

ALL PARTNERS FORUM 2026: DAILY BRIEF

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Day 4 (1st October 2026): Taking Stock, Learning and Looking Ahead

By Jackie Opara-Fatoye, Charlotte Nambadja & Charles Wendo



How can SGCI turn more than a decade of experience into stronger institutions, deeper African leadership and lasting impact?

The final day of formal discussions at the SGCI All Partners Forum 2026 shifted the focus to reflection on what the Initiative has learned, what is changing, and what should come next. Day 4 focused on monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL), lessons from the Forum and priorities for the next phase of SGCI.

At the heart of the discussions was a simple proposition: learning should do more than document activities. It should help councils understand what is changing, make better decisions and apply lessons from across the Initiative.

Turning learning into action

Prof Ellie Osir, Senior Program Specialist at IDRC, described MEL as the thread connecting SGCI's activities and said it had played an important role in shaping SGCI-3.

"MEL is critical because it helps us to understand what is working well and what is not working well and why. MEL transforms activities into knowledge and knowledge into action."

Lessons from previous phases, Osir said, have informed SGCI-3's stronger emphasis on council ownership, impact, capacity strengthening, learning and adaptation, and more streamlined reporting and accountability.

The challenge now is to ensure that MEL connects with other areas of SGCI's work, including strategic communication and capacity strengthening, so that evidence generated across the Initiative informs decisions and action.

Prof Rebecca Hanlin of the University of Johannesburg, SGCI's technical partner for MEL, said the next phase benefits from a substantial foundation of experience.



Prof Ellie Osir, Senior Program Specialist at the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) shares insights during the #SGCI All Partners Forum 2026.

“We have 11 years of knowledge and understanding about what works and what doesn’t work.”

Going forward, the University of Johannesburg will provide technical support to enable councils to take a greater lead in MEL.

Participants called for greater attention to what happens beyond the life of individual grants and projects. Among the priorities identified were following up previously funded research, conducting impact assessments and documenting stronger evidence and stories of research impact.

Councils move into the driving seat

But the reflections went beyond how SGCI measures change. Speakers pointed to a more fundamental shift in who is driving the Initiative.

Osir said the level of council leadership during the Forum itself was evidence of that change. Councils led sessions, facilitated discussions and played prominent roles in shaping the agenda.

As SGCI enters its third phase, he said, learning is also shifting from dependence on external technical support towards greater peer-to-peer exchange between councils, allowing them to share expertise and approaches developed in their own countries.

Examples are already emerging. Participants pointed to Botswana's experience with policy dialogue and Uganda's work on gender inclusion as practices from which other councils can learn.

For Prof Anicia Peters, Chief Executive Officer of Namibia's National Commission on Research, Science and Technology, greater African leadership also calls for a different relationship with SGCI's international partners.

"With our technical and funding partners, we want to see shared ownership. That creates a more equitable partnership. In SGCI 3, councils are not only saying that they want to take on a greater leadership role, but they are also saying that they want to contribute some of their own funding."

Her comments captured one of the recurring messages from the Forum: African leadership does not mean stepping away from international partnerships, but reshaping those partnerships around greater equity and shared responsibility.

Dr Jacqueline Owigo, Research and Innovation Adviser at FCDO Kenya, also pointed to a changing partnership landscape. Comparing the Forum with her first SGCI Forum in Ghana, she highlighted the growing number of participants, the emergence of the SGCI Alliance and the stronger leadership being exercised by councils.

Together, she said, these developments create new opportunities for research partners and funders to collaborate around an African-led research and innovation agenda.

A growing network

The expanding scale of SGCI was another striking feature of the week's discussions.

Dr. Jonathan Underwood, Equitable Research Ecosystems Lead at Wellcome in the United Kingdom, put that growth into numbers.

"Over 1,300 expressions of interest in the STISA research funding call. Twenty established councils. Five aspiring council members. Seven partners from Europe. Two councils from outside Africa and Europe. By the time we meet next year, we will get to about a quarter of the world's countries. It's just phenomenal."

That growth brings opportunities for wider collaboration and learning, but also raises questions about how an expanding network maintains coherence, sustains momentum and ensures that its partnerships deliver meaningful results.

What comes next?

Looking to the year ahead, participants identified several issues to watch: lessons from multinational research calls, alignment with STISA-2034, the new Alliance governance arrangements and whether the emerging structures deepen collaboration across the network.

Peters highlighted research infrastructure as an area requiring greater urgency. Despite years of discussion, she said, inadequate infrastructure continues to contribute to Africa's loss of scientific talent.

She called for SGCI programmes to give greater attention to strengthening existing research infrastructure and establishing more facilities across the continent.

The point connected Day 4's reflections to wider discussions during the Forum: African-led research needs not only stronger institutions and funding, but also the infrastructure, skills and partnerships required to turn ambition into impact.

From reflection to the next phase

As the four-day Forum drew to a close, the reflections suggested an Initiative in transition: larger, more visible and increasingly shaped by the councils themselves.

The adoption of the Windhoek Declaration provided a formal marker of that transition and the commitments delegates will carry forward.

While Day 4 brought the Forum's formal discussions to a close, delegates had one more day together. The following day would take them beyond the conference venue to visit sites where science and tourism intersect.

But perhaps the bigger test begins after the Forum.

Greater council ownership now needs to be reflected not only in governance, but also in how research priorities are set, partnerships are built, evidence is generated and used, capacity is strengthened and resources are mobilised.

After 11 years of SGCI, the question is therefore shifting from what activities are being delivered to what lasting change they produce.

And that brings the Forum back to the central message of its final day: learning matters most when it leads to action.



“I think this week’s Forum was a major milestone towards African integration when it comes to science, technology and innovation, and towards developing a real continental fund, which has been missing. Once Africa has its own funding framework, it will be much easier to leverage funding from other partners in a more sustainable and ambitious way.”

Dr Laurent Bochereau

Minister Counsellor for Science, Technology and Innovation
European Union Delegation to the African Union

“There is less international research funding available than before. Where there is an opportunity, national governments have an opportunity to take the lead in research funding, but they have competing priorities. Telling stories of the impact of your research can demonstrate the returns on investment in research.”

Dr Jonathan Underwood

Equitable Research Ecosystems Lead, Wellcome
United Kingdom

“There are so many countries represented here and so much knowledge being shared. I have been learning a lot over the past three days from these very rich exchanges... I will be taking a lot of information back to Norway about what is being done and what is improving.”

Dr Antonie Lysholm Kraemer

Senior Adviser, Norad

“As councils, we think we have funding to give to universities and that’s our job. That’s not our job. Our job is to fund science to improve the lives of people. So, we should encourage our scientists to work with communities because the science they do is for communities.”

Nokuthula Mchunu

Manager, International Collaborative Research Grants
National Research Foundation, South Africa

“Engagement is key. To be relevant locally, we need to engage with our communities but also with the government. We are looking for funding, but if the government does not understand what we are doing, they won’t listen to us.”

Dr Amos Nungu

Director General, Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology
Tanzania

“We are clear that the Policy Hub has been established. My appeal to colleagues is that take time to go through the relevant documentation. Once you read the relevant documentation, implementation can be smooth.”

Dr Cephas Mensah

Outgoing President of the SGCI Alliance

“We heard from the Prime Minister that science has to translate into opportunities for people, and this week we talked about how to move research to innovation and how research will impact society and inform policy. So, we really have an opportunity to create inclusive science and innovation systems.”

Dr Jacqueline Owigo

Research and Innovation Adviser, FCDO Kenya
Kenya

Photo highlights from Day 4 (1st October 2026)





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