

AFRICALICS

THE AFRICAN NETWORK FOR ECONOMICS OF LEARNING, INNOVATION,
AND COMPETENCE BUILDING SYSTEMS

RESEARCH COORDINATION AREAS (RCAs): INTEGRATING AFRICALICS ALUMNI INTO INNOVATION and DEVELOPMENT (I&D) RESEARCH

WORKSHOP REPORT
MARCH 2026





Group photo of participants during the RCA workshop held at Eka hotel, Nairobi

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Background

Since 2022, AfricaLics has taken significant steps to shape and support research that responds meaningfully to Africa's development challenges, with innovation at the centre. One of the key strategies that has emerged in this period is the creation and strengthening of Research Coordination Areas (RCAs). RCAs are thematic knowledge clusters designed to foster research collaboration, support knowledge exchange, and link academic research to real-world policy and development needs. To date, four RCAs have been established under AfricaLics, each aligned with a critical area of innovation and development (I&D) research on the continent:

- STI Measurement in Africa
- Global Value Chains (GVCs), Innovation, and Industrialization
- Advancing Inclusive Agricultural Innovation for Climate Resilience in Sub-Saharan Africa (AACRA)
- Innovation and Sustainable Energy Transition in Africa (I-SET Africa)

For more information on the AfricaLics RCAs, please visit the [AfricaLics RCAs webpage](#).

An overview of the collaborating partners in each of the AfricaLics RCAs (institutions and scholars) is included in Annex I.

Purpose and rationale

Building on the progress achieved since the inception of the first RCAs in 2022 the AfricaLics network, with support from the AfricaLics Research Capacity Strengthening (RCS) project, convened a research workshop in connection with the RCAs. The overall purpose of the event was to strengthen the RCAs as a mechanism for ensuring that AfricaLics academy and Visiting Fellowship Programme (VFP) alumni remain active in African I&D research while simultaneously supporting joint research activities and collaboration in the RCAs as a foundation for enhanced sustainability of the network.

The workshop, which was held on 9th – 11th March 2026 at Eka Hotel, Nairobi, served as a platform to consolidate progress, enhance collaboration, particularly between interested AfricaLics alumni (some of whom were already involved in the RCA work and others who joined for the first time), and align future research direction with AfricaLics' broader network goals. An overview of the participants in the workshop is included as Annex 2.

The event was designed to bring together RCA coordinators, senior I&D experts, and relevant scholars (including early-career researchers/ AfricaLics alumni) to discuss practical ways to strengthen cooperation within each of the four areas. Specific elements of cooperation during the workshop included, but were not limited to, joint development of research proposals, co-creation of knowledge products, and development of policies for enhanced visibility and alignment with AfricaLics' objectives. The programme of the workshop is included as Annex 3 of this report.

Key objectives

The key objectives of the workshop were:

- a) To ensure the integration of 7 additional AfricaLics VFP and academy alumni engaging in ongoing work within the RCAs.
- b) To support ongoing work within the RCAs aimed at increasing research activities, knowledge production, and fundraising for joint research projects.

The workshop focused on deepening thematic engagement and knowledge integration within and across RCAs through the following activities:

- Presentation and discussion of AfricaLics research capacity building initiatives and bibliometric analysis results to inform emerging research priorities and trends within Africa's innovation and development landscape.
- Updates on existing new state-of-the-art (SOTA) reports by RCAs, including ongoing work, lessons learned, and identified gaps for future research collaboration.
- Presentation of draft SOTA reports by new RCAs, showcasing progress, findings, and potential policy implications.
- Dedicated time for each RCA to work on joint research proposals or other tasks identified by the RCAs as important for their future work.
- Discussion on the contribution of RCAs to the development of the AfricaLics Knowledge Base, a repository for innovation and development research in and for Africa.
- Facilitate collaborative brainstorming to identify and evaluate potential funding sources that can support current and future RCA initiatives.

DAY I

Overview of anchoring of RCAs: role in AfricaLics network and links to the new AfricaLics RCS project

The session began with introductions, followed by an in-depth overview of the anchoring of Research Coordination Areas (RCAs) within the AfricaLics network, led by Dr. Ann Kingiri. The overview emphasized continuity in AfricaLics' core mission since its establishment in 2012: to promote high-quality, Africa-led research on innovation and development that informs policy and practice. Participants were reminded that the RCA concept builds on earlier efforts, particularly thematic research chairs initiated in the network's early years, and represents a more structured approach to fostering collaboration, knowledge exchange, and policy engagement. The RCAs were presented as central mechanisms under the AfricaLics network, designed to deepen research coordination across thematic areas while maintaining alignment with AfricaLics' longstanding vision.



Dr. Ann Kingiri giving the opening remarks during the workshop.

