



GRC COVID-19 VIRTUAL SEMINAR Sub-Saharan African Region Report

Introduction

In the absence of the regular Global Research Council Regional Meetings that were due to take place in 2020, the Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) region hosted a seminar to discuss the COVID-19 crisis, with a particular focus on exploring priority research areas and questions most suited for international collaboration, as well as the impact of the crisis on the GRC participating organisations and the wider research ecosystem. The meeting was hosted by the NRF (South Africa) and PASRES (Cote d'Ivoire) and attended by a wide range of stakeholders including GRC participating organisations representing the following countries: Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Guinea, Tunisia, Angola, Gambia and Sierra Leone. In addition, sister agencies from Brazil, Germany and the United Kingdom joined the discussion. Associates of the GRC participating organisations in the SSA region including the IDRC, Sida, African Academy of Sciences (AAS), Belmont Forum, Association of African Universities (AAU), UK FCDO, South Africa's HSRC, the African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS), UK-South Africa Newton Fund, and South Africa's Department of Science and Innovation also joined the discussion. The webinar included a number of regular items of GRC business, notably discussion and endorsement of the the 2020 Statement of Principles on public engagement and mission-oriented research, and knowledge products by the GRC working groups.

GRC 2020 STATEMENTS OF PRINCIPLES

Following presentation of both the statements of principles and responses by selected HORCs (COSTECH Tanzania and FNI Mozambique), GRC participating organisations in SSA endorsed the content of the SOPs with no further requests for amendments.

GRC WORKING GROUPS: PRP and GWG

Both working groups presented progress on knowledge products that are expected to be presented at the 2021 Annual Meeting. The Peer-Learning Initiative on Partnered Research Programmes (PRP) working group is finalising a report on the experiences of GRC participating organisation in implementing partnerships between academic and non-academic organizations. The GRC Gender Working Group (GWG) presented preliminary results of the survey on Gender disaggregated data at GRC participating organizations. In response to the working groups, NCST Malawi and MESRI Senegal shared reflections and their experiences in relation to the two topics, highlighting the importance of the work being conducted by the working groups for the SSA region.

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

A number of presentations were made headlined by Dr Amadou Sall on Senegal's contextualised response to COVID-19 as coordinated by the *Institut Pasteur de Dakar*. Additional presentations and reflections were presented as follows:

- The COVID-19 Africa Rapid Grant Fund, which had allowed for a multilateral research and science engagement response amongst SSA agencies;
- Responses to the pandemic by NRF Kenya, NSTC Zambia, and FONRID Burkina Faso, who had all issued national calls and were supporting government responses to the pandemic;
- Regional responses led by the AAS with a focus on defining a research agenda for the COVID-19 pandemic and engaging regional policymakers;
- The science engagement perspective to curb misinformation and enhance science communication as a national response led by the South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement (SAASTA); and
- Responses by sister agencies in Germany (DFG) and Brazil (FAPESP) to enhance cross-regional experience sharing.

The SSA funding agency Covid-19 responses can be summarised as follows:

- Providing science advice to government: evidence-based science advice to inform governments responses to COVID-19;
- Covid-19 national research calls: to contribute to generation of new knowledge to support prevention and control of the COVID-19 outbreak in-country;
- COVID-19 joint bilateral research calls: collaboration with other councils in the region as contribution to regional and continental efforts to understand or respond to COVID-19 – the Science Granting Councils Initiative in Sub-Saharan Africa (SGCI) had significantly catalysed this;
- Reconfiguring the funding agencies for effectiveness: reprioritisation and streamlining of funds, change in the business process to be able to respond rapidly, e.g. shortening the duration of the call process and disbursement of funds; and mobilisation of additional resources to support research on COVID-19.

The key lessons learnt in the region can be summarised as follows:

- Capacity building in science communication and science journalism is critical;
- There had been increased awareness about the role of science in the COVID-19 era;
- There had been improved science policy engagement in response to COVID-19, especially at national level with many funding agencies playing a leading role;
- In terms of preparedness in dealing with emergencies, not all funding agencies were able to do this rapidly and for some agencies it was relatively easy to adapt through changes in policies and standard operating procedures, and adopting online/ virtual modalities of working;
- The pandemic had necessitated that peer review processes have to be more agile, with some agencies reducing the number of stages of review;
- The importance of open access (sharing of data and best practices) was an emerging discourse that had been accelerated; and
- The importance of a regional mechanism such as the SGCI enabled quick and easy decision-making, and the mobilisation of funds to support launching multilateral calls.

