


# African Union

## **TOWARDS AN AFRICAN RESEARCH COUNCIL**

**Report of the Task Force  
Mandated by the Department of Human Resources,  
Science and Technology of the African Union Commission  
on the Feasibility of the Establishment  
of an African Research Council**





Department of Human Resources, Science and Technology  
of the African Union Commission  
P.O. Box 3243  
Roosevelt Street (Old Airport Area)  
W21K19  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Tel: (251) 11 551 77 00  
Fax: (251) 11 551 78 44  
<http://www.au.int>

© 2011

## Contents

Executive Summary.....	5
Acknowledgements.....	7
Introduction.....	9
Changing the Continental Paradigm: From the OAU to the AU.....	13
Harnessing Science for Regional Development.....	15
Terms of Reference and Method of Work of the Task Force .....	17
Key Findings and Recommendations.....	18
Basis for Recommendation .....	19
Terrain, Context and Challenges of Research in Africa.....	19
The Quest for a Research–Policy Nexus .....	23
The Case for the ARC.....	25
The ARC in the African Development Agenda .....	27
What Type of ARC?.....	29
Mandate, Objectives, and Niche of the ARC .....	32
Structure, Operations and Governance of the ARC .....	34
Sustaining the ARC .....	37
Conclusion and Next Steps .....	39
Appendices.....	40
Appendix 1: Members of the ARC Task Force .....	40
Appendix 2: Terms of Reference for the ARC Task Force .....	40

Appendix 3: Key External Observers and Participants  
at ARC Inaugural and Consultative Meetings ..... 42

## Executive Summary

The Department of Human Resources, Science and Technology of the African Union Commission mandated a seven-member Task Force to review the feasibility of the establishment of an African Research Council (ARC) and the role, if found feasible, which such a council might play. Members of the Task Force, guided by the terms of reference given to them, carried out the assignment using a combination of methods to generate information and organize consultations.

On the basis of the extensive review it undertook and the feedback it received from a broad cross-section of the leaders of key African scientific institutions that were consulted, the Task Force is able to recommend strongly that:

- a). The ARC be established as an autonomous pan-African scientific institutional resource that enjoys the full sponsorship of the AU and its Commission;
- b). Its mandate be centred on the mobilization, primarily on an open competitive basis, of research knowledge produced in various fields of science for the purpose of the advancement of the African development agenda;
- c). Its broad policy directions be set by the AUC and associated stakeholders assembled into a Governing Council that will be chaired at the highest level of the Commission;
- d). Its programme priorities be informed by concerns integral to the unfolding African development agenda in which member states of the Union and interest groups represented in organs such as ECOSOCC have a stake;
- e). Its operations be structured to adhere to the highest standards of institutional integrity and scientific excellence for which a strong Scientific Committee, comprising an admixture of accomplished and widely respected scholars, institution builders, and seasoned administrators of research institutions would be indispensable;
- f). The scientific autonomy and credibility of the Council, along with the integrity and transparency of its governance, should not at any time be negotiable if it is to assume its rightful place as a voice for African science in the international knowledge system;

- g). It be financed initially through an admixture of yearly allocations from the budget of the AUC; supplementary voluntary contributions from member states of the AU; support from African philanthropic individuals and foundations within Africa and its Diaspora; support from private foundations; and support from Africa's bilateral and multilateral development cooperation partners; and
- h). Its long-term sustainability, presence and impact be guaranteed through the establishment of a Trust Fund that will assure a steady flow of core resources for its work.

## Acknowledgements

In carrying out its assignment, the Task Force benefitted from the direct input, encouragement and support of many individuals. The AUC Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology, Mr. Jean-Pierre Enzin and his team, in particular Ms. Vera Ngosi, Mr. Hambani, and Mr. Claude Akotegnon gave generously of their time, experience and insights to ensure the success of the work of the Task Force, and never failed to be available whenever their input was required. Professor Morten Carlson, former Rector of the Swedish Agricultural University, Uppsala, Sweden and former Chair of the Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries (SAREC) shared his first-hand knowledge of the functioning of research councils in Europe generally and Sweden in particular. He was also generous with his feedback on drafts of the report of the Task Force. Drs. Kwame Gbesemete and Tekaligne Godana, both of the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida), participated in the inaugural session of the Task Force. Officials of the Department of Human Resources, Science and Technology of the AUC and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) also made significant inputs into the discussions and debates that took place among the Task Force members.

Leaders and senior managers of various African research councils and council-type institutions contributed very rich comments on the draft report of the Task Force at an all-day consultative meeting held in Nairobi, Kenya. Most of them, too many to list individually here but mentioned in Appendix 3 of this report, shared their thoughts and suggestions at short notice but with an unmistakable depth of commitment and knowledge for which the Task Force is grateful. Staff of the UN African Institute for Economic Development and Planning headquartered in Dakar, Senegal, offered efficient logistical support to the Task Force in respect of its various meetings. Support was also received from the leadership of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa whose commitment to supporting the agenda and efforts of the AUC is well known.

It is the hope of the Task Force that all those whose contributions helped in one way or another to shape the final outcome of this report would, on reading it, consider that the time they expended was well spent. It is needless to add,

however, that the members of the Task Force take full responsibility for the contents of the report.

Adebayo Olukoshi,  
Convenor and Chair of the Task Force.

## Introduction

1. Africa's post-independence development narrative is, in the main, a story of successive concerted efforts aimed at progressively transforming the economic, political and social fortunes of the peoples and countries of the continent for the better. The quest for Africa's developmental transformation has deep roots in history; indeed, as has been documented by a range of historians and ethnologists, it goes far back into antiquity.<sup>1</sup> It was also integral to the mobilization for national independence in the period after the Second World War just as it has remained an abiding feature of all post-independence policy-making at the national, sub-regional and regional levels.<sup>2</sup> It has, additionally, informed much of the region's post-colonial international relations.
2. There is an uncommon unanimity of opinion among Africans on the continent and in the Diaspora that the rapid transformation of the continent is a goal which is as impeccable as it is urgent and that must be accomplished without further delay. And without doubt, the efforts that have been deployed to transform the countries of the continent over the years have certainly registered significant periods and examples of success – Africa has seen and is still undergoing major changes that cut across all sectors. Over the last five years, the on going changes have been underpinned and spurred by an average annual rate of economic growth of about 6%.<sup>3</sup> However, it is also generally recognized that, on account of a combination of internal

- 
- 1 Historians like Cheikh Anta Diop, Walter Rodney, and Basil Davidson, to cite a few examples, devoted a considerable part of their professional careers documenting Africa's development trajectory from antiquity to more recent times.
  - 2 All over Africa, irrespective of the regime types that were established, a common refrain that was shared by governments across the board was a commitment to accelerated socio-economic transformation. Colonial rule was defeated in part because it was seen as a system which stymied African development as much as it assaulted the dignity of the African.
  - 3 This growth rate has come after over two decades of stagnation associated with deflationary thrust of macro-economic policy championed by the Bretton Woods institutions in the name of structural adjustment and although it is not at the optimal level that is required for an even more radical and rapid transformation, it does represent a break from the lacklustre performance of earlier years.

and external constraints, there is still plenty of unfinished business across the continent and much more work requires to be done in order for Africa to be able finally to reclaim its full and rightful place in the comity of nations. It is precisely for this reason that African leaders and policy makers have remained undaunted in the face of the numerous challenges they are confronted with as they continue to explore and pursue various options for delivering long-term sustainable development to the peoples of the continent.

