

## **Africa's STI multilateral platforms and the impact on national science and innovation policy**

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The quest to develop and maintain active and robust national systems of innovation is a debate that has diffused from the confines of the OECD to the realm of developing countries. The notion of NSI as a means to develop the means to improve economic growth and ensure a better quality of life has captured the attention of developing world policy makers and indeed many opinion leaders in the South. There is also the recognition that the model may need to be different from our wealthier neighbours in the global north. Due to resources constraints, limited industrial development, a small pool of human capital and academic sector, the global south would need even more creative mechanisms to organise for the development of National Systems of Innovation. One popular notion is that of regional support systems. A mechanism that may offer such promise is that of the African Science and Technology multilateral platform.

In 2002, using the mandate of the African Union Maputo Summit, South Africa hosted and chaired the inaugural meeting of the African Minister's Council on Science and Technology. This was the launch of the African Union/NEPAD multilateral platform on science, technology and innovation matters on the African continent. The African Consolidated Science and Technology Plan of Action was developed and launched in Dakar, Senegal in 2005. This plan, with its thirteen flagship areas was then 'domesticated' in each of Africa's five regions into a regional action plan. In the SADC region the SAMCOST, or Southern African Minister's Council on Science and Technology, was adopted by the SADC Heads of State and Government as the custodian of Science and Technology co-operation.

The desktop analysis indicates that these two platforms, i.e. the continental in the form of AMCOST and regional in the form of SAMCOST have been catalytic in developing new national institutional frameworks in SADC countries. There has been the development of national budget lines for S&T in many countries some have developed national departments of Science and Technology while a few have a discrete Ministry of Science and Technology in new cabinet configurations. The three SADC based flagship projects i.e. SANBio – the Southern African Biotechnology Initiative, the African Laser Centre (ALC), and the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences (AIMS) have been successful in both their mandated operations as well as their ability to increase collaboration in science and innovation in the region. There are indications of growth in national systems and institutions. Further there are indications of changes in international collaboration trajectories in major South African institutions with increased collaboration activity in the SADC region.

The paper will offer an analysis of a series of indicators to support this appraisal from the South African perspective. The paper will go on to offer a set of scenarios for the future development of science and innovation collaboration in the SADC region.

### ***References***

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