



# **ACTS RESEARCH STRATEGY**

**Adopted August 2022**

**Proposed Next Review - 2026**

## 1. PREAMBLE

The African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS) is an intergovernmental organization with a regional focus whose mandate is to strengthen the capacity of African countries and institutions to harness science, technology and innovation (STI) for sustainable and inclusive development. Towards this goal, the Centre positions itself as a leading think tank of choice for policy research in the application of STI in climate change, energy, agriculture and food security.

The ACTS Strategic Plan 2022 – 2026 anticipates high quality research that will inform policy analysis, capacity building and outreach on the application of STI. The Centre therefore recognises the role of reputable research and innovation, and the promotion of internationally competitive research as a core strategic goal. To ensure that the Centre can compete in a globally competitive environment, this commitment to research is aligned with the Centre's imperative to support the development of a cadre of Africa-centred researchers, analysts and policy makers on STI, knowledge and society.

The STI portfolio is dynamic and therefore it is important that our research including innovation support programmes and projects to take advantage of the benefits provided by increased use of technology including digital innovations.

The purpose of this document is to:

- present a framework for the management, support and development of research and innovation activities at ACTS,
- align research and innovation activities with the ACTS Strategic Plan 2022 – 2026 strategic objectives,
- provide an approach for strategic operationalisation of research and innovation activities across programmes.

The responsibility for the implementation of the research strategy resides with the Director of Research and Innovation and the Executive Director. The Research and Innovation Directorate is responsible for implementing the strategy and exercising institutional-level responsibilities and functions, while the individual programmes take ownership of and manage research and innovation activities; and operations.

The following definitions of different types of research apply:

**Research and development** is “creative work undertaken systematically to increase the store of knowledge, including knowledge of humanity, culture and society, and the use of this knowledge to devise new applications”.

**Basic research** is “experimental or theoretical work undertaken primarily to acquire new knowledge of the underlying foundations of phenomena and observable facts, without any particular application or use in view”. (OECD definition).

**Strategic research** (also known as oriented research) is “research carried out with the expectation that it will produce a broad base of knowledge likely to form the background to the solution of recognised or expected current or future problems or offer possibilities for solving them”.

**Applied research** is “original investigation in order to acquire new knowledge”. It is, however, directed primarily towards a specific practical aim or objective. The results of applied research are intended primarily to be valid for a single or limited number of products, operations, methods, or systems. The knowledge or information derived from applied research may be patented or suitably protected but may also be kept secret.

**Multi-disciplinary research** is “work/projects undertaken by a team of researchers from different disciplines or fields or different specialist areas within a discipline”

**Innovation is understood from a process perspective as** stretching from new ideas or new issues to be investigated to the final spread and use of new products or processes (new to the world, but also existing knowledge used in new context). It begins with a new combination of existing knowledge and ends with new knowledge. Innovation is not a linear process & feed back mechanisms are crucial for outcome.

**Transdisciplinarity** is “productive interactions between academic, practitioner, policymaker and citizen perspectives”

## 2. PURPOSE OF RESEARCH STRATEGY

The strategy outlines the guiding principles regarding the management, support, and development of research to all those involved in research at ACTS and partners.

The purpose of the strategy is to:

- 2.1 provide a framework for the governance of research, research development and innovation;
- 2.2 affirm research as a priority;
- 2.3 provide for continued high-level, effective, and efficient support for research;
- 2.4 ensure the fair treatment of all researchers, staff, non- resident fellows, research interns, visiting fellows, students among others;
- 2.5 ensure effective communication (internally and externally) about the principles and policies on which the research activities of the Centre are founded;
- 2.6 establish rational, transparent, and collective decision-making processes around the resource mobilisation, consultancies, allocation of research funds and other kinds of support for research.

- 2.7 balance the needs of research capacity development against those of established researchers;
- 2.8 integrate support for externally generated research into the main research system;
- 2.9 appropriately integrate aspects of data management taking cognizance of digitisation and inclusion including gender into the research operations.