3. Evidence of the magnitude of unfinished business facing Africa's leaders and peoples is abundant. With a population that is fast approaching the one billion mark, Africa is still home to 33 of the 48 countries categorized as the least developed in the world. Average per capita income may have grown in absolute terms over the years but at about USD2,000, it ranks among the very lowest in the world<sup>4</sup>. Some 70% of people living with HIV/AIDS worldwide are to be found in Africa. An average of 1.3 million people die from AIDS annually across the continent, representing 73% of world-wide deaths; about 800,000 people are killed by malaria every year; while child and maternal mortality rates, standing at 900 per 100,000 births, remain the highest for any region of the world. The continent's share of world trade has stagnated at about 3% for years; much of that trade comprises unprocessed raw materials for which prices are volatile and the terms of trade unfavourable.
4. Similarly, Africa's share of foreign investments remains very low at 5.2% of the global total, a lot of it going to mining activities in a small number of countries. Some 380 million Africans are reckoned to be living below the poverty line, representing almost half of the continent's current population. Most of the countries that are expected not to meet several of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) targets by 2015 are African. Looking ahead into the future, policy makers are exercised by the concern to ensure that the demographics of the continent, its vast arable lands, its forests, its immense natural resource endowments, and the reserves of surface and underground water do not become a liability but are rather transformed in a sustainable

---

<sup>4</sup> The average per capita income registered for Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and South Korea in 2007/2008 stood at about USD27,500. The average global per capita income for the same period was estimated at USD10,604. All the figures referred to in this paragraph pertain to 2007 and 2008; they were extracted from various World Bank and World Health Organization reports.

way into resources for uplifting human livelihood on the continent and powering long-term development.

5. Through a combination of individual and collective efforts, African countries have shown themselves to be keen to explore various opportunities for expanding domestic economic production and national productivity, especially in the agricultural and industrial sectors; increasing local value addition in the production of raw materials and natural resources; speeding up and sustaining long-term growth; improving domestic savings and investments; attracting more long-term foreign direct investments; accelerating the levels of domestic technological development; consolidating the agenda of nation- and state-building; consolidating citizen freedom and human rights; building a culture of peace, security, and stability; achieving greater international competitiveness; overcoming poverty; improving citizen well-being and welfare; enhancing the skills and aptitude of the populace; promoting deeper regional cooperation and integration; and scaling up the range, scope, and quality of Africa's participation in the international economic system. The commitment which African countries have shown to the pursuit of these and other related objectives has been manifested in the plethora of sub-regional, regional and international pacts that they have frequently and readily entered into from the 1960s period to date. While the various policy mixes that have been pursued may not always have yielded the optimal outcomes desired, the policy and political commitments that inform and underpin them provide a useful foundation on which to build in the efforts to tackle the unfinished business of continental development and transformation.
6. The unfinished business to which African countries must address themselves can, in the context of the contemporary international environment and the current circumstances of the continent, be summarized as entailing the following broad policy challenges: Food security; poverty eradication; water management; all-round improvements in the health and well-being of the populace; natural resource management; employment creation; gender equality; improved economic competitiveness; energy management; industrial development; infrastructure development; transport and telecommunications improvements; the management of rapid urbanization; adaptation to and mitigation of climate change; peace, security, and stability; human dignity, freedom and rights; and regional cooperation and continental

economic integration. These challenges are at the very heart of the search for a continental re-birth. In many ways, they are the challenges of the moment and of the future. There is a widespread recognition that in order to respond effectively to them and achieve its goals of socio-economic transformation, Africa will need, *inter alia*, to articulate coherent and holistic development policies that draw on the lessons it has learnt from previous phases of its development. *More than this, however, it is also increasingly clear that the continent will need to pay much greater attention to research and development (R&D), the promotion of innovation and the consolidation of a systematic interface between research and public policy, on the one hand, and research and industry on the other.*

7. The evidential base for the important role which research and knowledge have had and continue to play in the developmental prospects of nations is broad and compelling. Historically, the transition which the most advanced economies in the world today made in their development experience was underpinned by major investments in R&D. At the dawn of the new millennium, the United States and the European Union accounted for about 37% and 23% respectively of all global expenditure on R&D. During the same period, together they produced 76% of all global scientific publications and they have broadly maintained these proportions to date. More contemporaneously, the countries of the global South currently driving global innovation and transforming themselves into major players are distinguished in part by the serious, high-level attention which their leaders are paying to the nurturing of domestic research, development, innovation and knowledge systems. Many of these countries shared broadly similar characteristics with Africa in the 1960s. Asia entered the new millennium accounting for 31% of global R&D investments compared to the 0.8% that was recorded for Africa; the region recorded 21% of global scientific publications compared to Africa's 1.4%.<sup>5</sup> Little wonder that only 0.1% of global patents are currently owned by Africans.

---

5 "What do Biometric Indicators Tell Us About World Scientific Output?", *UIS Bulletin on Science and Technology Statistics*, Issue No. 2, September 2005. Also, the UNESCO Institute of Statistics provides comprehensive data on various aspects of the R&D map of the world broken down by region and country. The longitudinal evidence provided by UNESCO's data underscores the central importance of R&D to any serious efforts at transformation. To cite two concrete examples: Turkey tripled its expenditure on R&D over a period of ten years and succeeded in increasing the number of its scientists by

8. Clearly then, the principal question for Africa today can be summed up as follows: *In their shared determination to leap-frog into the centre of 21st century progress, what kinds of investments must African countries make in scientific research and innovation in order to overcome their state of relative underdevelopment?* It is a question which must be answered with all seriousness if science is to become an effective instrument for overcoming underdevelopment, creating wealth, and improving human livelihood in Africa. African leaders took the first step towards responding to this challenge when they resolved that they would allocate 1% of their GDP to R&D activities. However, to date, only South Africa, at 0.9%, approximates this commitment which, moreover is broadly seen as a global “best practice”. The challenge, therefore, remains.

## **Changing the Continental Paradigm: From the OAU to the AU**

9. The establishment in 2000 of the African Union (AU) as a successor to the defunct Organization of African Unity (OAU) marked the dawn of an important new phase in the development of the African continent. Unlike its predecessor which, by the force of historical circumstances, was pre-eminently and justifiably oriented towards the prosecution of the struggle for the complete liberation of Africa from the vestiges of colonial and white minority rule, the AU was called upon to occupy a vanguard position in the post-liberation, post-apartheid quest for the socio-economic transformation of the continent under conditions of sustained development, peace, mutual accountability, and democracy. Thus since 2000, the AU has been involved in the multifaceted task of elaborating standards, programmes and initiatives designed to harness policy and action in virtually all domains of economic, social, political and cultural development on the continent,

---

43%, a development which carried direct beneficial consequences for its socio-economic transformation agenda. By making similar investments, China not only increased the contribution of its scholars to global scientific publications to 10% over a period of five years, it is today second to the United States in terms of its output of research reports and is rapidly increasing in its share of patents, innovation, and markets. See *Knowledge Networks and Nations: Global Scientific Collaboration in the 21st Century*, Royal Society Report on the State of Global science for more details.

incorporating scientific research. It is a task that has been enabled by a rapidly consolidating pan-African policy community congregated primarily around the Union in its headquarter city of Addis Ababa.

10. The championing by the AU for a pan-African development agenda has stimulated collateral interest in the institutional architecture for the realization of the core goals and objectives of continental socio-economic transformation. Beyond the Commission of the Union and other institutions directly connected with its functioning, the effort to articulate and promote the African development agenda has already resulted in the identification of eight RECs to serve as the building blocks for the proposed African Economic Community (AEC). Other steps that have been taken to date include the launching of a New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD); the enabling of an African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM);

#### **Box 1: Some Key OAU/AU African Science Initiatives**

As far back as 1980 when the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) was adopted, attention began seriously to be paid by African leaders acting on a continental platform to the place of science in the quest for transformation. Chapter Five of the LPA was explicit on this. A special protocol annexed to the Abuja Treaty also covered the important role and place of science in the quest for development. However, after the birth of the AU, the range of initiatives pursued has multiplied as has the ambition for the role and place of science in continental development. A prize for technological invention and innovation was inaugurated. A resolution was also adopted to set aside a day for marking African scientific renaissance. A similar resolution was adopted for the commemoration of African technology and intellectual property rights. From the time of its establishment, science and technology occupied a central position in NEPAD's work while at the AU Commission itself, a Department of Human Resources, Science and Technology was created. An annual conference of African ministers of science and technology, AMCOST, a Consolidated Plan of Action on Science and Technology, and the 2007 Addis Ababa declaration on R&D expenditure, the pan-African university and centres of excellence initiative, and a pan-African research competition programme are but a few of the more significant, additional steps taken in recent years.

the establishment of the Pan-African Parliament (PAP); the anchoring of the African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights in the broader framework of the Union; the inauguration of an African Court of Justice; and the establishment of African Export-Import Bank (AFREXIM).

