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

AFRICAN TECHNOLOGY POLICY STUDIES NETWORK

African University of Science and Technology Abuja
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TOWARDS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NATIONAL RESEARCH AND INNOVATION COUNCIL AND A NATIONAL RESEARCH AND INNOVATION FUND IN NIGERIA

African Technology Policy Studies Network (ATPS)
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Towards the Establishment of a National Research and Innovation Council and a National Research and Innovation Fund in Nigeria

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The African Technology Policy Studies Network (ATPS) is a transdisciplinary network of researchers, policymakers, private sector actors and the civil society promoting the generation, dissemination, use and mastery of Science, Technology and Innovations (STI) for African development, environmental sustainability and global inclusion. In collaboration with like-minded institutions, ATPS provides platforms for regional and international research and knowledge sharing in order to build Africa's capabilities in STI policy research, policymaking and implementation for sustainable development.

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About SRIFA Project

The Science Granting Councils (the Councils) play critical and strategic roles in supporting research and innovation that contribute to the social and economic development of any country. As a creation of the law, the Councils are charged with the responsibility of research funding, quality assurance, policy and decision-making, knowledge exchange, and training/capacity building of the science system actors to ensure that outputs from the research and innovation endeavours are used to inform policy and practice. Given this important role, and in view of the dynamic nature of research and innovation developments, their capacity to perform these responsibilities to achieve desired goals needs to be continuously strengthened. In recognition of this need, the Science Granting Councils Initiative (SGCI) in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is providing support that will strengthen the national research and innovation funding agencies in West Africa.

Compared to other regions in Africa, only a few countries in West Africa have established agencies responsible for research and innovation funding. There is now a deliberate effort by the SGCI to strengthen the national research and innovation funding agencies where they already exist (Burkina Faso, Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire) to improve their performances as well as support the development of institutional frameworks/mechanisms for the development of new research and innovation funding agencies in countries where they do not currently exist (Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone). It is based on this timely opportunity provided by the SGCI, that the African Technology Policy Studies Network (ATPS) and its partner, the African University of Science and Technology (AUST) proposed to work together in a joined-up approach with other Collaborating Technical Agencies (CTAs) to deliver on the project titled: ***"Strengthening the National Research and Innovation Funding Agencies in West Africa (SRIFA)".*** The aim is to provide the requisite training and technical support to strengthen the national research and innovation funding agencies or their equivalents in the six participating West African countries. The project goal is to strengthen the agencies where they already exist to efficiently deliver on their mandates and support the development of institutional frameworks/mechanisms for establishing new research funding agencies where they do not exist. With support from the Science Granting Councils Initiative (SGCI), the UK's Foreign Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO), the South Africa's National Research Foundation (NRF), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the German Research Foundation (DFG), and the Norwegian Agency for

Development Cooperation (Norad), the SRIFA Project, therefore, aims to provide training and technical support to strengthen these national agencies to achieve their mandates, especially in areas such as monitoring research projects; financial reporting; institutional risk assessment; institutional communications capacity; mainstreaming gender in granting, and Council internal processes; and using research results to inform government policy and private sector practice.

About African Technology Policy Studies Network (ATPS)

The African Technology Policy Studies Network (ATPS) is a transdisciplinary network of researchers, policymakers, private sector actors and civil society promoting the generation, dissemination, use and mastery of Science, Technology and Innovations (STI) for African development, environmental sustainability and global inclusion. The ATPS has over 5,000 members and 3000 stakeholders in over 51 countries in 5 continents with institutional partnerships worldwide. We implement our programs through members in national chapters established in 30 countries (27 in Africa and 3 Diaspora chapters in Australia, the United States of America, and the United Kingdom). In collaboration with like-minded institutions, the ATPS provides platforms for regional and international research and knowledge sharing in order to build Africa's capabilities in STI policy research, policymaking and implementation for sustainable development.

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Key Messages

- Nigeria faces critical developmental challenges due to its large population, youth unemployment, widespread poverty, and economic crisis. Strategic investments in science, technology, and innovation are essential, as no nation has developed without such critical investments.

- The existing sector-based research and innovation funding model has led to duplication of efforts, resource wastage, lack of coordination, inadequate monitoring and evaluation, and insufficient institutional capacity to support innovation across all segments of the society.

- Without the establishment of a National Research and Innovation Council (NRIC) and a National Research and Innovation Fund (NRF) mechanisms, Nigeria cannot qualify for important international development funding, including funding from the Science Granting Councils Initiative (SGCI). Nigeria remains the only country among 16 other countries under the SGCI that has no well-established Council and Fund that cater for the entire research and innovation ecosystem as it is in the other 16 countries.

- Previous legislative attempts to establish a Council and a Fund have stalled due to innovation responsibilities being spread across multiple ministries. The recent presidential pronouncement and establishment of an Inter-Ministerial Committee to draft an Executive Bill represents the strongest political will to date and offers the most viable path to achieve this long-awaited milestone of having a NRIC and a NRF in Nigeria.

