REVIEW OF SGCI COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

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FINAL REPORT OF THE REVIEW OF THE SCIENCE GRANTING COUNCILS INITIATIVE (SGCI) COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

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This report was submitted to the Scinnovent Centre on completion of the review of the SGCI Communications Strategies.

Contents

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Acronyms

ATPS- African Technology Policy Studies Network

CID- Corporate Identity Guidelines

CMS- Content Management System

CTAs- Collaborating Technical Agencies

EC-Executive Committee

IDRC- Canadian International Development Research Centre

IMT-Initiative Management Team

MEL- Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

NRF- National Research Fund South Africa

SARIMA- Southern African Research & Innovation Management Association

SGC- Science Granting Council

SGCI- Science Granting Councils Initiative

SSA- Sub-Saharan Africa

STI- Science, Technology and Innovation

UNCST- Uganda National Council of Science and Technology

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Science Granting Councils Initiative in sub-Saharan Africa (SGCI) is a multi-donor funded Initiative established to promote research and evidence-based policies for economic and social development in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) by strengthening the capacities of science granting councils (SGCs) in the region. SGCI's mission includes enhancing SGCs capacity for research management; research programmes design and monitoring using robust Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) indicators; knowledge exchange with the private sector; and partnerships between SGCs and other science system actors. The achievement of SGCI's mission requires a robust communications strategy that enhances the overall understanding of its mission, increases its visibility and positions it as a key player and strategic partner in the STI landscape in SSA.

An assessment of the communications strategy, approaches and tools employed in phase one of the Initiative (2015 to 2019) was commissioned by The Scinnovent Centre in July 2020. The objective was to provide a roadmap towards positioning SGCI as a critical platform for strengthened capacity for funding, catalyze partnerships, evaluating and uptake of research and innovation through policy and practice in sub-Saharan Africa. Qualitative data for this assessment was gathered through:

1. **Review of selected documents and knowledge products;**

2. **Key informant interviews with selected stakeholders;**

3. **An analysis of the architecture and usability of the website and SGCI's social media and overall digital presence; and**

4. **A review of the status of gender and inclusivity in SGCI communication.**

This report presents a synthesis of findings and outlines opportunities for enhanced communication and engagement, to improve the SGCI communications.

From the assessment, it was established that the SGCI has a huge opportunity to influence the perceptions, policies and practices of research funders and other stakeholders across the STI landscape in Africa and beyond. The SGCI has heavily invested in the creation of new knowledge including policy options for research resource allocation, best practices for research management [manuals and guides for Councils to use] as well as the establishment of networks that move the needle in promoting STI-driven development in Africa.

From discussion with the stakeholders, the reviewers identified a communication structure that predominantly involved:

- **The Initiative Management Team (IMT),**
- **SGCs, and**
- **Collaborating Technical Agencies (CTAs).**

The SGCI appreciates the value of communications and outreach and has made some notable investments both in improving its internal/external communications including the production of a communications and outreach strategy and allocation of resources to develop a website. The Initiative also convenes regular stakeholder meetings to provide a platform for communication and engagement. These steps not only demonstrate its recognition of the pivotal role that communications and outreach play but also the goodwill from the management to support communications and outreach. The Initiative has also implemented several interventions geared towards supporting the SGCs – significant partners of the Initiative – including customized training programs to build their communication skills.

Nonetheless, the Initiative can implement a more structured and intentional approach towards enhancing its communication and outreach, by developing and funding an implementation plan, as well as regular monitoring, evaluating and updating the Strategy.

This review established that representatives of participating SGCs and CTAs well understand the SGCI mission. The most highly valued communications and outreach platform was the **convening of annual regional meetings** which were seen not only as in-person forums for knowledge exchange but were leveraged for external stakeholder engagement and media engagement opportunities. Other critical communications and outreach platforms used include, the annual and technical reports which reports on the achievements of individual councils, and knowledge exchange workshops; email communication; and the Initiative's website which was found to be functioning, accessible and easy to navigate.

The absence of full-time human resource and ring-fenced financial resources for communications limited the extent to which the documented communications strategy could be implemented. While there was a level of media engagement, and production of knowledge products such as policy briefs, and audio-visual materials, the communications efforts were found to primarily focus on existing donors, participating SGCs and CTAs stakeholders. Targeted outreach to non-participating SGCs, policymakers, academia, and potential donors described in the communications strategy document was not evident. While the internal stakeholders were clear about the Initiative's mission, there were no overarching key messages available for adaptation and use by project partners.

An assessment of the website's design, information architecture, content nomenclature, graphic and user

interface design and back-end integration services revealed that there is potential to improve the website.

The annual and regional forums are major channels that enable and enhance communication and engagement among the internal stakeholders and between the internal and external stakeholders. The forums attract the active participation of many participants across different stakeholder groups.

Although the SGCI has taken commendable steps in ensuring gender and inclusivity considerations are incorporated in their interventions, there is plenty of room for improvement to ensure this effort is expanded to communications and outreach.

Following the analysis, the reviewers recommend that SGCI should do the following to enhance its communications, outreach and stakeholder engagement:

- *Revise the communications and outreach strategy to include a specific monitoring evaluation plan or the production of easily monitored yearly communication plans.*

- *Allocate resources to employ a full-time communications specialist to support internal and external communications.*

- *Migrate the website to a more user-friendly Content Management System (CMS) software such as WordPress or Drupal.*

- *Revamp the website and the virtual hub followed by a training session to equip the CTAS and SGCs on how to use the two platforms.*

- *Employ a more structured approach toward building and maintain the digital presence.*

- *Develop a knowledge management system for easier, coordinated creation, storage and retrieval of knowledge outputs by all stakeholders.*

- *Assess how the SGCI communications and outreach might be exacerbating gender gaps and perpetuating exclusion.*

The SGCI has a huge opportunity to influence the perceptions, policies and practices of research funders and other stakeholders across the STI landscape in Africa and beyond.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This review was carried out over a period of two months and included a systematic in-depth assessment of the SGCI communication tools, platforms and approaches.

