, secondary, technical, vocational, and higher education that enables them to participate in public life, contribute to the national and global economy and fulfill their potential.
9.	Sierra Leone National Medium-Term Development Plan (2019-2023)	2019	Driven by the use of science, technology and innovation (STI) to establish Sierra Leone as an 'innovation nation' where agile, exploratory and research-driven start-ups and initiatives led by the citizens.
10.	Food and Feed Safety Act	2017	Provides for food and feed safety in Sierra Leone, and ensures the safety and quality of food and feed in order to protect the public against health hazards.

11.	The National Technical and Vocational Training (TVET) Policy	2019	Set up a common vision for the TVET system in Sierra Leone, facilitate alignment with both national development framework and coherence with other policies, enhance coordination of planned actions and reforms for improving outcomes and output of TVET.
12.	National Policy on Radical Inclusion	2021	Provides a roadmap for identifying and addressing the unique needs of marginalized groups of students including students with disabilities, pregnant girls and parent learners, children from poorest households and children in rural and underserved areas.
13.	Right to Access Information Act	2013	Allows for every person to have the right to access information held by or under the control of a public authority.
14.	University Act	2021	The Act aims to enhance the country's higher education system by providing a framework for the establishment, administration, and governance of universities. In relation to research and innovation funding, the Act mandates the creation of a conducive environment for research and innovation. This includes the provision of adequate scientific and technical infrastructure, promotion of innovation strategies, and building a strong local research capacity to drive national development. The Act also emphasizes the importance of universities in fostering research and innovation through funding, partnerships, and collaborations with various stakeholders.

5.2. Institutional Framework of Research and Innovation Funding

The national funding ecosystem for research and innovation in Sierra Leone involves multiple stakeholders with distinct roles and linkages. At the center of this ecosystem is the government, which plays a critical role in formulating policies, providing funding, and creating an enabling environment for research and innovation. Key institutions that are responsible for research and innovation funding in Sierra Leone include:

1. Ministry of Technical and Higher Education and;
2. National Science, Technological and Innovation Council (NSTIC)

5.3. Prioritization of Training needs

During the workshop, attendees conducted a thorough reassessment of the training required and technical assistance necessary for the NSTIC to function effectively. Subsequently, they methodologically prioritized these training needs in the sequence displayed below:

Table 2: Prioritized Training needs to strengthen NSTIC

Training Needs	Priority
Training and Capacity building on research management	1st
Fundraising and grantsmanship	2nd

Grants management and disbursements	3rd
Commercialization of research outputs	4th
Gender equality and inclusion strategies	5th
Monitoring, evaluation and learning in Council internal processes	6th

Subsequently, the participants prioritized the needed technical support to strengthen the Sierra Leone Council as presented below:

Table 3: Prioritised Technical Support to strengthen NSTIC

Technical Support	Priority
Drafting of STI policy documents/frameworks	1st
Organizing benchmarking/ learning visits to other well-performing Councils	2dn
Creation of physical and online platforms for knowledge sharing among critical R&I funding stakeholders in the country	3rd
Commissioning of studies on specific STI issues relevant to councils	4th
Brokering STI agreements with other Councils and Actors in the ecosystem	5th
Support on advocacy for increased R&I funding in the country from policymakers and parliamentarians	6th

DAY 2: CO-DEVELOPING TAILOR-MADE PROGRAMMES

The validation report for the workshop held in Sierra Leone exemplified a collaborative endeavour aimed at addressing the training needs of the council through the co-development of tailor-made programmes. This initiative underscored a strategic approach to capacity-building, wherein diverse stakeholders, including representatives from the council (NSTIC), academia, research organizations, media, and ecosystem partners engaged in research and innovation, converged to contribute their expertise and insights.

The workshop methodology was structured to ensure comprehensive coverage of the council's training requirements. Participants were organized into groups, each tasked with delineating specific training needs and crafting corresponding training support mechanisms for the council. Crucially, the composition of these groups was meticulously designed to foster inclusivity and multiplicity of perspectives. By incorporating representatives from the council alongside stakeholders from various sectors, the workshop facilitated a holistic and nuanced approach to program development.

