

The OR Tambo Africa Research Chairs: Transforming the African Research Landscape

1. Background

The contributions of science, technology and innovation (STI) for socio-economic development are acknowledged in major global and regional frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals and the African Union's Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA-2024), as essential both for advances in science, and for seeking solutions to the major challenges epitomised in the sustainability discourse. Within this context, human and institutional capacity development are key to achieving the research excellence and innovation required across the continent. While there are many exceptional scientists, both in Africa and among the African diaspora, with the potential to do leading edge research, a constrained resource base and weak institutional capacities limit their potential to flourish as world leaders, become catalysts for new ideas and innovations, and train the next generation of scientists.

Research Chairs are normally granted in recognition of individual leadership and talent and recognize the commitment of universities to supporting high-quality research. Chairs foster prestige and visibility for individuals to catalyze expertise in a given area and train the next generation of scholars. Chair holders are expected to meet set targets for staff development, and additional funds are provided for supporting post-doctoral and postgraduate students under the supervision of the respective Chair holders. Such research hubs play a critical role in the development of a national or regional research system. Canada's pioneering Canada Research Chairs programme began in 1997 and has funded almost 2000 research chairs to date. The successful South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI) was established in 2006 to attract and retain excellence in research and innovation at South African public universities. This initiative has met ambitious targets for supporting traditionally excluded groups and disadvantaged institutions, as well as for gender parity (including through a call exclusively for female candidates). Another example is the trilateral Chairs programme that began in 2017 with funding from Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and South Africa's National Research Foundation (NRF) to support world-class researchers in Canada, South Africa and a partner African country.

2. OR Tambo Africa Research Chairs Initiative

The proposed OR Tambo Africa Research Chairs combine political, development and higher education objectives. They aim to honour a leading figure in the development of African unity; have a catalytic impact on the development of research infrastructure in recipient countries; and contribute to knowledge production and high end skills in alignment with AU Agenda 2063 and STISA 2024. Through international and regional strategic partnerships, the Chairs will contribute to the development of long term mutually beneficial research collaborations on the continent.

"In 2017 we commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of one of the most important leaders of South Africa's liberation struggle, namely Oliver Reginald Tambo, who led the African National Congress during the years of exile. Mr. Tambo was not only a committed pan-Africanist but also an advocate of science and technology", *Department of Science and Technology, December 2017*

3. Objectives of the OR Tambo Africa Research Chairs Initiative

The key objectives of the initiative are to:

- a. Contribute to expanded research and innovation capacities in and for Africa, in alignment with AU Agenda 2063 and STISA 2024;
- b. Attract and retain excellent researchers and scientists within Africa's higher education system;
- c. Contribute to Africa's global research competitiveness while responding to the continent's socio-economic needs;
- d. Contribute to Africa's career pathways for young and mid-career researchers, with a strong research, innovation and human capital development output trajectory; and
- e. Honor and promote the legacy of OR Tambo, emulating his values of professional excellence, integrity, inclusiveness, honesty, humility and respect for human dignity.

4. Scope of the OR Tambo Africa Research Chairs Initiative

The OR Tambo Africa Research Chairs Initiative builds on and leverages existing continental frameworks and interventions geared towards institutional capacity strengthening; the development of high end skills; recruitment and retention of excellent researchers; and incentives to support research that contributes to socio-economic and transformative development. The Science Granting Councils Initiative (SGCI) in sub-Saharan Africa, the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) Centres of Excellence, the Strengthening Higher Agricultural Education in Africa (SHAEA) initiative, and the Alliance for Accelerating Excellence in Science in Africa (AESA) are examples of prominent initiatives contributing to this mission. The OR Tambo Africa Research Chairs Initiative seeks to **build** on these initiatives, on a **pilot basis**, and with an **initial focus on countries participating in the SGCI**.

The SGCI is a multi-funder initiative that aims to strengthen the capacities of 15 science granting councils (public science funding agencies) in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) in order to support research and evidence-based policies that will contribute to economic and social development. The SGCI:

- Represents 15 countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Senegal, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Botswana) in Western, Southern and Eastern Africa, and allows for geographical spread;
- Comprises public science funding agencies, who as partners will contribute to the sustainability of the chairs during and beyond the initial period of support provided;
- Reinforces existing structures to ensure that the chairs are not implemented in isolation of existing institutional capacities within national research systems;
- Provides further opportunity for capacity strengthening in the context of science granting councils through partnership in the identification of national priorities (in focusing the chairs), the research and grants management process, national support for chairs, and reinforcing the intended science-policy linkages in implementing the chairs; and
- Presents an opportunity to build critical mass of high-calibre research activity, and hence credibility.