Following an initial document review and analysis of SGCI's digital presence, an interim report was submitted to The Scinnovent Centre and a discussion held, which highlighted specific areas of focus to be included in the key informant interviews.

The online communication platforms were tested using a set of parameters that interrogated their structure, aesthetics, content and reach.

Further analysis of the online footprint included the ascertaining of the extent of audience engagement with the SGCI communication and knowledge products.

Responses from key informant interviews were analyzed to identify the perceptions, facts and trends related to the SGCI communication practices.

This report presents the findings of the review, a synthesis of the results to reveal the gaps and opportunities and recommendations for improving the SGCI communication, outreach and stakeholder engagement.

The report is structured according to the different documents, platforms or approaches that were assessed.

Methods applied to assess SGCI communication tools, platforms and approaches

- Key informant interviews with selected stakeholders representing different groups including the IMT, CTAs and SGCs

- A rigorous assessment of the SGCI's digital presence including an analysis of the architecture and usability of the website and internal virtual hub, and a review of the social media channels

- Evaluation of the SGCI communications and outreach strategy document; review of documents and other knowledge outputs

- Assessment of gender and inclusion in its communication, outreach and stakeholder engagement

2. COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY, APPROACHES AND TOOLS ASSESSMENT

2.1 COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH STRATEGY

The reviewers assessed the communications and outreach strategy to assess:

i. *its identification of SGCI target audience;*

ii. *determination of the goals and objectives for communication;*

iii. *its definition of critical messages;*

iv. *its communication channels, its implementation plan and resources, and parameters for measuring its success.*

The reviewers further held key informant interviews with selected stakeholders to assess the stakeholders' awareness of the Strategy and their perception of the SGCI's communication and outreach efforts. It was also noted that there is a separate document, the Corporate Identity Guidelines (CID), that guides the application of the SGCI branding and corporate identity with clear guidance on logos, colours, and fonts.

Communications Structure within SGCI

A notable investment had been made into the Initiative's communications efforts, demonstrating the recognition of the pivotal role that communications and outreach plays. From the discussion with the stakeholders, the reviewers established that overall communications responsibilities were shared among three organizations, Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Southern African Research & Innovation Management Association (SARIMA) and National Research Fund South Africa (NRF). The specific responsibilities of these three organizations were agreed on based on each institution's capacity and technical expertise to execute the various responsibilities. These responsibilities included: website and virtual hub management, social media management, publishing, and programmatic (science) communications. Other communications functions such as the organization of annual forums fell under the CTAs and SCGs. As mentioned above, a detailed implementation plan of the Strategy was, however, never developed.

Audience

Target audiences were defined as:

- *Policymakers in the target countries - Canada, UK, and sub-Saharan Africa*

- *International and regional donors*

- *National councils*

- *Research communities*

- *Civil society in the target countries*

- *General public*

Objectives

The Strategy for communication and outreach was found to have identified

six objectives for communications, shown in the box below:

Key messaging

The critical messages defined in the Strategy outlined several secondary objectives that the Initiative aspires to achieve. However, the messages did not put forward the 'one memorable' idea or takeaway for each audience group. There was an evident need to review the objectives and determine which single value proposition or advocacy message is most pertinent for each target audience.

There is a good understanding and internalization of the SGCI vision, mission among the key stakeholders, including the CTAs and the SGCs.

Communication channels

The Strategy outlines various events, including the SGCI annual and regional forums, selected strategic global and national meetings as critical events that it will leverage to engage different stakeholders as it disseminates its knowledge. The Strategy also indicates its plan of continuous media engagement and production of press releases.

The Strategy mentions a plan to create an online learning platform, based at South Africa's National Research Foundation (NRF), to allow peer learning and exchange among the councils. It was established that the platform was created – the Virtual Hub – and is considered as 'a collaborative space for online dissemination of CTA knowledge outputs, announcements and various other content generated as part of the implementation of the SGCI'.

Twitter is indicated as a primary channel for the SGCI's social media engagement.

The Strategy also emphasizes media engagement as a critical focus area.

SGCI communication objectives

- Documentation and sharing of lessons learned internally and externally
- Raising the visibility of the Initiative and its funders
- Raising the profile of the participating SGCs
- Defining the value add of the Initiative
- Partnership building in sub-Saharan Africa, Canada and UK
- Media engagement

There are human and financial resources allocated within NRF and IDRC for the website development and management. The Strategy states that its implementation is contingent on the level of internal and external resources available, and the scheduling for activities is given as 'when needed,' which is not binding. Key informant interviews revealed that the resources available were not sufficient to enable full implementation of Strategy.

It was also noted that the day-to-day roles of the communications focal points identified in the Strategy are not centred on communications. As such, the personnel responsible for oversight for communications were unable to dedicate time and skills to implement the Strategy fully.

The Strategy indicated that a mid-term review would be carried out. The assessment revealed that the review was not done; hence opportunities for enhancing the implementation of the Strategy were missed. If this has already been done, it calls for a revision of the document.

Monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL)

While a MEL plan is included in the Strategy, the table provided contains indicators that are not trackable. An example is an indicator of "General public" for which the evaluation methods are listed as – media

> *The day-to-day roles of the communications focal points identified in the Strategy are not centred on communications.*

monitoring and analysis; weblinks and references within external organizations communications vehicles; tracking of visits to the website and twitter analytics. Practical evaluation can be developed to measure progress (status of achievement of planned activity) or the outputs and outcomes of activities (production of planned communication products); the measure of impact after an event has taken place, against existing baseline data before the event. The reviewers learned that there was an M&E process that is implemented by the African Technology Policy Studies Network (ATPS), specifically for the annual forums.

Stakeholders' awareness of the Strategy

Apart from those listed on the Strategy as the focal points, all other stakeholders interviewed were not aware of the communications strategy and branding guidelines. This finding posits that their communication efforts are not linked to the communications objectives outlined in the Strategy nor intentionally aligned to the communications needs of the SGCI.

Frequently asked questions (FAQ) document was listed among essential documents in the communications strategy, yet no document or web page was dedicated to responding to FAQs.