11. Considerable work is also going on towards the establishment of other institutions which will combine with those that have already been created to serve as the key institutional bedrock for the realization and sustenance of the African development agenda. Most notable among these are the proposed African Central Bank; African Monetary Fund; African Investment Bank; African Stand-by Force for peacekeeping operations; and the Pan-African University system. Upon their adoption, the proposed African Security and Governance architectures that are being designed will yield additional institutions and associated mechanisms that should complement existing ones to provide a more robust complex of bodies mandated to implement different elements of the vision for a more integrated and united Africa where the generality of the citizenry are able to enjoy the benefits of development, peace, and freedom on a much higher scale than is the case at present.

## **Harnessing Science for Regional Development**

12. It is in the broad context of the building of the institutional architecture for the achievement of the goals of the African development agenda as articulated by the decisions and actions of the AU and, latterly, encapsulated in its strategic vision document, that the idea of the establishment of the proposed African Research Council (ARC) was mooted. Much more than the defunct OAU, the process of bringing the AU into being and developing its programmes and activities has involved the mobilization of Africa's intellectual resources on a scale never before witnessed in the continent's post-colonial history. Every aspect of the work of the departments that make up the AU Commission (AUC), to cite that example alone, has involved deployment of the skills and experiences of intellectuals drawn from all corners of the continent and the Diaspora. It is a highly significant development which also complements the deliberate creation of the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) as an organ of the Union for the

representation of the voices of the citizens of the continent. Furthermore, both through NEPAD and at the Commission, attention, on a scale never before witnessed continentally, has been paid to the articulation of policy frameworks for science and technology development across Africa. Indeed, as Box 1 shows, a plethora of continental science and technology initiatives has been articulated since 2000 as to signal a new collective commitment to the deepening of the role of knowledge and research in the development of the continent.

13. Although all the departments of the AUC have had recourse to the intellectual resources available on the continent and its Diaspora in the fashioning and realization of their work programmes and plans, the Department of Human Resources, Science and Technology has the additional mandate of being the focal unit in the Commission for promoting the African higher education system towards the goal of consolidating a pan-African knowledge system; addressing gaps in science and technology policy at the national and sub-regional levels; building a solid constituency for scientific research on the continent; forging partnerships that could contribute to the advancement of the frontiers of science in Africa; encouraging the adoption of common/harmonized standards across national boundaries; working with member states to improve national and regional R&D systems; and stimulating cross-border scientific exchanges. In this connection, the Department has launched a variety of initiatives that include the proposed pan-African University system referred to earlier; five centres of excellence in various fields of science; a pan-African policy framework, known as the Consolidated Plan of Action (CPA) for the development of science and technology; a scheme for intra-African student and scholar mobility; and a pan-African annual science research competition.
14. The proposed ARC is envisaged as a key component of the broad architecture of knowledge that is presently in the making under the broad auspices of the AU. *In this regard, the ARC can and must be understood from the outset as an initiative and project of the Union designed to help mobilize research and knowledge both on its own and in complement to other AU and non-AU related knowledge and research institutions for the attainment of the broad strategic objectives of continental development that is the historic lot of the AU to superintend at this time.* Its legitimacy, once established, cannot be separated from the political umbrella of the AU. It is a contextual factor that carries

implications for the nature, mandate, niche, structure, role, governance, and sustainability of the proposed Council.

## Terms of Reference and Method of Work of the Task Force

15. To give further flesh to the concept of the proposed ARC in all its dimensions and develop a comprehensive working document on why Africa needs such a Council, the role which it might play, and the *modus operandi* which it could adopt to realize its mandate, the Department for Human Resources, Science and Technology of the AUC enabled a Task Force made up of seven members drawn from the five sub-regions of the continent to produce this report. The Task Force was mandated, among other things, to:
  - a). Review the institutional terrain of research and knowledge production in Africa with a view to identifying opportunities and gaps with which the AUC can engage in the quest for an integrated continental knowledge system;
  - b). Examine in the light of the review of the institutional terrain of research and knowledge production in Africa, what the case might be for the establishment of an ARC;
  - c). Propose the mandate that the proposed Council could have, the niche it might occupy, and the objectives it should serve;
  - d). Explore the role which the proposed Council could play in building an African research-policy nexus;
  - e). Suggest a structure of governance for the proposed Council; and
  - f). Propose a viable framework for the financing of the Council over the long-term and in a sustainable manner.
16. The membership of the Task Force and the detailed Terms of Reference that guided the team in its assignment are annexed to this report as appendices 1 and 2. In addition to briefing discussions held at the Department of Human Resources, Science and Technology of the AUC by the Chair of the Task Force in December 2010, the members as a group held three meetings of their own. One of the meetings, the inaugural workshop, was held in Addis

Ababa in January 2011 and it involved the participation of external resource persons and observers from the AUC and its partner institutions. An enlarged one-day workshop involving representatives of some of the various regional, sub-regional and national institutions that presently carry out full or partial research council functions in Africa was also convened at the beginning of April 2011 to review the draft report of the Task Force. The names of all interested parties (individual and institutional) consulted are included as Appendix 3 to this report.

## Key Findings and Recommendations

17. On the basis of the extensive review it undertook and the feedback it received from a broad cross-section of the leaders of key African scientific institutions whom it consulted, the Task Force is able to recommend strongly that:
  - a). The ARC be established as an autonomous pan-African scientific institutional resource that enjoys the full sponsorship of the AU and its Commission;
  - b). Its mandate be centred on the mobilization, primarily on an open competitive basis, of research knowledge produced in various fields of science for the purpose of the advancement of the African development agenda;
  - c). Its broad policy directions be set by the AUC and associated stakeholders assembled into a Governing Council that will be chaired at the highest level of the Commission;
  - d). Its programme priorities be informed by concerns integral to the unfolding African development agenda in which member states of the Union and interest groups represented in organs such as the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) have a stake;
  - e). Its operations be structured to adhere to the highest standards of institutional integrity and scientific excellence for which a strong Scientific Committee, comprising an admixture of accomplished and widely respected scholars, institution builders, and seasoned administrators of research institutions would be indispensable;

- f). The scientific autonomy and credibility of the Council, along with the integrity and transparency of its governance, should not at any time be negotiable if it is to assume its rightful place as a voice for African science in the international knowledge system;
- g). It be financed initially through an admixture of yearly allocations from the budget of the AUC; supplementary voluntary contributions from member states of the AU; support from African philanthropic individuals and foundations within Africa and its Diaspora; support from private foundations; and support from Africa's bilateral and multilateral development cooperation partners; and
- h). Its long-term sustainability, presence and impact be guaranteed through the establishment of a Trust Fund that will assure a steady flow of core resources for its work.

## **Basis for Recommendation**

- 18. The rest of this report elaborates on the basis on which the Task Force arrived at its recommendation for the establishment of the ARC and its suggestions for the structure, mandate, governance, and operations of the Council. The arguments developed are presented in nine sections as follows: Terrain, Context and Challenges of Research in Africa; Quest for a Research–Policy Nexus; The Case for the ARC: Why the ARC? Why Now?; The ARC in a Consolidating African Development Agenda; What Type of ARC: Focus and Orientation; Mandate, Objectives and Niche; Structure, Operations and Governance; Sustainability; and Conclusions and Next Steps.