### **3. PRINCIPLES OF THE RESEARCH STRATEGY**

- 3.1 The programmes heads are responsible for the management of research.
- 3.2 Where the research is conducted outside of programmes/ACTS, the Programme Head under which the partnership is domiciled is responsible for the management of research. The Research and Innovation Directorate, in consultation with the Executive Director is responsible for the provision of research support and the exercise of institutional-level responsibilities and functions in accordance with relevant ACTS policies and regulations.
- 3.3 Support is provided both for sustaining and promoting the research activities of established researchers, as well as for mentorship and the development of emerging researchers. By default, the approach is intended to create an enabling eco-system for research.
- 3.4 Material and in-kind support for interns, junior researchers, early career researchers and other research fellows as well as non resident fellows is imperative for creating an enabling research environment.
- 3.5 Requests for support of research projects or activities are evaluated on the merits of the proposal, the merits of the applicant, the need for research capacity development, and the need to sustain existing research activities or capacity.
- 3.6 Programmes are responsible in the first instance for fund raising and subsequent provision of financial support for research activities, but if required, they will be assisted in this by the Research and Innovation Directorate.
- 3.7 Researchers not attached to programmes who seek financial support from ACTS Central funds must be supported in their request by the Executive Director and must demonstrate the tangible commitment to research support of the unit (e.g. corporate) within which the applicant functions.
- 3.8 All applicants requesting support from the ACTS Central funds need to show evidence of fund-raising efforts or need to provide a persuasive rationale why external funding is not feasible, in order for the application to be considered.
- 3.9 Research within ACTS and collaborators must be conducted under an ethically conducive environment.

### **4. CUSTODIAN OF THE RESEARCH STRATEGY**

- 4.1 The Director: Research and Innovation, in consultation with the Executive Director, the ARC, and the Programmes, is responsible for compiling and maintaining a research database, containing information about research activities by ACTS staff and researchers in as accurate and comprehensive a form as possible.
- 4.2 The Director: Research and Innovation, in consultation with the Executive Director, will contribute to the Annual Report that contains a summary of the nature and scope of the main research activities at the ACTS, and reflects research achievements. In addition, there are contributions to other research and innovation electronic documents and portals.

4.3 The Director: Impacts and Partnerships, in consultation with Director: Research and Innovation and the Executive Director, is responsible for driving partnerships and external funding campaigns at an institutional level and keeping a database of all strategic partnerships.

## **5. THE RESEARCH STRATEGY**

The research strategy identifies the strategic research goals and the resources and actions required to achieve the stated goals. The strategic goals for research stated below, and the activities designed to achieve those goals, serve to enhance quality research and outputs at ACTS. The proposed strategy has been informed by a range of imperatives both external and internal to the ACTS and is reflective of the ACTS Strategic Plan 2022-2026.

### **5.1 STRATEGIC RESEARCH GOALS**

- a) Maintain and enhance the quality of research undertaken.
- b) Enhance the institutional research profile and impact.
- c) Increase/enhance, manage, and structure external and internal stakeholder relations and particularly for research funding.
- d) Support and promote fundamental academic and research scholarship.
- e) Support national, regional, and global specific research and development policies and strategies.
- f) Maximise the impact and international recognition of ACTS research.
- g) Foster and expand strategic research partnerships and collaborative networks.

### **5.2 ACTIONS REQUIRED TO ACHIEVE THE STRATEGIC GOALS**

#### **5.2.1 Maintain and enhance the quality of research undertaken by creating an enabling environment for research**

- a) Research and Innovation Directorate to provide and coordinate efficient institutional support systems for researchers to develop and maintain research quality and integrity;
- b) assess, assure and promote research quality in line with Programmes-controlled structures and the implementation of ACTS approved policies;
- c) adopt effective and efficient research and data management systems under provisions of ACTS Data Management Policy;
- d) implement quality assurance review processes;
- e) recognise, encourage and reward research and innovation excellence by incentives such as the Executive Director's Awards, recognition for professional affiliation disclosure, and increased publication, innovation, and creative output subsidy for researchers;
- f) review the performance of existing research structures and establish new strategic programmes;
- g) in coordination with the Impacts and Partnership Directorate establish research collaborations and partnerships with national and international stakeholders including universities and research institutions. The provisions under ACTS Impact and Partnerships Strategy will apply:
- h) in coordination with the College of Scholars and ACTS virtual Academy to facilitate, support, and coordinate relevant capacity building and research activities;
- i) establish and implement mentorship and career development pathways for researchers;

- j) run adequately resourced research-capacity development initiatives for emerging researchers at the institutional level.
- k) in coordination with the Executive Director, attract, retain and provide maximum support for research interns, non-resident fellows and college of scholars; and
- l) in coordination with the Directorate of Impact and Partnerships, Programme Heads and Executive Director, promote the international exchange of researchers at all levels.