2.1.1 Gaps identified in the Strategy

- While the Strategy singles out Twitter as its primary social media platform, it does not indicate the comparative advantage it may have on twitter vis a viz, other social media platforms such as Facebook, which may be more influential. The reviewers established that the twitter account was initiated, but the SGCI communications have not maximized the opportunity that twitter presents; the reviewers identified a possible cause as lack of committed resources both in terms of human and finances resources to implement social media engagement.

- The website and social media are not being fully utilized; for example, several outputs in the virtual hub should be re-packaged and availed for public consumption on the website and social media channels.

- While there have been few instances of media mentions[1] during events, including coverage of the regional meeting in Ghana and the annual meeting in Tanzania, there was no evidence of structured media engagement, including press releases, media kits, and other intentional media engagement strategies.

- The Strategy should have considered the inclusion of video publishing channel such as YouTube to maximize update of its content produced in the form of videos.

2.1.2 Opportunities identified in the Strategy

- The Initiative should allocate dedicated human and financial resources to implement the Strategy and ensure adherence to the clear CID to provide an opportunity to produce captivating knowledge products that can attract large and diverse audiences to read and share the knowledge products.

- The custodian of the Strategy should foster buy-in among the stakeholders for smooth/successful implementation of the Strategy by holding awareness sessions of the Strategy and engaging the stakeholders in the identification of communication support required.

- Development of a comprehensive yearly implementation plan of the Strategy accompanied by measurable indicators that are time-bound for

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[1] 250 scientists to convene in Tanzania for African Science Granting Council: https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/news/1840340-5318658-9s0ec0/index.html

Innovation: Don't operate in isolation, funders urged: https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/news/-Innovation--Don-t-operate-in-isolation--funders-urged/1840340-5542096-6k9xv3/index.html

African Governments Urged To Invest In Science And Technology:

https://www.modernghana.com/news/866310/african-governments-urged-to-invest-in-science.html

Ghana government to increase funding for R&D – Minister: https://www.ghanabusinessnews.com/2018/07/05/ghana-government-to-increase-funding-for-rd-minister/-6k9xv3/index.html

accountability purposes. This plan will largely contribute to the Strategy's success.

- The widespread understanding of the SGCI vision and mission is a key opportunity for the development of a singular shared value proposition for the Initiative that can support the key messaging.

- The Strategy should outline the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder group and accountability for the same.

Key recommendation

Allocate dedicated human and financial resources to implement the Strategy and ensure adherence to the clear CID to provide an opportunity to produce captivating knowledge products that can attract large and diverse audiences.

2.2 DOCUMENTS AND KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS REVIEW

An assessment of communications and knowledge products that were readily available from SGCI partners and the SGCI website resources page was conducted. Specifically, the reviewers had access to the SGCI brochure and prospectus; four annual reports; case studies of the political economy, policy briefs; training manuals, research output documents, needs assessments, and videos. The analysis was conducted against the following parameters:

- **Application of brand**
- **Key messaging**
- **Accessibility**
- **Target audience**
- **Dissemination channels**

Brand

The IMT representatives interviewed were fully aware of the brand; however, the SGCs and CTAs interviewed were not aware of the existing CID guidelines and hence are not applying the guidelines in the production of their knowledge outputs.

The brand application was inconsistent across various products. While the CID is explicit on the colours, use, and positioning of logos, and typeface, it was established that these guidelines had not been consistently applied on all documents. For example, in the annual report of 2018, apart from the correct use of the four core donor logos on the cover, the other specifications of corporate branding are not followed, e.g. the headings are highlighted in non SGCI colours, and they vary from document to document. Two training manuals available on the SGCI website have entirely different brand identities, including colours that are inconsistent with the CID guidelines.

Key messaging

The documents and communications products assessed miss out on the opportunity to highlight the Initiative's mission statement. Additionally, messaging incorporating the objectives of the various pillars of the Initiative can still be strengthened.

Accessibility of resources

Not all communications products were readily accessible to the public. For example, the annual reports, brochures, and prospectus were shared directly with the reviewers but were not available on the resource's repository of the SGCI website. The issue numbers of the policy briefs found on the website suggested that there were other briefs produced before them that are not available in the same repository (e.g., policy brief 49). Only three out of six stories indexed under the news stories for a forum conducted in 2018 were available. There was a lack of evidence of efforts to avail the videos to target policymakers and other target audiences. The virtual hub also contains various resources which can be packaged for external audiences.

Target audience

Communications products mostly fulfil the objectives for internal audiences (the partner SGCs and the Initiative's principal funders). It was also noted that many communications materials available, including videos, are produced in English with no translations, despite the Initiative covering both anglophone and francophone countries.

While the communications and outreach strategy highlights the website, Twitter, and events as crucial channels of communication [and dissemination of knowledge], only a handful of outputs were available on the website. From a needs assessment report, the reviewers learnt that the councils held quarterly forums to disseminate the research results.

Various outputs including newsletters, photos of events and reports were available to SGCI partners through the virtual hub but not accessible to the public and other users without access to the hub. If availed to external audiences, these outputs can play a significant role in the engagement of the public.

2.2.1 Gaps identified in the knowledge products

- The Initiative has heavily invested in knowledge production, indicated by vast and different types of knowledge outputs in the internal repository, the SharePoint. However, most [almost all] of these outputs are not readily available on a public platform such as the website, a missed opportunity to reach out to a broader audience with the knowledge created by the Initiative.

- There is no established curation and publication process to ensure adherence to the branding guidelines and publication guidelines which promotes standardization of the brand.

- Most of the project documents [e.g. the brochure] have not been updated

despite the new knowledge produced over the past four years or so.

- All the written documents were available only in English, despite the fact the Initiative operates in 15 countries across sub-Saharan Africa, including three francophone countries. A quick visit of the Senegal and Cote d'Ivoire Council websites revealed that their primary language of engagement is French. Widespread engagement in English points to a possible missed opportunity for the SGCI to include the audiences in these countries in the language they understand.

- A few videos are available on the website but are not presented in such a way that audiences can retrieve them.

