

## ALL PARTNERS FORUM 2026: DAILY BRIEF

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### Day 1 (28 September 2026): From Shared Ambition to Practical Delivery

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## How do partnerships turn the third phase of the Science Granting Councils Initiative (SGCI-3) into real results?

That question drove the first day of the SGCI All Partners Forum 2026. Councils, funders, and technical partners explored how to set shared priorities, mobilise research funding, use evidence in decision-making and coordinate support, with Science Granting Councils (SGCs) at the centre.

One key message was that the Councils must shape collaborative initiatives and retain ownership of national priorities, even as their mandates, resources and systems differ.

The message set the tone for the Funders Collaborative Workshop, which asked how to make SGCI sustainable.

Mapping revealed co-funded and parallel calls, but also limited visibility, fragmented tracking and heavy coordination burdens. Participants saw the Collaborative as a coordination platform rather than a pooled fund.

Marcus Wilms, director for international collaboration with Africa and the Middle East at the German Research Foundation (DFG), described the partners' role in those terms. "We do not consider ourselves as donors or funders but as collaborators in the long-standing partnership to support the councils' capacity and partnership building," he said.

As Sepo Hachigonta, Executive Head for Strategic Partnerships, Networking & Resourcing at the National Research Foundation of South Africa, put it, sustainability is "not just about the money."

If ensuring sustainability involves knowing where money goes, the Funding Flows Dashboard makes a strong case. Covering 2020 to 2025, it holds data on about 30,000 grants from 258 funders, representing an estimated US\$54 billion flowing to more than 11,000 recipient organisations across Africa.

Johann Mouton, professor at the Centre for Research on Evaluation, Science and Technology (CREST), Stellenbosch University, said: "What we have been doing over the past two years as CREST and Stellenbosch is to build the first ever database and dashboard that tracks the flow of STI research funding to Africa."

Participants pointed to a missing piece: domestic funding. Mouton also asked whether the funding flowing into countries aligns with their research priorities and scientific capacity.



Sepo Hachigonta, Executive Head for Strategic Partnerships, Networking & Resourcing at the National Research Foundation of South Africa, shares his remarks at the #SGCIForum2026.

The dashboard shows that research and innovation in Africa is heavily reliant on donor funding. For Atridah Mulonga of Zambia's National Science and Technology Council, the data raised a difficult question. "What if one day they stop funding us?" she asked.

"The Dashboard helps us with planning because it indicates what has been funded and who the funders were," she added. Next steps include onboarding council users and expanding funder coverage.

The Curiosity-Driven Research Workshop then turned attention to researchers themselves. The proposed I2I matchmaking call would allow researchers to submit introductory posters, find collaborators, and form consortia before submitting pre-proposals for exploratory visits or workshops, with a larger call to follow.

Researchers from three participating SGCI countries could form a consortium, with the NRF-DFG partnership funding this first phase. Participants backed the two-stage approach and the Global Research Council's framing of open-ended, curiosity-driven research.

Then came the question of influence. In the SGCI Policy Hub-Councils Dialogue, the Hub was envisioned as a one-stop helpdesk coordinating support for councils. AUDA-NEPAD representatives urged stronger engagement with Regional Economic Communities, including ECOWAS, EAC and SADC, so that councils are recognised as implementation actors under STISA-2034.

Participants also asked how STI systems can remain viable as traditional donor funding declines. Councils were asked to validate the joint SGCI Alliance work plan and nominate policy and data focal points.

The Long-term Europe-Africa Water-Energy-Food Nexus (LEAWEF) Workshop, attended by Heads of Research Councils and SGCI Coordinators, showed partnership at the design table.

Planning for the second call centred on a Joint Call Secretariat coordinating work blocks, which councils could take on in whole or in part. Lessons from the first call's matchmaking highlighted barriers for French- and Portuguese-speaking researchers, prompting exploration of multilingual webinars and interpretation support.

Participants agreed on consortia of at least four eligible applicants from four countries, with no more than two European countries, and chose the NRF application system for matchmaking. Operational costs and the link between national funding decisions and assessment rankings remain open questions.

Across the sessions, discussions pointed towards a shift from building structures to delivering results, with African councils in the lead and peer learning highly valued.

Rejoice Maseko, a delegate from Eswatini, which is establishing its National Research Council, said what she has learnt from the SGCI annual forum is already paying off. "We realise that we can co-fund a project between two or more councils," she said.

The day concluded with a kick-off dinner attended by Namibia's Deputy Minister of Education, Innovation, Youth, Sport, Arts and Culture, Hon. Dino Ballotti. In his remarks, Ballotti emphasised the need to support researchers to make discoveries that address societal challenges.

He stressed that the work of scientists should ultimately improve people's lives, adding that when researchers place people at the centre of their work, their research has the potential to transform society.

As the forum moves into Day 2, discussions will turn to how councils can build more inclusive STI systems, strengthen their capacities, deepen research collaboration across Africa, and scale investments and strategic partnerships.

### Photo highlights from Day 1 (28<sup>th</sup> September 2026)





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