### **5.2.2 Enhance the institutional research profile**

- a) update model for the adequate provision of internal resources for research;
- b) provide programmes with financial contribution, infrastructural and human resources to develop and maintain institutional research capacity;
- c) maintain financial incentives for researchers to engage in high quality, internationally competitive sustained research activity and, especially, subsidized output - e.g. individualised research funds, annual awards for research excellence and talent management
- d) enhance support for research mentorship structures for emerging researchers;
- e) identify, encourage and provide support to junior researchers and staff to acquire at least a masters qualification aiming at a PhD through internal and collaborative research programmes;
- f) in coordination with the Executive Director and Programmes, increase the number and quality of researchers through a mentorship programme and research interns engagement programme;
- g) encourage inactive researchers to start becoming involved in productive research or to re-invigorate their past research endeavours, in alignment with the workload policy;
- h) include research output indicators in performance appraisals for Programme Heads;
- i) Establish Strategic Programmes and/or Flagship programmes.

### **5.2.3 Increase external partnerships and funding for research**

- a) engage in dedicated and sustained partnership activity to identify and source external research funding opportunities, both national and international;
- b) leverage internal research funds to attract external research grants
- c) utilise internal research funds only for research activities that cannot be funded – or cannot be adequately funded – by external funds, and for strategic research interventions;
- d) prioritize some internal funds for emerging researchers; and
- e) focus on specialised support for priority funding streams of the traditional development partners like IDRC, Sida, NRF and others

### **5.2.4 Support and promote fundamental scholarship and basic research**

- a) promote an ethos of fundamental scholarship;
- b) develop fundamental scholarship skills in staff; and
- c) through outreach, promote public understanding and appreciation for research.

### **5.2.5 Support national, regional and international specific research and development policies and strategies**

- a) participate in appropriate national and international organisations that promote research;
- b) identify and develop institutional research strength, including “focus areas”, “niche areas” or “thematic research areas” that complement institutional research strategies and priorities;

- c) identify and develop opportunities for relevant and applied research and knowledge production;
- d) establish and expand appropriate strategic research partnerships and collaborative networks; and
- e) promote research capacity development of excluded communities through adequately-resourced initiatives at national, regional and international levels.

#### **5.2.6 Maximize the impact and international recognition of ACTS research**

- a) encourage enhanced participation by researchers in national and international funding agencies;
- b) encourage enhanced participation by researchers in national research initiatives;
- c) encourage researchers to become part of international peer review circles such as those established by other relevant agencies within and outside Africa;
- d) timeously publicise research achievements and research initiatives widely (OR actively disseminate research results and achievements nationally, regionally and internationally);
- e) encourage publication of research results in international journals;
- f) promote the international exchange of researchers at all levels;
- g) enhance social responsiveness and impact of ACTS research
- h) establish and expand appropriate strategic research partnerships and collaborative networks.

#### **5.2.7 Foster and expand strategic research partnerships and collaborative networks**

- a) establish and expand appropriate strategic research partnerships and collaborative networks, both nationally and internationally;
- b) foster research partnerships and collaborations with research entities including science councils, science granting councils, national and regional facilities, and others;
- c) expand research collaborative networks with Institutions outside Kenya and Africa at large.

## **6. RESEARCH INTEGRITY - QUALITY AND ETHICS**

- 6.1 The Director: Research and Innovation, in consultation with the Executive Director, and the Programmes, is responsible for compiling and maintaining a research database, containing information about research activities by ACTS staff and researchers outside ACTS in an accurate and comprehensive form. The ACTS Data Management policy will apply.
- 6.2 Research integrity and ethics include the maintenance and promotion of the highest internal and internationally recognised standards of scientific and research practice, of adherence to the highest ethical standards in research and related operations. This includes provisions to safeguard against any form of sexual exploitation, abuse and all kinds of harassment of research participants, communities and research staff. All research must adhere to ACTS Research Ethics Guidelines (SOP – RE/3/2019 in operation)
- 6.3 Research quality care is the responsibility of the respective programme heads and Directorates.
- 6.4 All research agreements (except those undertaken within the context of approved private work/consultancies) concluded by staff with external entities must be approved in consultation with, and be signed off, by the Director of Research and Innovation and/or the Executive Director. Signed agreements should be archived through the ACTS Finance and Corporate Directorate.

- 6.5 The processes of the ACTS Research Ethics Committee (REC) must be followed for noting and/or approval before commencing with the research project activities.
- 6.6 External research funding applications, at times, come about on short notice and the time for legal review is impossible. For such or justifiable cases, in consultation with the Chair of the REC, the application may be submitted with the following provision: "In the case of a successful application/tender bid, the agreement will be finalised as per the ACTS Policies."