2.2.2 Opportunities presented by the knowledge products

- Some councils (such as the Uganda National Council of Science and Technology (UNCST)) produce communications regarding SGCI activities as part of their institutional communications plans. More councils should be encouraged to use specific language when communicating joint or relevant activities proactively, and their communications outputs can be harvested to feed into an overall SGCI communications product, e.g., a regular newsletter.

- Updates about the annual forum and Councils' activities captured in the reports could be used on the news section of the website and on social media to raise visibility and profile of the Initiative.

- Assessment of the annual reports[2] indicates that the Initiative has engaged policymakers across the different countries and regional policy-making bodies. It is a huge opportunity to build more momentum for publicity and audience engagement, which the Initiative should exploit more.

- Hard copy documents published by the Initiative should be republished to soft copies to enable their dissemination to a broader audience.

- The reports mention 'change stories' that can be pursued, packaged, and disseminated to different audiences across various platforms.

- There is a willingness among the councils to support communication and outreach efforts of the Initiative. For instance, a report of the 2018 multi-stakeholder meeting in Burkina Faso indicates that the Council's emphasis on the need for a process that can enable their stakeholders to access research findings based on their specific development needs.

- The knowledge products contain important vital messages that can be synthesized and re-packaged for different audiences and are opportune for stakeholders' continuous engagement.

Key recommendations

- ✓ Establish a curation and publishing process to ensure that all documents are appropriately published disseminated

- ✓ Develop an FAQ document to provide key information about the Initiative and prominently place it on the website

- ✓ Update brochure to provide updated information

- ✓ Convert hard copy documents to soft copy to enhance reach of information

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[2] The reviewers had access to the 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 annual reports

2.3 ONLINE PLATFORMS REVIEW

2.3.1 SGCI Website

https://sgciafrica.org/en-za

The Strategy identified the website as a crucial communication channel.

> The website serves an essential function of communicating about SGCI to both the internal and external audience. The SCGI website provides information about the structure of SCGI, the various stakeholders and their roles; it provides news and updates about SCGI and is home to the resources developed by SGCI.

Website management and administration

The reviewers established that the website was running on a SharePoint Content Management System (CMS). Through the discussion with the website's administrator, the reviewers found that the choice of the system was as a result of the communications arrangement between the organizations (IDRC, NRF and SARIMA) that took on the communications functions established in phase I, where SARIMA took the responsibility of developing and managing the website. The CMS was developed in line with existing infrastructure at SARIMA for better support.

The digital communications personnel based at SARIMA performed the day to day administrative functions of the website that included, making changes in website pages, uploading of documents, and publishing news. The administration of the website was done together with a company called Ment, which developed the website and provided the back-end coding support. There was a support contract entered with Ment in phase I to support this function. It is important to note that SharePoint is more popular and ideal as an intranet and document management solution, rather than an outward-facing solution such as a website.

Website Usability

The reviewers undertook a website heuristics usability review on the SGCI website. A detailed review is provided in **Annex 1**. Key observations were made on the following features:

Homepage/starting page

Effectiveness, layout, look and feel

- Key home page features are available on the website. The home page is useful in orienting and directing users to their desired information and tasks.

- The homepage layout is clear and uncluttered with enough 'white space' information.

- Call to action (read more) button is available.

- There are no photos and other visuals to enhance the look and feel of the website.

- In the latest news, the icons can be replaced by photos.

Logos

- The SGCI logo is pixelated, too small relative to the ribbon. The wordings on the left and right are not visible.

- Donor logos at the footer are not well aligned, sizing of logos is inconsistent.

- Placement of the logos on the footer is not consistent with the provisions in the SGCI corporate identity guidelines.

Trending news and Covid-19 news

- The home page demonstrates a trending news section, such as the Covid-19 live updates and other relevant current information. However, the news is outdated and only targeted to a specific audience, those looking for grant opportunities.

Headlines and sub-headlines

- These are not entirely clear and understood, e.g., The tab with 01: Research Management 02: Use of STI Indicators 03: Partnerships and Private Sector Engagement, and others can be better organized.

Social Media Integration

- There is no social media integration on the homepage.

- There are no social proof and success stories, links to case studies or short quotes seen on the homepage.

Navigation

- Generally, the website is easy to navigate. The navigation menus (primary menu, footer menu, breadcrumbs in every page) are easy

to locate, logical, and allow free movement across the website. The site structure is clear, easily understood, and addresses common user goals.

- Event page: Navigation on the calendar page is too technical; users cannot see past and upcoming events.

- Responsiveness: The website is not fully optimized for mobile and tablets

Search

- The search function works well. A consistent, quickly accessible, and easy to use search bar is available and situated in a place of maximum visibility.

- The search interface is appropriate to meet user goals (e.g., multi-parameter, prioritized results, filtering search results).

- Search results are precise and well displayed.

Typography, Layout, and Content

- Language, terminology, and tone: Language is all in English. No French translation.

- Typography: The use of different fonts and sizes is not well applied and does not help communicate messages distinctively and effectively. The font text used is not the same throughout the website.

- Footer is not informational and does not provide contact information, links, and social media integration. The footer links to the NRF website.

- Links to other useful and relevant content (e.g., related pages or

external websites) are available and shown in context.

- Key resources are missing dates, and users are not able to know what is current.

Help

The help function is useful. Users can quickly get further help (e.g., telephone or email address) through the Contact us page.

Gaps identified in the website

While the website is a crucial tool for communication and knowledge management within the Initiative and its external audiences, various gaps stifle this objective:

- The CMS used for the SGCI website, SharePoint, requires significant investment in a programming team that is both conversant and highly skilled to work with the software. The software is also limited in design and layout elements that boost the look and feel of a website.

- A better non-technical description of the following sections:
    - *How SGCI contributes to strengthening the ability of science granting councils*
    - *SGCI Collaborating Technical Agencies functions.*

- An opportunity to feature photographs of the Initiative's various activities has been missed. Social proofs and success stories can support the Initiative's credibility.

- The news lacks diversity and is not appealing to a broad audience. The Initiative should draw stories and

updates from the participating councils, from the annual reports to regional forums, to generate stories.