## **Terrain, Context and Challenges of Research in Africa**

- 19. Research Councils constitute an important part of the broader national, regional and/or global knowledge systems on the basis of which governments, corporations and citizens have sought to build and advance the frontiers of science and development. The strong interface that exists between knowledge and development is no longer in doubt, especially today, the age of the knowledge economy and society, in which investments in scientific research constitute a prime tool for securing a competitive advantage and developmental edge. A great majority of research councils exist and function at the

national level but a small number either function regionally/ continentally or which, though nationally-anchored, play regional and global roles as well. The mandates that most of the Councils in existence serve span basic, frontier, applied and policy research. These mandates are frequently sector/ field-specific, though Councils with an omnibus role of supporting all fields of science are not uncommon. The roles they fulfil are also varied, ranging from advisory functions and facilitation duties to direct implementation of activities.

20. As with much else in the contemporary international system, research councils are unevenly distributed across the world, with a broad North–South divide in evidence that generally mirrors the existing knowledge divides.<sup>6</sup> Within the framework of this North–South divide, Africa is the region with the least number of councils. Indeed, there are many countries in Africa which do not have national research councils of whatever kind. For those with councils that are financed by governments – and these are few and far between – there is a generalized problem of sustained public funding which impacts on their full and effective ability to meet their mandates on a consistent basis over the long-run. It is not unusual, therefore, to find research councils originally established as public-funded institutions mobilizing funding support from bilateral donors, multilateral institutions, private foundations, and the organized private sector as the opportunities present themselves (see Box 1 for an illustrative example from Kenya). The overwhelming majority of the national councils that are in existence serve a domestic constituency. However, in recent years, some of them have also begun to develop trans-border ambitions mainly through partnerships and joint programming that could, over time, become significant.
21. Non-governmental council-type institutions do exist on the continent and they play an important role in filling gaps in countries where national councils do not exist. More recently, the non-governmental councils have had to

---

6 It is to be noted, for example, that whereas all the countries of the global North have research councils that are publicly funded, the same is not true for the countries of the global South where councils are not universally present and do not always enjoy predictable public funding. Details of some of the dimensions of the North–South divides that continue to characterize the world of science can be found in several of the flagship reports of UNECSO, including the most recent one entitled *Knowledge Divides: World Social Science Report 2010*.

**Box 2: The Kenyan National Council for Science and Technology (NCST)**

The Kenyan National Council for Science and Technology was established in 1977 under the Science and Technology Act. Cap 250 of the Laws of Kenya. It is currently housed in the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology. As of December 2010, the Council had 44 staff on its payroll while 36 other posts are vacant. It has the responsibility for driving science and technology policy in Kenya, doing so through an advisory role to the government and the coordination of the nation's R&D activities. It has always enjoyed earmarked allocations from the Treasury for its work. However, the funds allocated to it relative to its mandate and needs are insufficient. As a consequence, the Council has been compelled to raise funds from outside government, usually from bilateral and multilateral sources. Indeed, at present, resources from outside government outstrip the amounts allocated to the Council annually by the Treasury. Still, legally, it remains a full public institution.

take on additional responsibilities in the wake of the collapse of the research funding that could hitherto be secured by scholars from their universities.<sup>7</sup> Most of the non-governmental research councils are sector/field-based; a patent unevenness in their distribution across fields of knowledge is in evidence. It is an unevenness that is as reflective of the opportunities that are available for securing donor and/or private sector support as anything else. Thus, such councils as have been established to support medical, agricultural, science and technology, and social sciences research have, on the whole and in spite of the challenges they face, fared generally better than those that work on the arts and humanities.<sup>8</sup> Non-governmental council-type

---

7 All of the better known organizations active in the production of knowledge in Africa today on a regional scale and fulfilling council-type functions are non-governmental: The African Academy of Science (AAS), the African Association of Universities (AAU), the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC), the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), the Organization for Social Science Research in East and Southern Africa (OSSREA), the African Centre for Technological Studies (ACTS), etc.

8 While the field of agricultural and environmental science, broadly defined, enjoys relatively strong institutional development at the national, sub-regional and regional levels with such active bodies as CORAF, CARDESA, SACCAR, ASARECA, and FARA, the same cannot be said of the Arts and Humanities for which there is no single regional

organizations currently exist and function at the national, sub-regional and regional levels.

22. Under normal conditions, the bulk of the research that is carried out in any society is undertaken within the higher education system, with the university serving as the leading site. The prolonged crisis, dating from the early 1980s, which the African higher education system has experienced has, however, taken a huge toll on the infrastructure of and capacity for research. In contexts where research councils, governmental and/or non-governmental, are in existence, the gap created by the collapse during the 1980s and 1990s of university-based research in much of Africa was partly filled by the entry into the region of councils from outside the continent. National councils from Europe, the United States and Australasia have selectively extended their reach to Africa, sometimes doing so to take advantage of incentives provided by their home governments and at other times seeing Africa as a prime site for undertaking specific research experiments. International sector/field-specific councils have also, for the same reasons, established African country and regional offices.<sup>9</sup>
23. At the same time, various domestic and international initiatives designed to help re-build the higher education system across the continent have been launched in recent years. At one level, governments have licensed private universities to operate even as they continue to explore and pursue different reform efforts with regard to the workings and funding of the public universities they own. At another level, administrators of public universities have, for their part, introduced independent measures of their own aimed at laying a new foundation for the promotion of research. Furthermore, private foundations, many of them from the United States, have also pooled resources by which they have invested in selected projects in a selected number of public universities in different parts of Africa. More recently, support has been offered to help revive some of the existing national academies of science alongside the strengthening of the African Academy. Significant

---

council-type institution in Africa. The Social Sciences fare relatively better than the Arts and Humanities with such institutions as CODESRIA, OSSREA, and the AERC being active as do the Medical Sciences which, in a number of countries, are quite strongly represented by medical research councils.

9 This has been particularly so in the fields of agricultural research and medical sciences.

funding has also been made available to select think-tanks functioning at the national level and immersed in most cases in policy research work.

24. Summing up, the institutional terrain of research in Africa is one that is, on the whole, characterized by acute fragmentation within and across countries; poor resource endowments that also speak to the miniscule allocations which governments make to research; a prolonged crisis in the higher education system that has weakened it but which is also spurring various agendas of transformation; the existence of an admixture of public and non-governmental councils sharply unevenly distributed across countries and fields of knowledge; a disproportionate dependence on external donor funding – which, to put it mildly, is not always altruistic – for the organization of knowledge-generation; and the heavy underdevelopment of the national research–policy nexus in most countries.

### **The Quest for a Research–Policy Nexus**

25. The challenges that condition the terrain of research in Africa, both historically and contemporaneously, are many. Significantly, these challenges have mushroomed in the framework of a long-standing disconnect between research and knowledge produced in Africa on the one hand and the policy and decision-making processes in much of the continent on the other hand. The roots of the disconnect are the subject of a lively academic debate that needs not detain us here. Suffice it to note though that at the dawn of independence, a project of national liberation in which intellectuals played a frontal role, research was recognized as being integral to the quest to build and consolidate independent nationhood. Indeed, the pioneer universities that were established by the post-colonial nationalist elites were seen as institutions that were, by definition, integral to the twin project of nation-building and socio-economic development which governments committed themselves to promoting.
26. However, as the independence years wore on and challenges of governance and development accumulated, resulting in the narrowing of the political space in many countries, including the imposition of single-party regimes and military rule, the natural alliance that appeared to exist between the research community, mostly domiciled in the university system, and the post-independence governments began to fray. Mistrust and mutual

misconception rapidly built up as much over purpose, mission and direction as over method, space and considerations of timeliness. Thus it was there that the seeds of the disconnect between indigenous research and the domestic policy community germinated. In many respects, the gulf between the two was to further widen as the independence years wore on. Governments tended to rely on the technical advice of foreign expatriates for their policy decisions. The indigenous research community, feeling marginalized, tended consciously, for its part, to keep a distance from government. The costs of the disconnect to African countries and their efforts at development can only be guessed.