- A sustainable funding mechanism (5% of VAT revenue as proposed) and governance structure representing the quadruple helix model (government, academia, private sector, and civil society) are critical for effective implementation. The bill should emphasize commercialization of inventions and include provisions for venture capital development to ensure that innovations contribute to national economic development.

1. Introduction

Nigeria stands at a critical juncture in its research and innovation development trajectory. With pressing challenges of youth unemployment, widespread poverty, and economic instability, the country requires transformative approaches to catalyze growth and prosperity. The establishment of the National Research and Innovation Council (NRIC) and National Research and Innovation Fund (NRF) represents a crucial step toward building the institutional and financial architecture necessary to harness Nigeria's considerable research and innovation potential and transform it into tangible socio-economic benefits for all Nigerians (Ozor *et al.*, 2025). On the 5th of November 2024, the African Technology Policy Studies Network (ATPS) and the African University of Science and Technology (AUST) convened a High-level Policy Dialogue in Abuja to advocate for the establishment of a NRIC and a NRF in Nigeria. This critical initiative brought together over 70 key stakeholders from government, academia, private sector, and development agencies to map out actionable plans for expediting the establishment of these vital institutions. The policy dialogue emerged as part of the project tagged *"Strengthening the National Research and Innovation Funding Agencies in West Africa (SRIFA)"* being implemented under the auspices of the Science Granting Councils Initiative (SGCI) with funding support from several international development partners, including the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada. The urgency of this initiative is underscored by Nigeria's position as the only country among six West African participating countries in the SRIFA project without a national research and innovation council that cater for the entire research and innovation funding ecosystem.

2. Rationale for establishing and operationalizing the National Research and Innovation Funding Agency

The establishment of NRIC and NRF is imperative for Nigeria's socio-economic transformation. The current fragmented approach to research and innovation funding has proven ineffective in addressing the country's development challenges that are driven by research and innovation. Several compelling factors underscore the urgency of this policy initiative. First, Nigeria's sectoral approach to research and innovation funding has resulted in significant inefficiencies, including duplication of efforts, wastage of limited resources, and lack of coordinated monitoring and evaluation systems. This fragmentation has hindered the development of a robust National System of Innovation capable of addressing cross-cutting challenges.

Second, the absence of a dedicated and sustainable funding mechanism has constrained Nigeria's innovation capacity. While institutions like the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) provide valuable support, they are limited in scope, focusing primarily on public universities (thereby excluding private universities, research institutions and most importantly the private sector) and unable to receive external funding from international partners. Third, Nigeria's ineligibility for important international funding opportunities represents a significant opportunity cost. Without established NRIC and NRF structures, Nigeria cannot qualify for support from major international development partners, including the SGCI, which provides substantial technical and financial resources to strengthen research and innovation capabilities in sub-Saharan Africa. Fourth, the historical progression from the 1980 Lagos Plan of Action through the 2005 intercontinental strategy to the current Agenda 2063 emphasizes the continental commitment to transforming African economies into innovation-led and knowledge-based economy. Nigeria, as Africa's largest economy, must align with this strategic direction to maintain regional leadership.

Finally, the recent presidential pronouncement in support of the establishment of the NRIC and NRF through an Executive Bill by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu signifies unprecedented political goodwill to establish these institutions. This high-level support, coupled with the formation of an Inter-Ministerial Committee to draft the Executive Bill, creates a unique window of opportunity that must be seized to advance Nigeria's innovation agenda.

3. Methodology

This special policy brief is based primarily on the successful conduct of a high-level policy dialogue in Nigeria which was organized by the ATPS and the African University of Science and Technology (AUST) under the broader project on "Strengthening the National Research and Innovation Funding Agencies in West Africa (SRIFA)". The goal of the high-level policy dialogue was to chart a course of action towards establishing NRIC and NRF in Nigeria. The project team convened key stakeholders, including policymakers, researchers, and private sector representatives, to deliberate on the structural and legislative frameworks required to strengthen Nigeria's research and innovation ecosystem. The event was held at the Raw Materials Research and Development Council in Abuja on November 5, 2024. The policy dialogue formed part of a comprehensive engagement strategy involving roundtable discussions, press briefings, and training sessions. The event convened over 70 high-profile stakeholders drawn from the Ministry of Innovation, Science and Technology, other relevant government ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs), universities and research institutes, the private sector, development partners, and the media. This special policy brief was drawn from the key outcomes of the high-level policy dialogue and the communique.