- Vital resources and knowledge products are missing on the website, including annual reports and forum meeting summaries and photos.

- The reviewers also noted that the website had deployed the use of an automated language-translation tool that is activated based on users' geographical location. This language solution has disadvantages, including quality control and limited access for other language speakers who may be in an Anglophone country.

Opportunities for improvement

Given the fundamental role [including the anticipated role] of the website, the reviewers recommend the following to optimize the intended objectives of the website:

- The SGCI should allocate human and financial resources with the ability to create, organize and regularly manage content for the website

- Migrate the website to a more user-friend CMS software that will simplify the content processes for non-technical people. Options to consider may include WordPress and Drupal CMS.

- A comprehensive knowledge nomenclature should be introduced to facilitate easier retrieval of knowledge.

- With the SGCs being critical stakeholders in the Initiative, the website should contain a dedicated

section to feature the voices of the councils.

- All partners should place a link of the SCGI website on their organization's website to promote the work of the Initiative.

- Optimize the website for mobile phones and tablets as more people now access news from hand-held devices.

- SGCI should develop its disclaimer to be placed in the footer section.

- Add social media integration within the website that will enable Twitter news feeds to be displayed on the website.

- Exploit the use of images and other visuals such as event photos; photographs and names give testimonials credibility.

- Revamp the website to make it more appealing and use high-resolution images, including the logo. The website design should accentuate not only usability but also provide an attractive web presence for the SGCI.

- Consider investing in developing a fully bilingual website.

2.3.2 Social Media Audit

Twitter handle: *@SGCIAfrica*

The reviewers performed a social media audit of SCGI's platform to assess their performance against the following criteria:

Integration with the website	
Are Social Media profiles visible on their website?	No
Do they have a clear Unique Value Proposition?	No
Does their website target a specific audience?	No
Do they offer valuable and relevant content (blogs, podcasts, videos?	Only blogs
Do they provide good descriptions of their products and services?	Yes
Are their business objectives distinct?	Yes
Social Media Audit:	
Which Social Media channels do they currently have an active presence?	Twitter and YouTube account existing, but no active presence. Last tweeted on January 08, 2019.
Do they have well-designed headers, graphics, and profile descriptions?	No. Twitter has a profile description YouTube has none.
Do they have an established base of followers?	Twitter followers; 198 YouTube; 0
Do they have recent posts? (within the last week)?	No. Twitter posts were very inconsistent Dec 2018, Nov 2018 were most active but still not consistent.
How often do they post?	N/A
Do the posts seem targeted to a specific audience?	Yes, to the science council. The posts are mostly retweets and no original posts.
What level of engagement do they receive on their posts? (Likes, shares, comments, re-pins)	Minimal, the councils and partners don't connect with them.

Opportunities for enhanced social media management

- Development of a social media plan.
- Integration of the twitter and social medial feeds into the website.
- Dedicate resources to implement the social media strategy.
- Identification and engagement of 'social media influencers' in the Initiative's area of interest and influence.

2.3.3

Virtual Hub Usability

The hub is a secure collaborative space for online dissemination of CTA knowledge outputs, announcements and various other content generated as part of the implementation of the SGCI. The virtual hub is an internal platform, accessible only by username and password, to internal audiences. All the CTAs have their pages in the virtual hub where they can share their resources. Like the website, the hub has been developed using the SharePoint Content Management system.

The reviewers applied a similar heuristics usability review on the virtual hub as the one applied to the website. A detailed assessment is provided in **Annex 2**.

In line with its intended objective as a collaborative space for CTAs, the following key observations were made:

Homepage/starting page

Effectiveness, layout, look and feel.

- The home page is ineffective in orienting and directing users to their desired information and tasks.

- The similarity between the website and the hub makes it challenging to determine whether one is on the homepage of one or the other.

- The homepage layout is clear and uncluttered with enough 'white space' information.

- The call to action button is not easily understandable.

- There are no photos and other visuals to enhance the look and feel of the hub.

Navigation

- The virtual hub is difficult to navigate. The site structure is not easy to understand as the navigation menu quickly redirects one out of the hub and to the website without any alert or warning.

Search

- The search function works well. A consistent, quickly accessible, and easy to use search bar is available and situated in a place of maximum visibility.

- The search interface is appropriate to meet user goals (e.g., multi-parameter, prioritized results, filtering search results).

- Search results are precise and well displayed.

Help

- The help function is not available. Users cannot quickly get further help (e.g., telephone or email address) when using the hub.

Opportunities for improvement

Given the important role of the virtual hub in information management, the reviewers recommend the following to optimize its intended objectives:

- The look and feel of the hub should be different from that of the website. The current design is confusing and makes it difficult for users to tell which platform they are in easily.

- A better description of the home page should be provided to guide users on how to navigate the hub.

- A comprehensive knowledge nomenclature should be introduced to facilitate easier retrieval of knowledge.

- A system to ensure that knowledge products existing in the hub and targeted for the external audience are also available on the website should be developed.

- A detailed description of the publication process should be available on the home for users to understand the objectives of the hub and especially the process of publishing.

Key recommendations

✓ Revamp the website to make it more appealing

✓ Exploit the use of images and other visuals such on social media platforms

✓ Have a different look and feel on the Virtual hub

✓ Develop a user and publication guide for the Virtual hub to enhance its functionality

3. GENDER AND INCLUSIVITY IN COMMUNICATIONS, OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

SGCI PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES

Countries	Science Granting Councils
Ethiopia	Ministry of Science and Technology (MoST)
Kenya	National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) and National Research Fund (NRF)
Rwanda	National Commission for Science and Technology (NCST)
Tanzania	Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH)
Uganda	Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (NCST)
Burkina Faso	Le Fonds National de la Recherche et de l'Innovation pour le Développement (FONRID)
Côte d'Ivoire	Programme d'Appui Stratégique à la Recherche Scientifique (PASRES)
Ghana	Directorate of Science and Technology, Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI)
Senegal	Direction du Financement de la Recherche et du Développement Technologique, Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche
Botswana	Department of Research, Science and Technology
Malawi	National Commission for Science and Technology (NCST)
Mozambique	Fundo Nacional de Investigacao (FNI)
Namibia	National Commission on Research, Science and Technology (NCRST)
Zambia	National Science and Technology Council (NSTC)
Zimbabwe	Research Council of Zimbabwe (RCZ)

3.1 Overview of Gender and Inclusivity in SGCI

The SGCI has a keen interest in ensuring gender and inclusion are considered in the implementation of its interventions. The reviewers noted that the Initiative had established a gender working group that convenes during the annual forums.

