

ALL PARTNERS FORUM 2026: DAILY BRIEF

📍 Windhoek, Namibia | 28 September – 02 October 2026

Day 2 (29 September 2026): From Priorities to Practical Systems

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What does it take to build the STI systems that will carry the third phase of the Science Granting Councils Initiative (SGCI-3)?

This question ran through Day 2 of the SGCI All Partners Forum 2026, the Technical Day.

Councils, funders and technical partners worked through the direction of the new phase, inclusive STI systems, capacity strengthening, multinational research collaboration and strategic partnerships.

One key message held across the sessions was that councils must retain ownership of national priorities while using SGCI to collaborate across countries and institutions.

The opening session set the frame. Dr Cephas Adjei Mensah, outgoing President of the SGCI Alliance, said SGCI has grown over more than a decade and now brings together 20 participating Science Granting Councils. Another five countries are in the process of joining.

Dr Mensah outlined five priority areas for SGCI-3: the Policy Hub, the Funders Collaborative, thematic working groups, the Capacity Strengthening Hub and nationally led initiatives.

Ownership was a recurring theme. Prof Anicia Peters, incoming President of the SGCI Alliance, called on councils to take greater ownership of the Initiative, including its priority areas, the criteria for admitting new councils and the partnerships built under SGCI-3.

Dr Angus Paterson, Acting Chief Executive Officer at the National Research Infrastructure Platforms of South Africa, encouraged councils and development partners to reduce dependence on single sources of external funding. Dr Amos Nungu, Director General of the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology, said institutional capacity is what turns funding into results. "Let councils identify their priorities; let us strengthen institutions through real work; let us look for evidence of change in how our councils perform," he said.



Dr Angus Paterson, Acting Chief Executive Officer at the National Research Infrastructure Platforms of South Africa, shares his thoughts at the #SGCIForum2026.

The session on inclusive STI systems shifted the discussion from the principle of inclusion to how it can be put into practice. Dr Steven Ssebale, SGCI Coordinator for the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology, said a review of projects in Uganda found that gender considerations were often recognised but not consistently built into project design and implementation. He proposed clearer gender expectations in research calls, budget templates that reinforce them, and gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation.

Atridah Mulonga of Zambia's National Science and Technology Council extended the discussion to Indigenous knowledge, saying inclusion should run through the entire funding cycle, from eligibility and proposal design to assessment, ownership and benefit sharing. "Inclusion means moving it from just a principle to making it a core feature in the funding systems," she said.

She identified a shortage of reviewers with expertise in Indigenous knowledge as one of the challenges. She stressed that greater recognition of Indigenous knowledge should not come at the expense of scientific quality.

Giulia Signori, Programme Assistant with the Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World, noted that women scientists are often treated as beneficiaries of research programmes rather than as experienced contributors, whereas science benefits greatly from women's participation. Relatedly, Lora Gailly, Associate Project Officer with UNESCO, cautioned that participation does not necessarily translate into influence.

Participants called for inclusion to be embedded in calls, budgets, assessment criteria, monitoring systems and institutional policies, supported by data, reviewer expertise and internal capacity.

The Capacity Strengthening Hub workshop asked what support councils actually need.

Dr Frejus Thoto, Executive Director of the Capacity Strengthening Hub, a Technical Supporting Agency, said the Hub seeks to assess needs, connect councils to qualified providers and existing initiatives, and revamp the SGCI digital learning platform. It will neither set priorities on behalf of councils nor operate simply as a training provider.

He identified three factors that should shape its approach: a council's maturity, its institutional form, and its language and operating context. "Context is key. Understanding how every SGC works in their context is useful," he said.

Digital grants management emerged as the councils' leading training need, followed by monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL); data infrastructure and evidence use; research ethics and integrity; and intellectual property and technology transfer. Other training needs included resource mobilisation; financial management and governance; gender equity and inclusion; science diplomacy and STISA 2034; peer learning among councils; and science communication.

Councils backed peer learning through staff exchanges, regional and language clusters, and trainer-of-trainers approaches, with materials translated into English, French and Portuguese. Because staff turnover and limited resources can undermine earlier investments, participants proposed embedding knowledge in institutional systems, procedures and documentation.

Attention then turned to the STISA-2034 Multinational Call, which will co-fund multi-country research consortia, each bringing together researchers from three to five countries, across agriculture, health, ICT, energy and the environment. The call has drawn 1,321 expressions of interest involving close to 4,900 institutions, with 19 participating councils, about US\$10 million in investment and a further US\$7 million in matchmaking funding.

Participants identified language barriers, limited translation, mobility constraints, differences in institutional governance and uneven council capacity as the main practical challenges.

They noted that, based on the available resources, only a small proportion of applicants would be funded and proposed exploring ways to connect strong unsuccessful applications with other opportunities.

Next steps include shortlisting, full-proposal development, evaluation, due diligence and implementation.

The session on scaling investments and strategic alliances asked how councils can engage international partners from a stronger position.

Dr Laurent Bochereau, Research and Innovation Counsellor at the EU Delegation to the African Union, identified low research investment and fragmentation as major constraints. He suggested that SGCI could help by giving partners a platform to engage councils collectively.

Dr Marcus Wilms, Programme Director for International Affairs covering Africa and the Middle East at the German Research Foundation, said the relationships built among councils have created a basis for joint action. "Trust among the councils is an infrastructure for cooperation," he said.

Inger Midtkandal, Special Advisor with the Research Council of Norway, noted that many Europe–Africa platforms remain European-led and urged co-creation so that African partners help shape priorities from the outset.

Participants also identified the private sector as a partner that remains insufficiently engaged and said researchers and councils often lack clear information on Europe–Africa funding mechanisms.

The Council Leadership Forum and TSA Meeting brought the day back to implementation.

Leadership continuity will be maintained through co-chairing, with further guidance and a volunteering process to be clarified before January.

The Programme Management Team and the University of Johannesburg will continue convening TSA coordination, with workplans analysed for overlap, redundancy and gaps. The five candidate councils will be included in the forthcoming Curiosity–Driven Research matchmaking call.

Across the sessions, discussions pointed towards a shift from setting direction to designing the mechanisms that make it work: tailored capacity support, inclusion built into funding systems, practical support for cross-border research and coordinated engagement with international partners.

As the Forum moves into Day 3, the Policy Day, attention will shift to the role of science, technology and innovation in Africa's development. Beginning with the official opening by the Prime Minister of Namibia, discussions will explore SGCI's role in implementing STISA-2034, the future of African research infrastructure, strengthening councils' leadership and policy influence, and positioning Africa more strongly in the global research ecosystem.

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“This is my first time attending an SGCI forum. It has been an absolutely transformative experience, meeting council heads, funders and other experts in one room. The discussions and networking have been excellent. SGCI gives us a great platform to learn from each other.”

Dr. James Kisale, Executive Secretary, Uganda National Council for Science and Technology Uganda

“We invest in bringing researchers together, creating meaningful scientific exchange, and giving them time to explore their ideas.”

Lara Jacob, Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) – German Research Foundation

Photo highlights from Day 2 (29th September 2026)





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