It is the intention to establish an **initial ten (10) OR Tambo Africa Research Chairs** across the African continent, focused on research priorities¹ identified by each host institution in conjunction with, especially the SGCI and

¹Broad priority areas linked to existing continental frameworks and complementary initiatives have been identified as follows: climate change, poverty and inequality, food security, unemployment and skills development, energy, notions of

ARUA countries, and in alignment with AU Agenda 2063 and STISA 2024. Gender, disciplinary and geographical spread will be underlying considerations in the awarding of a chair. **At least 60% of the chairs shall be female holders, and up to 40% in the Humanities and Social Sciences.** Each Chair will be **applicable for one 5-year term** in the first instance, with a possibility of renewal for up to two additional terms of five years each, subject to excellent performance and availability of funds.

5. Guiding Principles

The following principles will inform the awarding of the Research Chairs to a successful host institution:

- a. The OR Tambo Africa Research Chairs Initiative is a strategic programme aimed at **strengthening research and innovation capacities in public research-intensive universities in Africa**, enhancing the training of a new generation of researchers and the further development of established researchers in all knowledge areas while responding to national priorities and strategies;
- b. Research Chairs shall be **held by an African research-intensive public university** in partnership with other higher education and research institutions, or the private sector, in the country, region or outside Africa;
- c. **Public research-intensive universities in SGCI participating countries** will bid for Research Chairs in an open and competitive process. A Research Chair will not be pre-allocated to an institution or SGCI participating country;
- d. Each applicant public university must **work with the SGC in their country** to align their proposal to relevant research priorities, after which the application can be submitted to the NRF;
- e. The **university must have a suitable candidate** identified before submitting an expression of interest;
- f. The **Chair holder will be expected to dedicate at least 80% of their time to conducting research, training postgraduates, and mentoring emerging researchers;**
- g. Research Chairs are **tenable to established researchers who are recognised internationally as leaders in their respective fields**, and have received substantial international recognition for their research contributions.

6. Institutional Requirements

Research Chairs will be awarded to public research-intensive universities in Africa that can host Research Chairs in their own right. Only institutions that adequately demonstrate research strength and competencies in the identified thematic/ research priority area of the Research Chair and have the required research support infrastructure will be considered for awarding of the Research Chairs. In addition, host institutions will be required to contribute the salary component of the Research Chair holder. Other universities and research institutions, nationally, regionally and outside Africa, may be involved as partners. The application must demonstrate the host institution's enabling environment for such a Chair, including a sustainability plan.

7. Candidate Requirements

Proposed Chair holder(s) must submit a relevant proposed research programme that is responsive to the scope of the OR Tambo Africa Research Chairs Initiative.

identity, water conservation, good governance, materials development and nanotechnology, urbanisation and habitable cities, non-communicable diseases, migration and mobility, post-conflict societies, artificial intelligence, and science and innovation policy. Preference may be given to research closely linked to these themes.

8. Partnerships and Collaboration

The OR Tambo Africa Research Chairs shall be supported through a collaborative model involving African public research intensive universities, African science granting councils (funding agencies), international funding agencies, the private sector and the not-for-profit sector. South Africa’s Department of Science and Technology, the NRF South Africa, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) Canada, and the Oliver & Adelaide Tambo Foundation have confirmed support of the initial ten (10) pilot Research Chairs at a cost of approximately **USD215 000 per year per research chair**. A partnership model will be pursued for further support and expansion of the initiative, for example, with leading international and South African universities with focus and track record working in Africa, who are prepared to contribute through human capital, sharing of laboratory space, exchange of post-docs, and/ or financially.

Partnering in the context of SGCI

SGCI participating councils are expected to play a key role in the selection, implementation and sustainability of the chairs. The following contribution is envisioned:

- a. The selection process
 - Disseminating, identifying and engaging with potential applicant universities, targeting research intensive universities within their national systems, to ensure proposals are aligned with national interests.
- b. Contributions to the chairs
 - Financial contribution e.g. to support postgraduate students (this could be earmarked from an existing pool of funds for postgraduate students) or % to the research chair’s salary component, in accordance with existing national guidelines.
 - Other types of support, both direct and indirect to ensure the success of this initiative.
- c. Administration of the chairs
 - Support to ensure effective management of the chairs, and that results are well-disseminated and utilized.

9. Next Steps

The application and selection process will be conducted using a two-phased approach (institutional expressions of interest and detailed applications) coordinated by the NRF, which will eventually oversee the Chairs once awarded. *Applications will be submitted in English. Efforts will be made to translate the call documents and the application process in French and Portuguese.* The timeline below is proposed:

December 2018	Launch of call for institutional expressions of interest
May/June 2019	Launch of closed call for applications
October 2019	Beginning of tenure of first Chair holders
September 2024	End of tenure of Chair holders