A 2016 annual report noted gender and other forms of inclusion as critical gaps and recommended a formal approach on gender be considered including training and support to councils. In response to this recommendation, a gender mainstreaming framework and action plan[3] was developed.

Two sessions in a 2017 SARIMA conference included gender topics, and the conference report noted that gender-related questions had been included in the benchmark questionnaire.

The reviewers assessed the extent to which the Initiative ensured gender and inclusivity are considered in its communication and outreach. The reviewers assessed delegates' participation in the meetings, language support, audience engagement, authorship of outputs and dissemination of knowledge.

Participation in annual and regional forums

Assessment of the annual reports indicates that the Initiative is intentional in promoting all Councils' participation during the annual forums. The regional and yearly reports reveal

that these Forums rotate across the region, providing the opportunity for equal participation among the Councils.

What was not clear was how inclusive the planning was; i.e., who participates in the planning committee of the forums? How are they selected?

Language

Apart from the prospectus, all the other knowledge products we reviewed were in English only. The language bias reveals a significant gap in the inclusivity of both French and English-speaking audiences. All communication on the SGCI website apart from the logo, is solely in English, potentially excluding significant audiences in at least three focus countries.

Audience Engagement

The SGCI communications strategy indicates the civil society, the research community, the policymakers as its primary audiences, and the public as its secondary audience. Apart from the participation of national-level policymakers and regional policy-making bodies in their major meetings, it is not clear the level of engagement of these different audiences and any plans to engage diverse groups of these audiences.

Authorship of knowledge outputs

A review of eight publications available on the SGCI website revealed balanced participation of women and men in publishing opportunities.

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[3] Noted in appendix 3 of the 2017 annual report

Dissemination of knowledge products

The dissemination strategy of SGCI outputs is targeted mainly at its internal audiences (mostly implementing partners), evidenced by the wealth of reports, policy briefs, posted in internal repositories (primarily SharePoint) only. This inward-facing dissemination approach leads to the exclusion of external audiences from accessing and benefiting from the knowledge created by the Initiative.

3.2 Opportunities for Enhancing Gender Parity and Inclusion

The SGCI has taken commendable steps in ensuring gender and inclusivity considerations are incorporated in their interventions, evidenced by the establishment of the gender working group and the development of the gender mainstreaming framework.

It was established that there is very little awareness of the communications strategy among the stakeholders. This presents possible missed opportunities to include all partners in communication activities. The SGCI can enhance its efforts on gender and inclusivity if it conducts an awareness session of its communications and outreach strategy.

To ensure a holistic approach in their interventions on this facilitating inclusivity, the Initiative should consider expanding the framework to include communications and outreach. The reviewers suggest that SGCI should assess the extent of gender and inclusivity in the communication strategies, to provide a status report that can guide its approach going forward.

Some of the questions that gender assessment should answer include:

- *How might SGCI's communications be gendered and thereby exacerbating gender gaps and excluding more stakeholders?*

- *Are the communication focal points aware of the gender mainstreaming framework and their role in it?*

- *Do the communication focal points understand how their communication activities might enhance or inhibit gender and inclusivity?*

- *Is there a publishing style guide that encourages the use of non-discriminatory language in the knowledge products, including in promotional items?*

For example, to facilitate widespread understanding of gender within the key audiences, such as Councils, SGCI may consider developing and implementing a training course on the link between gender and communications.

Key recommendations

➢ Create content in both English and French to reach the Initiative's target audience, and consider other languages where key audiences are located

➢ Assess the extent of gender and inclusivity in the communication strategies

4. LIMITATIONS OF THE REVIEW

The reviewers sought to hold key informant discussions with representatives of major stakeholder groups including the Executive Committee (EC), the Initiative Management Team (IMT), the Collaborating Technical Agencies (CTAs) and the Science Granting Councils (SGCs). However, the team was unable to get responses from the EC and out of the sample of SGCs contacted, only one responded. The website analytics and key metrics were also unavailable.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategic communication, outreach and engagement involve much more than producing a strategy document. While a strategy is essential, it should be accompanied by an actionable implementation plan and resources to execute the plan. The SGCI should revise its communication and outreach strategy to specific measurable objectives and activities accompanied by indicators of success and how to monitor the progress of the intended plans.

An SGCI meeting in 2017 in Entebbe recommended tailored training in creating blogs, use social media, and developing communications strategies[4] indicates that there is a desire by partner members to be more actively engaged in implementing the communications strategy. It was also noted that there are brand ambassadors within the network who were active early in the project. With additional support, the proactive SGCs and individual brand ambassadors could be more effective in contributing to the Initiative's communication and outreach strategy.

The stakeholders value the annual and regional meetings as major forums for communication and engagement; thus, the forums present an opportunity to maximize media engagement through a structured plan. There is a huge opportunity to harness the momentum from these forums after they end, and to continue the stakeholder engagement, which could include creation and dissemination of content from the Forums.

Various information, education, and communication materials produced by SGCs and CTAs, can be re-packaged into SGCI-relevant messaging.

Besides producing the meeting reports and disseminating them internally, not many opportunities are exploited to

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[4]. This recommendation has also been echoed in the needs' assessment reports

continue the engagement beyond the Forums.

Documentation and broad dissemination of most activities implemented such exchange visits among the SGCs; regional forums (stories, social media posts that show the interaction between the councils and between councils and non-member entities).

Several knowledge products have been produced by the SGCI including training manuals, books, policy briefs, event reports, photographs of events, videos and flyers. Because a structured knowledge management system is missing, use and update of this knowledge are limited. The SGCI should consider developing a knowledge management system that will ensure easier and coordinated creation, storage, dissemination and retrieval of knowledge products as when needed.