4. Major Findings

During the High-Level Policy Dialogue, stakeholders came up with critical insights and recommendations that could enhance the speedy establishment of the NRIC and NRF in Nigeria as presented below:

4.1 Key Observations

The discussions underscored the pivotal role of structured research and innovation funding in national development, citing global best practices where countries that made strategic investments in science, technology, and innovation (STI) witnessed significant economic and technological progress. Despite Nigeria's potentials, its current research and innovation funding landscape remains fragmented, characterized by sector-based funding models that result in duplication of efforts, inefficient resource allocation, and a lack of coordination. The absence of a centralized funding body has also disqualified Nigeria from receiving significant international research grants, particularly from initiatives such as the SGCI, which requires, as a prerequisite that beneficiary countries must ideally have a national research and innovation council as a coordinating entity for funding eligibility. Nigeria's development challenges, including high youth unemployment, economic instability, and widespread poverty, were identified as critical issues necessitating the establishment of an institutionalized research and innovation ecosystem to support ideas and innovation development, commercialization, and industrialization. While TETFund exists to support research in public universities, its operational framework limits its ability to leverage external research funding sources, further highlighting the need for a dedicated national research and innovation funding agency.

During the policy dialogue, stakeholders also examined past legislative efforts to establish the NRIC, noting that previous initiatives had stalled due to bureaucratic inefficiencies and fragmented responsibilities across multiple ministries and arms of government. Although a bill for the establishment of the NRIC currently exists in the National Assembly as a private member's bill, stakeholders emphasized the need for an Executive Bill to accelerate legislative approval and implementation. Encouragingly, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's recent pronouncement in favour of establishing a NRIC and a NRF, coupled with the formation of an Inter-Ministerial Committee chaired by the Vice President of Nigeria and tasked with drafting an Executive Bill for establishing a NRIC and a NRF, represents a significant step toward institutionalizing Nigeria's research and innovation funding mechanism.

4.2 Key Resolutions

The key resolutions of the high-level policy dialogue in Nigeria focused on establishing robust institutional mechanisms for funding research and innovation across the entire ecosystem. The first critical resolution was the need for the NRIC and NRF to be legislated through an Executive Bill rather than a Private Member's Bill. This approach was deemed necessary to fast-track its passage and ensure government-wide endorsement, avoiding the bureaucratic bottlenecks that have hindered the process in the past. The Bill would integrate contributions from the Academy of Sciences and other relevant stakeholders while prioritizing key sectors such as information and communication technology (ICT), food and agriculture security, manufacturing, climate change adaptation, solid minerals, and energy among others.

Another essential resolution was the composition and governance structure of the NRIC. It was agreed that the Council should embody a quadruple helix model, involving government representatives, academia, the private sector, and civil society. The governance structure would feature a Director General with supporting directors under the leadership of a governing board that includes industry representatives, think tanks, and government officials. The funding mechanism for the NRF was also a significant point of discussion. Delegates resolved that 5% of Nigeria's VAT revenue should be allocated to the NRF, to ensure a sustainable and transparent funding stream. Additionally, provisions should be made for venture capital to encourage investment in research commercialization. This model would help transition research from conceptualization to marketable innovations, thereby fostering economic growth and job creation.

The importance of integrating economic policy into the NRIC framework was also emphasized. Delegates resolved that it will be more beneficial to the country if the Council is situated under the Presidency, ensuring cross-sectoral collaboration and national economic alignment with the Federal Ministry of Innovation, Science, and Technology (FMIST) serving as the primary coordinating body, with contributions from other relevant ministries. A crucial step towards achieving this synergy would be the harmonization of all existing innovation funding agencies into the NRIC and NRF. Youth inclusion was identified as a priority, with the resolution that the Bill should contain specific provisions for youth engagement in research and innovation. This strategy aims to harness the energy and ingenuity of young Nigerians, addressing the nation's high youth unemployment rate while promoting a culture of innovation-led knowledge-driven development.

Furthermore, the delegates emphasized the importance of international collaboration and capacity-building initiatives. The ATPS was urged to continue supporting the FMIST in developing research foresight strategies, conducting national research and development surveys, and organizing knowledge-exchange programs with successful research and innovation councils worldwide. The dialogue concluded with strong optimism regarding the successful passage of the Bill and the eventual operationalization of the NRIC and NRF. The collective efforts of government, academia, industry, and civil society were recognized as pivotal to ensuring a well-established, sustainable research and innovation ecosystem in Nigeria.

5. Conclusion

The establishment of a NRIC and a NRF in Nigeria represents a transformative step towards achieving a robust, coordinated, and sustainable research and innovation ecosystem in the country. Given Nigeria's pressing socio-economic challenges, including youth unemployment, economic instability, and limited global competitiveness, creating these institutions is not only timely but imperative. This policy brief underscores the need for a well-structured governance framework, an integrated funding model leveraging 5% of VAT revenue, and a cross-sectoral approach involving government, academia, research, industry, and civil society. With strong political backing, particularly through the President's endorsement and the formation of an Inter-Ministerial Committee to draft an Executive Bill, there is now a unique window of opportunity to institutionalize research and innovation as drivers of national development. The successful implementation of the NRIC and NRF will enable Nigeria to harness its research potential, attract international funding, and translate scientific advancements into socioeconomic benefits, ensuring long-term prosperity and global competitiveness.