27. There is widespread consensus today that no society can properly develop itself on a sustained basis without mobilizing and effectively deploying indigenous knowledge and research capacities. Or, to put it in another way, no society can go far with its efforts at development solely on the basis of a wholesale importation of foreign ideas and ideologies, to the detriment of the investments which must be made in growing domestic capacities to identify, analyze, and resolve development challenges. It is primarily for this reason that concerns have also been expressed increasingly loudly that African countries need to build an effective nexus between research and policy not just because it is the right thing to do in order for development efforts to be properly anchored but also because ideas still matter, as they have always done, in the development process. Moreover, the world has transited to an era in which in the organization of the economy and society, the systematic generation, nurturing, deployment and renewal of knowledge, always a critical factor in all human history, has become ever more central. Furthermore, the role and place of evidence in contemporary decision-making at all levels speaks directly to the importance of rigorously conducted research carried out to the highest standards on the aptness and appropriateness of policy measures which governments design and implement.
28. At a time when an African development agenda anchored on a twin pillar of integration and socio-economic transformation in an environment of peace and democratic freedoms is rapidly taking shape, a historic opportunity exists to attempt to forge an effective nexus between research and policy on the continent. To this end, African research capacities would need to be harnessed in a *structured* and *systematic* manner to underpin and back the process of the design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and renewal

of the agenda. To do so requires careful reflection on the institutional framework that might be best suited to generate research, harvest research results, and package them for input into the policy processes associated with the pursuit of the African development agenda. It would seem that the proposed ARC, properly conceived and designed, might be the appropriate institutional mechanism that could be developed to help strengthen the much-needed interface between research and policy in Africa today.

### **The Case for the ARC**

29. Thinking about the possibility of and need for the establishment of an ARC over and above the non-governmental pan-African and sub-regional councils or council-type organizations that are in existence has gathered significant momentum over the last 24 months or so. The most immediate justification for the proposal to study the feasibility of establishing such a Council is the desire to better harness research input into the work of continental development which the AU is leading. But, as could be surmised from the preceding paragraphs, the case for the establishment of the proposed Council is far richer and more impeccable. At one level, although regional and sub-regional institutions exist already in Africa even if few in number, uneven in their strengths and quality, and focused on specific fields of knowledge, the proposed ARC will not necessarily duplicate their efforts or displace them from the field of research production and knowledge dissemination. Indeed, at its best, the ARC could, in complementing them, become an important factor for their reinforcement whilst simultaneously filling an institutional gap in the terrain of research and of the research-policy nexus. Also, by its sheer presence, the proposed ARC could contribute to the development of a better coordination among the regional and sub-regional councils that currently exist so that their individual efforts could add up to produce a much greater collective research impact at all the levels desired. In so doing, the fragmentation and atomization of research efforts which is currently in evidence in Africa might, at the minimum, be mitigated. The same collateral benefits from the existence of an institution such as the proposed ARC could also accrue at the national level through the stimulation of the creation of local councils where they do not already exist and the reinforcement of existing ones where they are already in place.

30. At another level, the proposed ARC should contribute to carrying forward the core principles and vision that have been built into the Consolidated Plan of Action for Science and Technology in Africa which was developed and adopted under the auspices of the AU by African governments. The Council will also, without doubt, fit very well into the evolving architecture for an integrated African knowledge system within which, among other initiatives, the Pan-African University project and its five centres of excellence have been conceived. The complementarities between the ARC and the Pan-African University will strengthen efforts at enhancing specialist research capacities in Africa and providing policy officials with a broader evidence base for their work. Furthermore, the subsisting decision by African heads of state and governments to support the exploration of a council on science and technology for Africa could be carried forward for realization under the umbrella of the proposed ARC. In doing so, the continent will be endowed with a regional council that could serve as an additional voice for the African research community in the international knowledge/research system and an effective interlocutor which could engage with research councils from other regions of the world. Considering that no such interlocutor exists at present at the regional level, the proposed ARC will, again, be filling an important gap.
31. Over and above the arguments that have been presented in Paragraphs 29 and 30, the case for the establishment of the ARC is further bolstered by the recognition that one of the main challenges faced by Africa today is to ensure that research occupies a more central role in the policy process. None of the existing councils operating at the continental or sub-regional levels is dedicated to the promotion of policy research as such even if they display an awareness of the importance of the research–policy nexus and have occasional programmes of outreach to policy communities. Yet, given the context within which the idea of the ARC has emerged and the broad terrain on which it will be expected to function, it is clear that a strong need exists for a council that will be sufficiently close to the core pan-African policy instances housed under the AU as to be able to develop a programme of targeted research interventions derived from their preoccupations and concerns to be carried out to the highest standards of critical scholarship and whose results will be fed back into the policy process. It is both a *mobilizing* and *mediating* function which is sorely missing in Africa presently but

which, if realized, could contribute to the emergence of the research–policy nexus for which there is now a considerable yearning across the continent.

32. As part of the consolidating African development agenda which the AU is promoting, a distinct pan-African policy community is also in the making structured around institutions, mechanisms and processes that are concentrated in Addis Ababa but also present elsewhere on the continent in gradually increasing numbers. This emerging policy community is visible as much by its growing numbers and the diversity of skills it embodies as by its increasing impact and reach. Yet, it is still not able to readily call on a commensurate research institution that could accompany it in its efforts using the best traditions and instruments of research. What research it is able to mobilize is procured through informal or personal links that only further underscore the need for a properly structured institutional framework which, on the basis of undiluted research integrity and an unequally unalloyed commitment to excellence, will be available proactively, as well as on request, to mobilize independently generated research results into the consolidating African policy agenda.

### **The ARC in the African Development Agenda**

33. While the case for the establishment of an ARC is clear, the question of its interface with the consolidating African development agenda is both important and delicate and, therefore, bears some further reflection. *The central question which is posed here is how the Council can relate effectively with the emerging development agenda as to be able to respond to the needs of the policy community fully and in a timely manner whilst at the same time staying faithful to its nature as a research institution founded on the highest scientific standards and traditions.* It is a question that speaks to the nature of the proposed Council, the kinds of principles that must guide its engagement, the flexibility and dexterity that it would require to exercise in order to be able to play its role effectively, and the depth of integrity and rigour it must embody and project in order to be both respected and respectable.
34. As has been observed earlier, there is no doubt that in the period since 1994 when the task of continental liberation was formally completed, there has been a growing momentum towards harnessing regional energies to bring about the kinds of socio-economic transformation for which Africans have

yearned for a long time. Thus it was that the OAU was dissolved and the AU was born on the back of a broadly shared determination by Africans to ensure that the 21st century would not pass the continent by. As expected, the AU and its organs set about their mandate with a plethora of initiatives, both conceived within the Commission but also developed and delivered through special programmes such as NEPAD that has recently transmuted into the NEPAD Agency. Within the Commission, various policy initiatives and plans have been developed or are in the making that encompass science and technology, industrial policy and strategy, mining and natural resource management, land reform and use, higher education, social policy, agricultural transformation and food security, infrastructure development, and transportation, to cite a few. Work is also continuing apace towards the establishment of various pan-African development institutions, especially those which are expected to play a key role in investment, financial and monetary matters. The drive towards the formulation of broad policy standards in various social and economic fields is matched by the attention which has been paid to the promotion of shared political values and institutions, including a peer review mechanism, a continental justice and legislative framework, an architecture for governance, peace-keeping, and conflict resolution, and a commitment to a culture of democracy.

35. Clearly, the various initiatives and programmes which the AU has been driving, and which together comprise the contemporary African development agenda, have thrown up various institutions. Conceivably, the ARC would become a part of this emerging pan-African institutional architecture. But perhaps more than this is the fact that the development of the agenda will benefit immensely from a steady flow of research evidence and input on a continuing and systematic basis. However, to date, the process of tapping into the work and experience of the African research community to inform and enrich the formulation and implementation of the African research agenda is fragmented, informal, indirect, and limited. Redressing this situation will represent one of the most powerful arguments for the establishment of the ARC. *It will imply an ARC that enjoys the full confidence and patronage of the AU, its Commission and other organs whilst being simultaneously able to promote carefully targeted research input collected on the basis of the highest scientific standards into the development work of the commission.* To put

it differently, the ARC's place within the African development agenda will centre primarily on bringing science to the policy process and informing scientific research with policy preoccupations.<sup>10</sup> It is a distinct role which is not adequately served on an on-going, permanent basis on the continent; it is a function that is in urgent need of being filled.