The SGCI preliminary needs assessment reports[5] reveals the Councils' huge appetite to enhance their communication, and they highlight the need for additional training opportunities to develop their ability to:

- **Promote knowledge exchange with the public and private sector.**

The SGCI preliminary needs assessment reports reveal the Councils' huge appetite to enhance their communication.

- **Communicate research to non-science audiences including through development of policy briefs.**
- **Explore more dissemination channels in addition to the 'quality forums'.**

The interest in more training opportunities focused on communication skills indicates the need for the SGCI to continue offering communication training such as the course offered in 2018 as it monitors the learning outcomes. The Initiative could capitalize on the use of already developed resources to build the capacities of the councils, such as the training manual[6] on 'communicating with the private sector' by supporting the councils to use these resources while monitoring the results.

Appreciating the importance of a digital presence, the Initiative allocated resources [both financial and human] for the website development. It made attempts to establish a presence on social media through the Twitter account. While these are commendable efforts, they are not enough to build and enhance the much-need digital presence of the SGCI. To strengthen the digital presence of the SGCI, more resources should be allocated for the

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[5] Zambia, Namibia, Botswana indicated their desire for more training opportunities to build their communication capacities
[6] Odongo, D and Bolo, M. 2019. Communicating with the Private Sector: A Toolkit for Science

Granting Councils in Africa. The Scinnovent Centre Manual 2 Nairobi, Kenya: The Scinnovent Centre

website and social media management. Most importantly, with SARIMA indicating that they have handed over the website management function to the Scinnovent Centre, the reviewers recommend that the Initiative should discuss and agree on hosting arrangements of the website going forward.

Resources should be allocated to employ a full-time communications specialist who will support communications while ensuring that the Initiative's visibility is improved. The Initiative should dedicate time to identify the profile of a suitable candidate to handle the communications function of the Initiative.

While the Initiative has made attempts to establish a digital presence, there is a need for a more structured approach toward building and maintain the digital presence. More intentional efforts, including the allocation of adequate resources, should be dedicated to improving both the functionality and usability of the website. The reviewers recommend that the SGCI considers migrating its website to a more user-friendly Content Management System (CMS) software such as WordPress.

Knowledge creation and co-creation is an important objective of the SGCI. To maximize on this objective, the SGCI

The SGCI should allocate resources should to employ a full-time communications specialist, to ensure improved visibility of the Initiative

should consider developing a knowledge management system that will ensure easier, coordinated creation, storage and retrieval of knowledge outputs by all stakeholders as and when needed.

SGCI has enabled a platform where its stakeholders can participate in global forums such as the Global Research Council (GRC). In the GRC, an IMT member and an SGC representative is a co-lead of the GRC Gender Working Group[7]. Representation in such global forums offers the Initiative unique communication opportunities to communicate about its mandate more broadly, while enhancing SGCI's authority within the STI sector.

The SGCI is keen on ensuring gender and inclusion are considered throughout its interventions. More practical solutions, such as: creating content in the language that all their audiences are more conversant with; provision of support services for persons with disabilities during meetings will help the Initiative build more momentum towards ensuring gender parity and inclusion is achieved. The efforts on ensuring gender and inclusivity are considered can be complemented by assessing how its communication is supporting the gender mainstreaming framework.

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[7]

https://www.globalresearchcouncil.org/about/gender-working-group/

6. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

12-MONTH IMPLEMENTATION PLAN													
ACTIVITY	**LEAD**	**TIMEFRAME IN MONTHS**											
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Engage dedicated communications specialist	Scinnovent	X	X	X									
Revise and operationalize the SGCI communications strategy	Communications specialist				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Develop key messages and identify key stories list for content generation	Communications specialist					X							
Continuous content development for website	Communications specialist						X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Develop factsheets for program and revise brochure	Communications specialist				X	X	X						
Develop a plan for social media engagement	Communications Specialist				X	X	X						
Revamp the SGCI website	Communications specialist				X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Introduce new strategy to partners, build capacity to enhance participation	Communications specialist						X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Evaluate year one communications plan	Scinnovent												X

7. ANNEXES

Annex 1: SGCI Website Usability Review

	Homepage / starting page	Score[8]	Comments
1	The logo is linked to the homepage; it is of the right size and resolution.	Good	The logo is pixelated, too small in relation to the ribbon. Donor logos are not well aligned; sizing of logos is inconsistent.
2	The home page is useful in orienting and directing users to their desired information and tasks.	Good	
3	The home page demonstrates a trending News section such as the COVID 19 live updates and other relevant current information.	Good	Information is there, but outdated.
4	Headlines and Sub-headlines communicate clearly and simply.	Poor	It is not clear what the tabs labelled 01, 02, 03 mean. Text descriptions are ideal.
5	Call to action (CTA) button is clear, distinct and appealing pulling users to interior pages or to sign up or practically try something out.	Good	Read more, download button available on the website.
6	Visuals (Photographs and videos) are relevant and add value, good quality, and high-resolution images used. Visuals that cause action	Very poor	No visuals used. In the latest news, the icons can be replaced by photos.
7	Social Media Integration (Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Instagram, LinkedIn, Youtube)	Very poor	There is no social media integration on the homepage, no videos.
8	Social Proof and success stories, short quotes are seen on the homepage, links to case studies, photographs and names give testimonials credibility.	Very poor	Nothing listed.
9	The homepage layout is clear and uncluttered with sufficient 'white space' information in 5 seconds.	Moderate	
	Navigation		
10	The navigational menu (primary menu, footer menu, breadcrumbs in every page) is easy to locate, sensible and allows free movement across the website.	Excellent	

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[8] Scoring criteria: Excellent; Good; Moderate; Poor; Very poor