6. Policy Recommendations

To ensure the establishment of a robust and efficient National Research and Innovation Council (NRIC) in Nigeria and a sustainable National Research and Innovation Fund (NRF), the following policy recommendations are proffered:

1. ***Expedite Legislative Endorsement through an Executive Bill Development to Ensure Speedy Establishment of NRIC:*** The path to establishing the National Research and Innovation Council requires decisive presidential leadership and strategic legislative actions. President Bola Ahmed Tinubu and the Inter-Ministerial Committee must take a proactive approach by crafting an Executive Bill that goes beyond traditional legislative processes. This involves extensive consultation with the Academy of Sciences and key stakeholders across critical innovation sectors, ensuring the Bill comprehensively addresses Nigeria's multifaceted development challenges. The Bill must be more than a mere administrative document; it should serve as a transformative blueprint for national development through research and innovation development. By personally championing the legislation, the President can leverage his political capital to overcome bureaucratic inertia, ensuring that the Bill receives expedited attention at the National Assembly. The key is to frame the Bill not just as an institutional creation, but as a critical mechanism for addressing youth unemployment, economic instability, and national competitiveness.

2. ***Create a Sustainable and Transparent Research Funding Mechanism through a 5% Revenue Allocation:*** Funding has historically been the challenge of research and innovation in Nigeria. The Federal Ministry of Finance, in close collaboration with the Ministry of Innovation, Science and Technology, must design a revolutionary funding approach that moves beyond traditional budgetary allocations. The proposed 5% VAT revenue allocation represents a sustainable and transparent mechanism that can provide a predictable financial stream for research initiatives. However, this is not merely about collecting funds but about creating an intelligent, accountable ecosystem of research investment. The funding framework must incorporate sophisticated financial management protocols, including rigorous audit trails, periodic public reporting, and mechanisms to track the return on research investments. A dedicated venture capital component will transform the fund from a passive resource to an active engine of innovation, providing not just grants but strategic investment in high-potential research projects that can drive economic development.

3. ***Implement a Quadruple Helix Governance Structure to Ensure a Robust and Formidable Ecosystem:*** The governance of the National Research and Innovation Council demands a radical departure from traditional bureaucratic models. The Presidential Office, working intimately with the Ministry of Innovation, Science, and Technology, must develop a governance framework that genuinely represents a quadruple helix model. This means moving beyond tokenistic representation to creating a truly integrated ecosystem where government, academia, the private sector, and civil society engage as equal, strategic partners. The selection process for Council members must be transparent, rigorous, and merit-based, ensuring that only the most visionary and competent individuals are chosen. A comprehensive governance charter will define not just roles and responsibilities but also establish clear performance metrics and accountability mechanisms. The goal is to create a dynamic, responsive governance structure that can adapt to rapidly changing technological and economic landscapes, preventing institutional stagnation and ensuring continuous innovation.

4. ***Prioritize Youth Research and Innovation Engagement as a Major Pathway to Technological Advancements:*** Addressing Nigeria's youth unemployment crisis requires more than traditional employment strategies. It demands a comprehensive approach to youth innovation. A collaborative effort involving the proposed National Research and Innovation Council, the Ministry of Youth Development, and tertiary institutions must create a holistic youth innovation ecosystem. This goes beyond funding to include creating genuine pathways for young researchers and innovators. Dedicated funding streams for researchers under 35 with gender equality, national innovation challenge programs with substantial prizes, and comprehensive mentorship opportunities will transform innovation from an abstract concept to a tangible career path. The initiative must include skill development workshops, industry-academia partnership programs, and strategic internship opportunities that bridge academic knowledge with practical innovation capabilities. By establishing a national database to track youth innovation contributions, Nigeria will not only support young innovators but also create a data-driven approach to understanding and nurturing technological talents.

5. ***Harmonize and Coordinate Existing Innovation Agencies to Ensure Cohesion:*** The fragmentation of Nigeria's innovation infrastructure has long been a significant impediment to technological advancement. The Presidential Office and the Ministry of Innovation, Science, and Technology must lead a strategic consolidation that goes beyond mere administrative reorganization. This

requires a comprehensive audit of existing innovation agencies, followed by a carefully designed integration strategy for a functional National Innovation System (NIS). The consolidation must establish unified reporting mechanisms, standardized performance evaluation protocols, and integrated research databases. Crucially, this process must be accompanied by a sophisticated change management program that ensures smooth transition, minimizes institutional resistance, and maintains continuity of ongoing research and innovation activities.

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