Appendix 1: Programme

Moderator: Dr Aldo Stroebel, Executive Director: Strategic Partnerships, NRF South Africa	
11:05-11:15	Welcome, opening remarks and introductions from the co-hosts <i>Dr Molapo Qhobela, National Research Foundation, South Africa</i> <i>Dr Yaya Sangare, Secretary-General, Fund for Science, Technology and Innovation (FONSTI) and Secrétaire Exécutif, Programme d'Appui Stratégique à la Recherche Scientifique (PASRES), Cote d'Ivoire</i>
11:15-11:30	The Global Research Council: a partnership of the world's public science funding agencies <i>Ben Sharman, Senior Policy Manager: Global Partnerships, United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI)</i>
GRC 2020 Statements of Principles	
11:30-11:40	2020 GRC Public Engagement Statement of Principles <i>Prof Rasigan Maharajh, Chief Director, Institute for Economic Research on Innovation (IERI), Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa</i>
11:40-11:50	2020 GRC Mission-Oriented Research Statement of Principles <i>Ben Sharman, Senior Policy Manager: Global Partnerships, United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI)</i>
11:50-12:00	Response to Statements of Principle HORC 1: <i>Dr Amos Nungu, Director General, Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH)</i> HORC 2: <i>Prof Vitoria Langa de Jesus, Executive Director, Fundo Nacional de Investigacao (FNI), Mozambique</i>
GRC Working Groups: Partnering amongst GRC Participating Organisations to Advance Peer Learning	
12:00-12:10	Peer-Learning Initiative on Partnered Research Programs <i>Dr Sepo Hachigonta, Director: Strategic Partnerships, NRF South Africa</i>
12:10-12:20	GRC Gender Working Group: Preliminary Results of Survey on gender disaggregated data at GRC participating organisations <i>Dorothy Ngila, Project Specialist: Strategic Partnerships, NRF South Africa</i>
12:20-12:30	Response to GRC Working Groups HORC 1: <i>Prof Elijah Wanda, Director General, National Commission for Science and Technology (Malawi)</i> HORC 2: <i>Prof Soukèye Dia Tine, Directrice du Financement de la Recherche et du Développement Technologique, Le Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche (Senegal)</i>
12:30-12:40	Break
Sub-Saharan Africa's Response to Covid-19	
12:40-12:55	Lessons from Senegal: Leading a contextualised response to Covid-19 <i>Dr Amadou Sall, Chief Executive Officer, Institut Pasteur de Dakar, Senegal</i>
12:55-13:05	The Covid-19 Africa Rapid Grant Fund <i>Dr Andrew Kaniki, Executive Director: Knowledge Advancement and Support (KAS), NRF South Africa</i>
13:05-13:10	Discussion
Sub-Saharan Africa's Response to Covid-19: The Funding Agencies Perspective	
13:10-13:20	<i>Dr Jemimah Onsare, Acting Chief Executive Officer, National Research Fund (NRF), Kenya</i>
13:20-13:25	<i>Filipo Zulu, Acting Executive Secretary, National Science and Technology Council (NSTC), Zambia</i>
13:25-13:35	<i>Dr Hamidou Tamboura, Directeur Général, Le fonds National pour la Recherche et de l'Innovation pour le Développement (FONRID), Burkina Faso</i>
Sub-Saharan Africa's Response to Covid-19: Pivotal Role for Science Engagement	
13:35-13:45	Regional perspective: African Academy of Sciences <i>Dr Isayvani Naicker, Director: Strategy and Partnerships, African Academy of Sciences</i>
13:45-13:55	Country perspective: South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement (SAASTA) <i>Dr Beverley Damonse, Group Executive, Science Engagement and Corporate Relations, NRF South Africa</i>
13:55-14:05	Discussion
Covid-19: Cross-Regional Perspectives	
14:05-14:15	<i>Prof Euclides de Mesquita Neto, Adjunct Panel: Special Programs and Collaboration in Research, São Paulo Research Foundation, (FAPESP), Brazil</i>
14:15-14:25	<i>Dr Marcus Wilms, International Affairs: Africa, Near and Middle East, German Research Foundation (DFG)</i>
13:55-14:25	General Discussion: Forecasting the Future and Reflecting on the Future Scientific Response
14:25-14:30	Concluding Remarks <i>Dr Annette Ouattara, Assistant du Secrétaire Exécutif du PASRES, Cote d'Ivoire</i>
END OF SESSION	
14:35-15:00	Closed meeting of SSA Heads of Research Councils <i>Conveners: Dr Molapo Qhobela and Dr Yaya Sangare</i>