11	The navigation has sufficient flexibility to allow users to navigate by their desired means (e.g. searching, browse by type, browse by name, most recent).	**Excellent**	
12	The site or application structure is clear, easily understood and addresses common user goals.	**Excellent**	
13	Links are clear, descriptive and well labelled. There is a link to the homepage from every page of the website. Standard colour for visited and unvisited links	**Excellent**	
14	Browser standard functions (e.g. 'back', 'forward', 'bookmark') are supported.	**Excellent**	
15	The current location is indicated (e.g. highlighted menu item).	**Excellent**	
16	Users can easily get back to the homepage or a relevant start point.	**Excellent**	
17	Responsiveness, easy access from desktops, mobile phones and tablets.	**Poor**	The website is not fully optimized for mobile.
18	A clear and well structure site map or index is provided (where necessary).	**Moderate**	
	Search		
19	A consistent, quickly accessible and easy to use search bar situated in a place of maximum visibility.	**Excellent**	The search bar is easily accessible and visible.
20	The search interface is appropriate to meet user goals (e.g. multi-parameter, prioritized results, filtering search results).	**Good**	
21	Search results are relevant, comprehensive, precise, and well displayed.	**Good**	
22	How many clicks does it take you to search for X-Y?	**Excellent**	One to two clicks.
	Typography, Layout and Content		
23	Language, terminology and tone used is appropriate and readily understood by the target audience.	**Good**	Available in English.
24	Typography: There is an effective use of different fonts and sizes to help communicate message distinctively and effectively.	**Moderate**	Text is not the same throughout the website.

24	Footer is informational and provides contact information, links and social media integration.	**Poor**	Links to NRF website. It is recommended to have an SGCI footer.
25	Links to other useful and relevant content (e.g. related pages or external websites) are available and shown in context.	**Excellent**	
26	Consistency of the Logo, header and footer on each page, the search bar on each page, Consistency page layout	**Good**	
27	Terms, language and tone used are consistent (e.g. the same term is used throughout).	**Good**	
	Help		
28	Online help is provided and is suitable for the user base (e.g. is written in easy to understand language and only uses recognized terms) where appropriate contextual help is provided.	**Moderate**	No help page.
29	Users can easily get further help (e.g. telephone or email address). There is the presence of a user-friendly message for a 404 error page.	**Good**	Contact us page available.
	User Experience		
30	Did this website win your trust? Does the website give a happy feeling	**Moderate**	The website is heavily targeted for the scientific audience. General audiences would find it difficult to relate.

Annex 2: Virtual Hub Usability Review

	Homepage / starting page	Score[9]	Comments
1	The logo is linked to the homepage; it is of the right size and resolution.	Poor	The logo is pixelated, too small in relation to the ribbon. Donor logos are not well aligned; sizing of logos is inconsistent.
2	The home page is useful in orienting and directing users to their desired information and tasks.	Poor	It is not clear if a user is in the hub and or the main SGCI website.
3	The home page demonstrates trending News/updates and other relevant current information.	Poor	The home page for the exchange is just a calendar. A detailed description of the functions of the website is needed on the homepage.
4	Headlines and sub-headlines communicate clearly and simply.	Poor	Not available. A beneficial requirement for the resources categories.
5	Call to action (CTA) button is clear, distinct and appealing pulling users to interior pages or to sign up or practically try something out.	Very poor	No particular call to action is available.
6	Visuals (Photographs and videos) are relevant and add value, good quality, and high-resolution images used. Visuals that cause action	Very poor	No visuals used.
8	Social Proof and success stories, short quotes are seen on the homepage, links to case studies, photographs and names give testimonials credibility.	Very poor	
9	The homepage layout is clear and uncluttered with sufficient 'white space' information in 5 seconds.	Good	
	Navigation		
10	The navigational menu (primary menu, footer menu, breadcrumbs in every page) is easy to locate, sensible and allows free movement across the website.	Poor	The general navigation for the hub is not very good.
11	The navigation has sufficient flexibility to allow users to navigate by their desired means (e.g. searching, browse by type, browse by name, most recent).	Moderate	

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[9] Scoring criteria: Excellent; Good; Moderate; Poor; Very poor

12	The site or application structure is clear, easily understood and addresses common user goals.	Poor	
13	Links are clear, descriptive and well labelled. There is a link to the homepage from every page of the website. Standard colour for visited and unvisited links	Very poor	Difficult to go back to the home page of the hub once you start browsing other pages.
14	Browser standard functions (e.g. 'back', 'forward', 'bookmark') are supported.	Poor	
15	The current location is indicated (e.g. highlighted menu item).	Very poor	
16	Users can quickly get back to the homepage or a relevant start point.	Poor	Easy to make the mistake of going to the SGCI website homepage instead of the virtual hub homepage.
17	Responsiveness, easy access from desktops, mobile phones and tablets.	Poor	
18	A clear and well structure site map or index is provided (where necessary).	Very poor	A useful utility to include in the hub to enhance usability.
	Search		
19	A consistent, quickly accessible and easy to use search bar situated in a place of maximum visibility.	Good	The search bar is easily accessible and visible.
20	The search interface is appropriate to meet user goals (e.g. multi-parameter, prioritized results, filtering search results).	Good	
21	Search results are relevant, comprehensive, precise, and well displayed.	Good	
22	How many clicks does it take you to search for X-Y?	Good	One to two clicks.
	Typography, Layout and Content		
23	Language, terminology and tone used is appropriate and readily understood by the target audience.	Good	
24	Typography: There is an effective use of different fonts and sizes to help communicate message distinctively and effectively.	Good	
24	Footer is informational and provides contact information, links and social media integration.	Very poor	

25	Links to other useful and relevant content (e.g. related pages or external websites) are available and shown in context.	Poor	
26	Consistency of the Logo, header and footer on each page, the search bar on each page, Consistency page layout	Good	
27	Terms, language and tone used are consistent (e.g. the same term is used throughout).	Good	
Help			
28	Online help is provided and is suitable for the user base (e.g. is written in easy to understand language and only uses recognized terms) where appropriate contextual help is provided.	Poor	Not available.
29	Users can easily get further help (e.g. telephone or email address). There is the presence of a user-friendly message for a 404 error page.	Very poor	Not available.
User Experience			
30	Did this platform win your trust? Does the hub give a happy feeling?	Very poor	The hub is not user-friendly.