### What Type of ARC?

36. Research councils come in different forms and shapes. Depending on their origins and the purpose for which they are established, research councils could be tasked with the goal of either promoting the generation of basic scientific knowledge, the facilitation of the production of applied scientific knowledge, or the encouragement of futuristic, frontier knowledge that enriches the depths of scientific understanding and which may, in some distant future, find practical uses.<sup>11</sup> In practice, irrespective of the specific boundaries that may be defined for them, research councils tend to display varying degrees of hybridity by which they supplement their core mandate with some additional functions. It is, therefore, not uncommon to find research councils mandated to support basic/primary scientific research maintaining a portfolio of applied research projects and *vice versa*. In reality, therefore, while the mandates of research councils always include exercises in boundary setting, the lines that separate basic and applied research are not quite as sharp or as clear cut as is sometimes assumed.
37. In the light of the foregoing, and taking into account the context within which the proposed ARC has emerged, it would seem that the Council would inevitably be called up to nurture, commission, support and deploy research of a basic, applied, and frontier nature to respond, with appropriately measured flexibility, to the policy needs associated with the consolidating African development agenda. The question of where the weight of the

---

10 Handled properly, this role for the proposed ARC could serve as the basis for an African Quadratic Helix in which policy, science, industry and society are organically interconnected to deliver socio-economic transformation.

11 The European Research Council which was established under the auspices of the European Union Commission, for example, has a core mandate of supporting frontier research of the type that would help to ensure that in a rapidly changing world in which new centres of economic power are threatening old established ones, Europe maintains the edge that is necessary to help it to stay competitive.

work of the Council should or will eventually be put is an empirical, not a theoretical one, and it will only be answered fully and satisfactorily on the basis of the multiple realities which the Council will need to take into account as it develops itself after it has entered into operation. What is clear, however, is that irrespective of where the primary accent may be placed, the proximate and ultimate relevance of the Council will be hinged on the extent to which it is able, with the integrity and credibility worthy of a prime scientific institution, to engage the unfolding African agenda with a view to informing its articulation and implementation in direct and indirect ways.

38. If, indeed, the emerging African development agenda is the primary source of inspiration to which the proposed ARC must anchor itself, there will be direct implications for the organization of its work. The African development agenda is a multi-dimensional agenda that necessarily calls for the mobilization of research from different fields of knowledge. Even if that was not the case, the challenges confronting the countries of Africa and which the unfolding development agenda seeks to cover are as complex as they are diverse and inter-locking, requiring the deployment of research knowledge drawn from different fields of science. Furthermore, contemporary knowledge systems are themselves experiencing a mutation in which the rigid disciplinary boundaries of yesteryear are dissolving in favour of growing inter-, cross-, trans-, and multidisciplinary dialogues that are spurring the emergence of new fields of knowledge and the promotion of more broad-based scientific solutions to the range of challenges confronting humankind.
39. While it is very common to find research councils that are mandated to work in specific fields of research and knowledge production, the proposed ARC will, in the light of the challenges of the African research agenda, need to be a more open and flexible entity, rather than a narrowly based, rigid and closed one. *In being open and flexible, the ARC will be able to structure its work and approach in such a way as to mobilize scientific knowledge and results from a variety of fields. Whether the structuring that will occur in practice will be inter-, cross-, trans-, or multidisciplinary will depend on the kind of research knowledge it needs to generate on a specific problem.* In other words, the specific form and structure of research mobilization that the ARC will undertake is, once again, not an abstract one but an empirical one. What is clear is that to be able to respond as robustly and comprehensively as possible to the research knowledge requirements of the unfolding African development

agenda, and to be able to interface research and policy in an effective way, the ARC will need to support knowledge production across various fields of science: engineering and technology; medical and bio-medical sciences; the basic sciences; the social sciences; the agricultural and environmental sciences; and the arts and humanities. *Indeed, the genius of the ARC will comprise its capacity to formulate research projects and programmes that promote collaborative work among researchers working across various disciplines and fields of knowledge to tackle a common problem of interest to the continental policy community and the member states of the African Union.*

40. Proximity to the AU and its development agenda for Africa will come with its distinctive advantages. It will allow the Council to be a privileged and properly informed observer that also enjoys the additional benefit of being able to draw part of its legitimacy from the standing of the Union as the sole recognized political umbrella body for the continent. The organic linkage to the AU which proximity implies will also place the Council in a unique position of being able to formulate research questions deriving from the concerns of the key officials and players associated with and/or involved in the highest continental policy and political instances. Furthermore, the credibility of the Council as a possible additional voice for African policy research will be enhanced as will its standing as a potential interlocutor with research councils from other countries and regions of the world. Finally, proximity is indispensable to the possible role which the Council could assume in forging an African research–policy nexus.
41. However, the credibility of the ARC will also be judged first and foremost as a scientific institution worthy of the name. It is precisely for this reason that its privileged proximity to the AU, its Commission and other organs must be managed in such a way as to ensure that it is accompanied by institutional autonomy and a sufficiently critical distance that will ensure that while science will be mobilized to inform and serve policy, it will not be politically-determined and led whether in the design of research problems, the choice of methodologies and instruments, the interpretation of evidence and results, and the packaging and presentation of findings. To ensure its scientific excellence and integrity without losing its close association with the AU system, careful attention will need to be paid to the crafting of the structure, procedures, processes, and governance of the Council. These questions are addressed further down in this report. Suffice it to note

further at this point that the history of institution-building in Africa is littered with examples of laudable initiatives that ultimately floundered and either under-performed their promise or collapsed outrightly on account of the fact that, lacking autonomy, they became mired in institutional politics originating from their sponsoring agencies and membership.<sup>12</sup> The ARC must not be allowed to repeat this unhappy history.

### **Mandate, Objectives, and Niche of the ARC**

42. It is clear from the argumentation that has been developed up to this stage that the mandate of the ARC, once established, will be to:
  - a). Mobilize, on an open and competitive basis, the very best of African research produced across different fields of science as critical input for informing and engaging the unfolding African development agenda;
  - b). Serve as a critical pan-African connector of the various institutions of science active at different levels and in various fields of knowledge on the continent with a view both to strengthening deeper synergies among them and providing platforms on which they could engage the AU and its organs on a continuous basis;
  - c). Build and sustain a continental research–policy nexus whose content and contours would be informed by the African development agenda;
  - d). Play a leading advocacy role for the importance and place of science in development;
  - e). Mobilize resources within and outside Africa in order to support research activities and programmes that would be developed under its auspices;
  - f). Build partnerships within and outside Africa that will enable it to achieve its mandate;
  - g). Be a voice for African policy research in the global knowledge system; and
  - h). Contribute to the achievement of the global visibility and presence of African scientific research and knowledge production.

---

12 While it will not be prudent for the names of some of the institutions concerned to be cited here, it is important that the lessons arising from their failure at different levels to be taken seriously and borne in mind in structuring the ARC.