The validation workshop placed a premium on gender and social inclusion by explicitly instructing groups to integrate these considerations into their programme designs. Recognizing the importance of equitable participation and representation, participants were prompted to contemplate how their initiatives could effectively cater to diverse demographics and address potential disparities. In addition to outlining training needs and support strategies, participants were prompted to anticipate challenges that might arise during programme implementation and propose viable solutions. This forward-thinking approach not only demonstrated a proactive stance towards program efficacy but also underscored a commitment to fostering resilience and adaptability in the face of potential obstacles. Upon conclusion of the small group discussions in the breakout sessions, participants reconvened in plenary presentations. During these sessions, attendees provided feedback and constructive comments to strengthen the proposals put forth by each group. Ultimately, through collaborative dialogue and collective agreement, it was affirmed that the sections developed by various groups accurately represented the collective thoughts and considerations of the workshop participants.

The workshop served as a platform for collaborative ideation and strategic planning, leveraging the collective expertise of stakeholders to co-create bespoke training programmes for the council. Through inclusive deliberations, gender-sensitive considerations, and proactive problem-solving, the workshop epitomized a concerted effort towards advancing capacity-building initiatives tailored to the unique context of Sierra Leone. The tailor made programmes for both the training needs and technical support are presented below.

Prioritized Training Needs for Sierra Leone Council

	Training Need	Proposed Programmes
1.	Training and capacity building on research management	Training on understanding research management
		Strategic planning/project management
		Training on project oversight Quality assurance, compliance and ethics training
		Training on data management
		Training on Intellectual Property IP rights
		Training on technical writing
		Training on effective research communication (knowledge translation)
2.	Fundraising and grantsmanship	Grant identification
		Grant proposal writing
		Budget development
		Training on research impact evaluation
		Knowledge and capacity building on sustainability of research outcomes
		Capacity building on commercialization of research outcomes
3.	Grants management and disbursement	Identification of the Funding opportunities: Local regional and continental, international

		Grants review and evaluation Best Practices for forming/assessment committee
		Financial management
		Monitoring and evaluation
		Monitoring and controlling project expense
		Budgeting and planning auditing
		Grant Disbursement process:/Protocols Disbursement of funds to the recipient, Managing and tracking of the grant's expenditures
		Risk Management Identifying potential risk, contingency plans development
		Stakeholders engagement and capacity building and technical assistant
		Legal and ethical considerations/ capacity strengthening
		Compliance with laws and avoid conflicts of interest case studies

4.	Commercialization of research output	Market Analysis: what's out there, who needs it
		Definition of commercialization
		Understanding the commercialization process and Landscape/Ecosystem
		Intellectual Property right and Management
		How to conduct market analysis and business plan
		Overview of Possible Funding sources, Pitching to Potential Investor how can this be effectively done
		Regulatory compliance and ethics
		Different ways of operation
		Entrepreneurship-enterprising group
		Partnership and collaboration
		Marketing and Sales strategies
		Impact assessment and upscaling
		Case studies and real-world applications Best Practices
5.	Gender equality and inclusion strategies	Identify target Beneficiaries for the training
		Conduct a comprehensive need analysis to identify all thematic gaps

		Design training to address positive attitudes to promote unbiased attitude / treatments/ responses to the specific gender group of people living with disability, ethnicity vulnerabilities etc
		Design training on intersectional data analysis, such data are analysed by race, sex, vulnerability etc.
		Design training to address skills gap analysis (for upgrade, up stall, empowerment etc).
		Design training on sexual training (how to identify, mitigate sexual harassment).
		Design gender/ cultural sensitivity training
		Develop diversity, equity, and inclusion training
		Develop mentorship and sponsorship program
		Develop a training for the gender equality and women empowerment Act (GEWE)
		Develop cultural competence training
		Develop inclusive leadership training.
6.	Monitoring , Evaluations and Learning in councils	Training on result base management
		Data science application
		Defining and tracking of key performance indicators
		Impact Assessment
		Evaluation framework training to develop field/ site visit checklist training on how to improve

