By Aimable Twahirwa;

KIGALI: A number of regional research projects were funded by Science Granting Councils Initiative (SGCI) in close collaboration with national granting councils from four African countries including Rwanda in strengthening science, research and innovation systems.

The SGCI as a multi-funder initiative was launched in 2015 with the overall goal of strengthening the capacities of national science granting councils (SGCs) in 15 participating sub-Saharan African countries including Rwanda through support for research and evidence-based policies that contribute to the social and economic development goals.

The implementation of these projects are in line with the 2020 Rwanda's national science, technology and innovation policy which seeks to mobilize investments in STI to have an increasing impact on business and industry.

Prior to these interventions, the Rwandan government was the major funds provider for research which was mostly funded through regular budget support without a consolidated monitoring framework to measure the volume of national R& D expenditure and assessment of their impact on development.4

Shared values

The review of the science, technology and innovation policies of Rwanda engaging new stakeholders including SGCI was conducted in response to a request by the Rwanda Ministry of Trade, Industry and East African Community Affairs and with the support of the National Commission of Science and Technology (NCST).

Dr. Didace Ndahimana, Researcher and Lecturer in Food and Nutrition at the Department of Food Science and Technology, of the School of Agriculture and Food Sciences, College of Agriculture, Animal Sciences and Veterinary Medicine, University of Rwanda who benefited grant from SGCI is convinced that in a country like Rwanda all ideas that have potential should be refined into innovations in a nationally relevant way.

“The initial phase of SGCI offered valuable experience in transforming research into innovation where by researchers can create something that is based on shared values,” Dr Ndahimana said.

So far, the Rwandan researcher and his team have been dedicated during SGCI-supported project to developing new techniques to farming standards for mass culture of locusts to produce high-quality food for industrial processing in East Africa.

Rwanda’s National granting council has contributed 5,000$ while SGCI contributed 100,000 $, reports said.

Monitoring and Evaluation framework

For the second phase of SGCI however, key priorities for Rwanda has been focusing on supporting these efforts to monitor, evaluate and learn from various project activities and results to enhance National Council of Science and Technology (NCST)capacity to become more effective through review and learning with partners and the communities they work with.

Whereas Monitoring and evaluation aims to help NCST to work out what difference it makes through different research projects, various partners are supposed to learn from this to improve the national granting council performance in future.

For the effective implementation of SGCI2- funded projects, implementing the MEL plan has been among key priorities for Rwanda to help researchers achieve their goals on individual and team projects.

According to Felly Kalisa, Policy Analyst at Rwanda’s National Council of Science and Technology, there is currently ongoing process as part of SGCI 2 implementation to hire consultants who will help NCST to have a Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) framework to evaluate the implementation of Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) policy in the country.

Apart from SGCI2, Rwanda national STI funding also comprises of other specialized financial streams including the Rwanda Green Fund (Fonerwa), the Business Development Fund (BDF) as well as direct funding provided to Government’s research performing institution such as Rwanda Agriculture Board (RAB) and Rwanda Biomedical Centre (End)