43. The overall mandate of the ARC to promote and sustain an African research-policy nexus allows it to pursue a range of more specific objectives such as:
- a). Promoting the production of high level scientific research geared towards addressing Africa's present and future development concerns, doing so, *inter alia*, through the organization of open research competitions;
  - b). Contributing to the strengthening of the institutional basis of knowledge production in Africa across different fields of science;
  - c). Promoting a sustained dialogue of the sciences in Africa;
  - d). Supporting a sustained dialogue between Africa's research and policy communities;
  - e). Stimulating the development of national research and knowledge systems in the member states of the AU;
  - f). Encouraging the development of sub-regional research and knowledge systems as the demand for these emerge and grow;
  - g). Taking an active role in the development and sustenance of standards of excellence for science in Africa, including the development of a continental system of knowledge ranking; and
  - h). Working with and through the Pan-African University initiative, its centres of excellence, other regional research councils and think-tanks, and the universities to consolidate a coherent continental research and knowledge system.
44. The institutional terrain of knowledge production and scientific research in Africa may be as underdeveloped as it is uneven both spatially, across different fields of knowledge, and within different domains of science. Still, there are institutions in existence at the national, sub-regional and regional levels that strive to perform council functions in one form or the other and with varying degrees of success and sustainability. It cannot be that the ARC, in its design and functioning, will emerge on the terrain in order to crowd out, side-step, or erode existing institutions at the national, sub-regional and/or regional levels. Indeed, properly structured and mandated, the ARC should serve to strengthen and further stimulate existing institutions. To be able to do so, it must have a clear, even distinct niche which does not duplicate the functions and roles of existing councils and council-type institutions,

and which adds new value to the terrain of African research and knowledge production.

45. At all levels of development, Africa is not short of challenges which research councils, including the ARC, can and should address. Nevertheless, the ARC will bring three distinct benefits, which would also be its niche, by its entry into the terrain of knowledge production for solving development problems, including the capacity to anticipate them. The first of these benefits is the mobilization of research knowledge explicitly and exclusively designed to respond to the development agenda that is crystallizing on a continental scale around an equally rapidly growing pan-African policy community at the heart of which the AU is located. It is an agenda which, as was noted earlier, will benefit from a thorough and sustained research input. This first benefit feeds into the second one, namely, the nurturing and strengthening of a sustained research–policy nexus on the continent. The absence of such a systematized nexus suggests a gap and a niche waiting to be filled.
46. The third benefit which the ARC could serve without crowding existing institutions or duplicating their functions is the mobilization of research knowledge around concerns that are common to the member states of the AU and from which they will all benefit if it is organized and carried out. Increasingly, African countries share a growing list of common concerns for which no single one of them or any of their national agencies is fully prepared or able to respond because of the challenges of the practical mobilizing cross-border, multinational research networks. Yet, the need for such cross-border, multinational research mobilization is not in doubt as local, narrowly-based solutions proposed for tackling problems like pandemics and natural disasters that do not respect national boundaries manifest their limits and shortcomings.

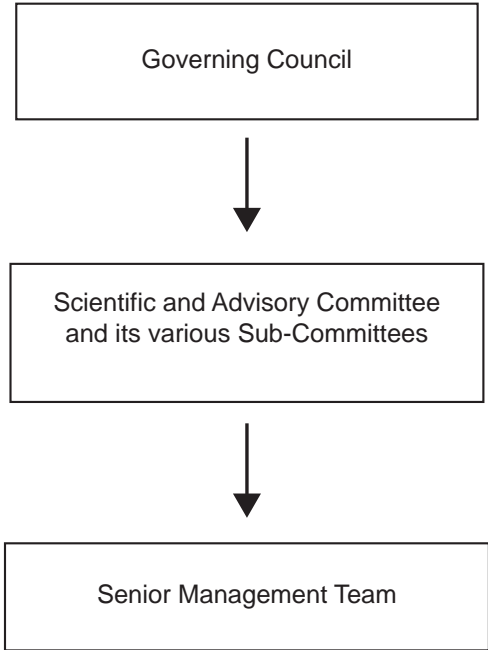
### **Structure, Operations and Governance of the ARC**

47. Careful attention to the structure, operations, and governance of the proposed ARC is indispensable to the construction of its relevance and credibility. Relevance and credibility do not always seat together easily but they are also not necessarily incompatible. Looking at different models of research councils in existence and keeping in mind the mandate which the proposed ARC could serve, it would seem indispensable that the Council should be

established from the outset as an autonomous institution with its own independent structures, operational procedures, and governance framework. It is equally important that, from the outset, the Council should be structured in a manner that is sustainable, allowing for efficiency in operations and ensuring that overhead costs are kept at a minimal level in relation to programme outlays. Furthermore, checks and balances need to be put in place in order to ensure that the Council is not thwarted or hijacked by an unaccountable management, an overambitious chief executive, or an irresponsible governing board.

- 48. In the light of the considerations outlined in paragraph 47, it would be prudent to launch the proposed Council as a pan-African institution operating out of a designated headquarters location of its own. At least in its years of formation and consolidation, the temptation to establish offices in different parts of the continent, whether countries or sub-regions, should be resisted as much for the heavy cost burden that could be implied as for

**Figure 1: Structure of the Proposed ARC**



the dissipation of energies that will be involved. Rather than proliferate offices across the continent, the ARC could, from its headquarters anchor itself institutionally by opening its doors to existing research councils and council-type institutions on the continent to affiliate with it. In doing so, these existing institutions, and any other ones that may come on stream, could serve as institutional focal points across the continent for the ARC, helping to extend its reach and serving as partners in the design and implementation of its programmes. In thus creatively avoiding to be burdened by the need to establish field offices in different parts of the continent – at its foundation, the Council will be able to devote its energies to developing and consolidating its internal institutional structures and mechanisms with a clear focus on programme areas and how they might be organized, external relations, and finance and administration, including the management of grants.

49. All councils, especially the most successful ones among them, have clearly defined operational procedures to guide their work. The proposed ARC cannot avoid having such procedures properly set out and put in place at the same time as it begins to function. It is not within the mandate of the Task Force to outline what the procedures that should be employed might be. However, it is proper to establish a number of guiding principles that should inform the establishment of such procedures. Here, perhaps the most important consideration to keep in mind is internal institutional accountability and an unalloyed transparency before all constituents in the work and workings of the Council. Clarity of internal and external guidelines and procedures, as well as the free accessibility of the guidelines and procedures to all interested parties constitute an essential prerequisite for institutional credibility. In its operations, the proposed ARC must not only be representative, inclusive, fair and accountable, it must always be seen to be so and its rules-building and application will benefit from being guided by this principle.
50. To propose that the ARC should be established as an autonomous but accountable institution founded on the highest standards of scientific excellence is one thing; operationalising autonomy, excellence and accountability is quite something else and calls for the application of some of the best experiences available in institution-building. This task is made all the more complex by the fact that the ARC will not simply be established as a regular,

mainstream or generic research council but as an institution that will employ core council functions to support an evolving development agenda and foster a pan-African research–policy nexus. The challenge of this for institutional governance is two-fold and can be summarized as credibility and relevance. The Council will need to enjoy a system of governance that imbues it with the highest scientific credibility and inspires confidence. At the same time, its governance system cannot be indifferent to the important goal of underpinning the African development agenda with well-considered research input.

51. In the light of the foregoing, and guided by considerations of transparency, accountability, autonomy and relevance, the Task Force proposes that the ARC should aim to operate a three-tier system of governance comprising a Governing Council, a Scientific Advisory Committee, and a Senior Management Team. While the Governing Council will be responsible for setting broad policy guidelines and direction, the Scientific Advisory Committee will play the role of a technical working group composed of top scientists with an impeccable track record across different fields of competence and which will be charged with assuring the scientific pertinence and quality of the work of the Council. The Senior Management Team will be established as the collegiate body that will be responsible for the day-to-day management of the affairs of the Council, and the implementation of the decisions and recommendations of the Governing Council and the advisory Scientific Committee. Details of the specific powers, prerogatives, duties and responsibilities of the three organs need not be spelt out in this report; they will be detailed in the statutes of the ARC. What is really important is to ensure that in crafting them, a robust system of accountability imbued with appropriate checks and balances is put in place.

### **Sustaining the ARC**

52. The history of the development of institutions in Africa is replete with many examples of noble initiatives that came to nothing in the end on account of an inadequate reflection on how they might be sustained over the long-term. It is important that this familiar fate should not be allowed to befall the proposed ARC. In particular, the question of stable, significant, sustainable, and long-term financing for the ARC is one which requires to be given careful consideration from the outset. The Task Force noted that in general,

most research councils around the world benefit from a significant amount of public funding, that funding being a mark of the recognition by their home governments of the importance of research to the national development process. As a regional council, there is a case that could be made for the ARC to benefit from such public support from the member states of the AU and from the annual budgetary allocations of the AU itself.