Technical Support for the Sierra Leone Council

	Technical Support	Proposed Programmes
1.	Drafting of STI policy support documents /implementation frameworks	Stakeholders' engagement
		Development of STI policy implementation plan
		Write handbook on Science, Technology and Innovation to serve as guidelines for the policy implementation plan.
		Development of research framework on research project deliverable.
		Communications and advocacy

		Risk management and contingency planning
		Build a risk register for each of the objectives
		Governance and institutional arrangement
2.	Organizing benchmarking /learning visit to other well-performing councils	Learn the operation of online grant management systems
		Explore knowledge on the council’s organizational structure and best practices
		Explore knowledge on financial management systems
		Learn the commercialization of research outcomes
		Understudy the network building dynamics and create avenue for partnership and collaboration
		Understanding grant identification strategies
3.	Creation of physical and online platforms for knowledge sharing among critical Research and Innovation funding stakeholders in the country	Overview of existing platforms, Lessons Learnt
		Customizing the knowledge to the S/L context and adapting the technical platform to the needs of S/L
		Mainstreaming diversity and inclusion
		Designing user-friendly interface. Accessible (offline and online) and friendly, easy to navigate
		Establishing a matrix to assess the impact of the platform
4.	Stakeholders engagement and policy dialogue on topical issues	Understanding the stakeholders landscape categorizes them E.g. academic , Private sectors etc.
		Assess level of interest expectation
		effective communication/engagement strategies and tools
		Policy analysis, advocacy and ethical considerations
		Negotiating and \conflict Resolution
		Partnership building and collaboration

		Partnership building and collaboration
		Case Studies Best Practice, Role Plays etc.
5.	Commissioning of studies on specific STI issues relevant to Council	Conveying the media
		Drafting appropriate messages to target beneficiaries
		Effective communication skills
		Budget allocation and management
		Risk management
6.	Brokering STI agreements with other Councils and Actors in the ecosystem	Stakeholder mapping (Established for referencing)
		Tapping result from more established councils /actors
		Developing on Laws/Policies, data sharing etc.
		Case study training on areas of challenges, successes and how to tackle them.
		Networking and negotiation skills.
		Risk management
		Effective communications
		Cultural sensitivity
7.	Support on advocacy for increased R&I funding in the country from policymakers and parliamentarians	Lobbying and networking with different stakeholders
		Public relations and media engagement and digital communication
		Policy advocacy
		Funding mechanisms
		Communication and advocacy strategies/ skills (e.g. storytelling, public speaking, etc.)
		Stakeholder engagement

Challenges and Opportunities

Navigating the landscape of training and support initiatives in Sierra Leone presents several challenges, necessitating strategic solutions for effective implementation. A significant hurdle is the availability of funding, which may not meet ambitious goals. Diversifying funding sources through partnerships with governmental bodies, philanthropic organizations, and the private sector can mitigate financial constraints and enhance resilience. Another challenge is the shortage of local expertise crucial for program success. Engaging local experts allows for a nuanced understanding of the socio-cultural context, enriching training sessions and technical support. Investing in capacity-building programs for local experts strengthens initiatives and promotes community growth.

Inadequate training logistics and infrastructure pose logistical challenges, addressed through establishing collaborative resource-sharing networks. Partnerships with local businesses, academic institutions, and community organizations optimize access to venues, equipment, and expertise, fostering efficiency and knowledge exchange. Corruption poses a significant challenge, diverting funds and undermining trust. Transparency measures, anti-corruption education, and stakeholder engagement can mitigate this challenge, restoring trust and mobilizing resources for training and support initiatives. Despite these challenges, strategic planning, collaborative partnerships, and innovative approaches can overcome obstacles, facilitating impactful and sustainable development in Sierra Leone.

Conclusion

The workshop on validation, co-development and co-design of training programme and technical support in Sierra Leone exemplifies a collaborative effort aimed at addressing the capacity-building needs of the Council. Through a co-development approach, tailored programmes were crafted to suit the specific requirements of the Council, reflecting a strategic endeavour towards enhancing institutional capabilities. The workshop methodology, structured to ensure comprehensive coverage of training needs, fostered inclusive participation and multiplicity of perspectives, laying the groundwork for holistic program development.

A notable emphasis on gender and social inclusion permeated the workshop discussions, ensuring that training programmes are designed to promote equitable participation and representation. Forward-thinking considerations of potential challenges and proactive solutions underscored a commitment to program efficacy and resilience. Through collaborative dialogue and collective agreement, the workshop facilitated the development of training programmes that accurately reflect the collective insights and considerations of all stakeholders involved.

Moving forward, the challenges and opportunities identified present avenues for strategic action and innovation. Diversifying funding sources, engaging local expertise, optimising resource-sharing networks, and addressing corruption through transparency measures and stakeholder engagement are essential steps towards overcoming obstacles and achieving sustainable development goals in Sierra Leone. By leveraging strategic planning, collaborative partnerships, and innovative approaches, the training and support initiatives stand poised to make a meaningful impact on capacity-building efforts in the region.



A cross-section of participants during the Sierra Leone validation workshop

Workshop Programme



Day 1: Understanding the Research and Innovation Funding Landscape 4th March 2024		
Morning Session: Opening and Overview		
8:30 - 9:00	Registration	Susan Mburu
9.00 – 9.15	Welcome Remarks.	Prof. Kelleh Gbawuru Mansaray
9.15 -9.45	Opening Remarks.	Prof. Peter Onwualu and Prof. Red-Wood Sawyerr
9.45 – 10.00	Ice-breaking Activity: Participants' Expectations	Prof. Peter Onwualu
10.00-10.15	Introduction to Workshop Objectives and Expected Outcomes.	Prof. Peter Onwualu
10.15 -10.30	Overview of the Policy and Institutional Landscape Study for Sierra Leone.	Wentland Muhatiah
10.30 – 11.00	Tea Break	
Session 1: Presentation of Preliminary Results		
11.00 – 11.30	Policy and Institutional Landscape Findings in Sierra Leone.	Wentland Muhatiah/ Dr. Cynthia Nwobodo
11.30 - 12.00	Comprehensive Stakeholder Mapping Insights from Sierra Leone.	
12.00 - 12.30	Needs Assessment of Research and Innovation Funding Ecosystem for Sierra Leone.	
12.30 - 1.00	Interactive Q&A Session.	Prof. Peter Onwualu

	Lunch Break	
Afternoon Session: In-depth Stakeholder Engagement		
2.00 - 3.30	Breakout Sessions: Stakeholder Group Discussions on Prioritization of Training Needs and Technical Support.	Wentland Muhatia/ Dr.Cynthia Nwobodo
3.30 - 4.00	Group Presentations on Identified Challenges and Opportunities.	
4.00 - 4.30	Plenary Discussion: Key Themes Emerging from Stakeholder Engagements.	
4.30 – 6.00	Networking Session	
	Dinner	
Day 2: Co-Developing Tailor-Made Programs		5th March 2024
Morning Session: Recap and Objective Setting		
8:30 - 9:00	Registration	Susan Mburu
	Recap and review of Day 1.	Dr. Cynthia Nwobodo
	Refinement of Workshop Objectives for Day 2.	Prof. Red-Wood Sawyerr
	Introduction to Co-Development Process.	Cynthia Nwobodo
10.30 – 11.00	Tea Break	
Session 2: Co-Development Workshops		
11.00 – 11.40	Workshop 1: Designing Tailor-Made Training Programs.	ALL
11.40 – 12.20	Workshop 2: Identifying Technical Support Needs.	ALL
12.20 – 1.00	Cross-Group Discussions and Insights Sharing.	ALL
1.00 – 2.00	Lunchbreak	

Afternoon Session: Implementation Planning

2.00 -2.30	Presentation of Co-Developed Program.	Council Representative
2.30 – 3.30	Feedback and Iterative Refinement.	ALL
3.30 - 4.15	Roadmap for Implementation: Timelines and Responsibilities.	Dr. Cynthia Nwobodo
4.15 – 4.30	Closing Remarks and Next Steps.	Prof. Peter Onwualu

List of Participants for SRIFA Validation Workshop in Sierra Leone

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