53. However, realistically, it is also clear that the Council cannot hope to receive the entire quantum of resources which it will require from the member states of the AU and from the AU itself. The reasons for this are many – and perhaps obvious – but need not detain us.<sup>13</sup> It is to be expected that, building on its mandate, the ARC will source support from bilateral and multilateral partners outside the continent. Such support can be expected to flow in depending on the initial confidence which the Council inspires in various donor quarters, and the faith which they subsequently develop in its long-term relevance and viability. But while all such donor support should be tapped by the Council, it is important to know that it does come with its own costs too and managing those costs in order to diminish their impact on the work of the institution must rank as a high priority.<sup>14</sup>
54. Over the long-term, as the Council consolidates itself, the Task Force recommends that serious consideration should be given to the creation of an ARC Trust Fund to which AU member states, bilateral and multilateral donors, private foundations, and philanthropic organizations could contribute resources. The initial size of the Fund will be tied to the broad vision that would underpin the foundational strategic plan of the Institute. Resources for the programmatic work of the Council will be derived from the Fund on a yearly basis; the governing organs will have the responsibility for ensuring its regular replenishment. Details of the modalities for drawing from the

---

13 Suffice it to note here that the AU itself suffers from the financial shortfalls arising from the inability of its Member States to meet its budgetary needs fully. A significant number of countries also fail to meet their annual assessed contribution to the organization. As of the end of 2010, five Member States were responsible for 75% of the approved annual regular budget of the Union.

14 A frequent cost which scientific institutions that raise funds from various donor sources carry is the amount of energy that is drained writing reports to them. Also, it is not unusual for some donors to seek to hijack institutional agendas, erode organizational autonomy, and impose conditionalities that add up to hamper institution-building.

Fund could be worked out if the idea is embraced but its chief advantage will lie in its potential to assure the Council of stable, multi-year financing that can enable it to make a strong impact as soon as possible after it is launched.

## Conclusion and Next Steps

55. In the considered view of the Task Force, the case for the establishment of the ARC is a strong one. The Council, once established as an organization sponsored and mandated by the Union, will fill important gaps in the terrain of research in Africa and in the continental quest for better interfacing research and policy. Properly structured and governed, it could become a standard-bearer for the best in African science, organizing the production of research within defined fields, facilitating dialogues with various policy communities, acting as a voice for African science within and outside the continent, and contributing to the strengthening of the institutional basis of science at the national, sub-regional and regional levels. The autonomy which the Council should naturally enjoy and the scientific excellence for which it must strive at all times are, in the view of the Task Force, compatible with a relationship of proximity to the AU. That proximity should be deployed judiciously to enable the Council deliver on its core mandate of contributing to the advancement of the African development agenda.
56. Building on the strong endorsement which the Task Force has delivered in support of the idea of the establishment of the proposed ARC, it is suggested that in the lead up to the internal decision-making process of the AU that would review the recommendations contained in this report, immediate steps be taken to draft the statutes and internal regulations of the proposed Council. Also, steps should be taken to launch a constituency-building series of consultations both within the AUC and its affiliated institutions, and among the various institutions that comprise the African higher education and scientific sector. It is, after all, these institutions that would serve as important external pillars for the Council when it begins to function. Furthermore, early steps should be considered for opening dialogues with potential funders of the initiative within and outside the African continent.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Members of the ARC Task Force

### Convener and Chair

Professor Adebayo Olukoshi, Director, United Nations African Institute for Economic Development and Planning, Dakar, Senegal and Interim Executive Director, African Governance Institute, Dakar, Senegal.

### Members

Professor Malika Benradi, Professor, Faculty of Law, Université Mohammed V, Rabat, Morocco;

Dr. Kirana Bhatt, Chair of the Medical Research Committee, National Council for Science and Technology of Kenya, Nairobi, Kenya;

Dr. Ousmane Kane, Director of External Relations and Partnerships, National Academy of Science and Technology of Senegal, Dakar, Senegal;

Dr. Pinkie Mekgwe, Deputy Director, Office for International Education and Exchange, University of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana;

Professor Stephen Aderibigbe Olomola, Departmental Director, Nigerian Institute for Social and Economic Research, Ibadan, Nigeria;

Mr. George Omondi, Director, ARRFORUM, Nairobi, Kenya.

## Appendix 2: Terms of Reference for the ARC Task Force

1. The African Union Commission (AUC) is undertaking a process that is expected to lead to the establishment of an African Research Council (ARC). When established, the proposed ARC will function as a critical and an autonomous pan-African resource for facilitating research across all fields of knowledge in support of the African development agenda. It is envisaged that in full bloom, the ARC will act as a key apex research facilitation institution encompassing the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, biomedicine and technology. It is expected that the Council will contribute to

the emergence of a properly functioning continental research system whose strategic interventions will help to build a better interface between knowledge produced in Africa and the continental development agenda.

2. As part of the preparatory work towards the launching of the ARC, the UN African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP) has been identified as a suitable partner to undertake a consultancy for the AUC that will involve conceptualizing the route by which the proposed Council could be established. The task will be led by the Institute's Director, Professor Adebayo Olukoshi, who will take the primary responsibility on behalf of IDEP to produce a concept note on how the AUC might proceed with its efforts at establishing the ARC.
3. The concept note to be produced should be informed by the AUC's desire to build an ARC that will:
  - a). Play a central role in supporting research in Africa;
  - b). Do so as an organisation sponsored/launched by the AUC;
  - c). Enjoy legitimacy among the key players in research and knowledge production, dissemination and consumption in Africa and beyond;
  - d). Work autonomously of the AUC whilst being conscious of the research and knowledge needs of the African development agenda;
  - e). Build credibility speedily as to be able to attract material and non-material support within and outside Africa;
  - f). Work in synergy with national, sub-regional and regional research organisations already existing on the continent;
  - g). Contribute to the consolidation of an African research system that works from the national level through to the sub-regional and regional levels;
  - h). Help, through its activities, to strengthen the African research underpinnings of the continental development agenda;
  - i). Enjoy the capacity to be able to interface with similar research council's around the world;
  - j). Be internally governed in a manner that is both accountable and effective – and is seen by key stakeholders to be so; and

- k). Move swiftly to a point where it could become self-sustaining and self-propelling in all senses.
4. The Office of the AUC Commissioner Human Resources, Science and Technology shall be the primary focal point for the completion of this assignment and for any follow-up activities that might flow from it.

### **Appendix 3: Key External Observers and Participants at ARC Inaugural and Consultative Meetings**

Professor Shaukat Abdulrazak, Director, National Science and Technology Council of Kenya, Nairobi, Kenya;

Professor Olu Ajakaiye, Director of Research, African Economic Research Consortium, Nairobi, Kenya;

Dr. Abdallah Bujra, Director, Development Policy Management Centre, Nairobi, Kenya;

Professor Morten Carlson, former Rector, Swedish Agricultural University, Uppsala, Sweden;

Dr. Kwame Gbesemete, Embassy of Sweden, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia;

Dr. Tekaligne Godana, Swedish International Development Agency, Stockholm, Sweden;

Dr. Karuti Kanyinga, Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Development Studies, University of Nairobi, Kenya;

Dr. Temba Masilela, Deputy CEO, Human Science Research Council of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa;

Professor Paschal Mihyo, Director, Organisation for Social Science Research in East and Southern Africa;

Dr. Sospeter Muhongo, Professor, University of Dar es Salaam, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania;

Dr. Godwin Murunga, Lecturer, Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya and Director, African Leadership Centre, Nairobi, Kenya;

Dr. Ebrima Sall, Executive Secretary, Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, Dakar, Senegal;

Professor John Ssebawufu, Director of Research, African Association of Universities, Accra, Ghana.