Participants were also reminded that the workshop was made possible by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)-supported RCS project administered by ACTS as a spoke of AfricaLics. More specifically, the funds for the workshop are provided for under the third pillar of the RCS project, which aims at ensuring that early career researchers who are also alumni of the AfricaLics academies and/or the AfricaLics VFP remain engaged in African I&D studies, thereby capitalizing on and scaling up work done in the past 12 years to support the field of innovation and development studies in Africa, particularly as it relate to major developmental challenges in Africa. Participants in the workshop were encouraged to think beyond traditional academic outputs toward more accessible and policy-relevant knowledge products, including databases, repositories, and other dissemination tools that could enhance the visibility and usability of research outputs.

A key theme in this session was the growing importance of the AfricaLics alumni network. Alumni were highlighted as critical contributors to ongoing activities, not only as beneficiaries of past capacity-building initiatives but also as active collaborators, mentors, and knowledge producers. Their role was seen as pivotal in sustaining the network, especially in a changing funding landscape. In addition, it was suggested that the RCAs should consider how they could contribute to the AfricaLics Knowledge Base (available on the AfricaLics website). The development of the Knowledge Base is a strategic priority for the network that will help support new scholars in the field.

Bibliometric analysis of AfricaLics Research Capacity-Building (RCB) activities 2012-2024

The second session, facilitated by Dr. Maruf Sanni, presented findings from a bibliometric analysis of AfricaLics research capacity-building (RCB) activities spanning 2012–2024.



Dr. Maruf Sanni presenting the bibliometric analysis results.

The analysis assessed the scholarly productivity, collaboration patterns, and thematic focus of outputs generated through AfricaLics flagship programmes such as the PhD Academy, Visiting Fellowship Programme (VFP), and conferences. The findings indicated that AfricaLics has supported the generation over 400 peer-reviewed publications and more than 6,000 citations across its programmes, demonstrating significant academic impact. Research outputs were strongly aligned with Africa-focused challenges, particularly in areas such as agricultural innovation, STI policy, inclusive innovation, and industrial development.

The analysis also revealed several important dynamics. First, earlier cohorts of programme participants showed relatively higher publication outputs and citation impact, suggesting that it takes time for results to materialize, while also underlining the importance of sustained post-programme support. Second, collaboration networks, while growing, remained somewhat fragmented across thematic clusters, pointing to opportunities for stronger integration an issue that the RCA framework is expected to address. Finally, some key challenges identified included the need to further address gender imbalances in participation in AfricaLics activities, structural barriers to publishing (notably high open-access costs), and the limited mechanisms for tracking alumni career trajectories and research impact over time.

The session concluded by highlighting the need for enhanced mentorship structures, writing support, and more systematic post-programme engagement.

World Café: RCA Brainstorming Session

The World Café session, facilitated by Prof. Rebecca Hanlin, provided an interactive platform for participants to collectively reflect on the operationalization of RCAs. Discussions were structured around three central themes: (1) how RCAs should function and collaborate, (2) the development of the AfricaLics Knowledge Base, and (3) the role of RCAs in strengthening research capacity in innovation and development studies.

Summary of feedback from participants

The World Café session generated a rich set of ideas on how RCAs can strengthen collaboration, build knowledge systems, and contribute to research capacity strengthening (RCS) in Innovation and Development (I&D) across Africa. The feedback reflects a strong collective emphasis on moving toward more coordinated, impactful, and contextually grounded research ecosystems.

1. *Strengthening RCA Collaboration and Research Contributions*

Participants highlighted the need for RCAs to function as highly collaborative, cross-country research networks. A key priority is the development of joint research agendas that address clearly identified gaps rather than producing research for its own sake. This includes promoting comparative, multi-country studies, systematic reviews, and stronger theoretical contributions grounded in African contexts.

There was also a strong call for alignment with national and continental priorities, ensuring that research contributes to real-world challenges and policy needs. Participants emphasized building networks of research teams, enhancing peer review processes, and securing funding particularly for mobility and collaborative projects to sustain these efforts. Overall, RCAs are seen as vehicles for creating a pipeline of new, relevant knowledge and strengthening Africa-led research narratives.

2. *Developing a Knowledge Base and shared resources*

A central theme was the importance of establishing a robust, accessible Knowledge Base to support research and collaboration within and across RCAs. Participants proposed creating a centralized knowledge management platform that includes open-access publications, datasets, policy briefs, training materials, and preprints.

This platform should be interactive, transparent, and user-oriented, serving diverse stakeholders such as researchers, policymakers, and educators. Suggestions included integrating bibliometric tools, developing thematic resource repositories, and enabling crowd-sourced contributions. The Knowledge Base is also envisioned as a tool for curriculum development, evidence sharing, and strengthening the visibility of African research outputs.

3. *Building research capacity in I & D (teaching, learning, and policy engagement)*

Participants identified multiple ways RCAs can contribute to research capacity strengthening (RCS). Mentorship emerged as a key priority, including both formal and informal mentoring structures, writing workshops, and support for early-career researchers.

In teaching and learning, there were calls to develop updated curricula, Massive open online course (MOOCs), and professional training programmes that reflect current research and industry needs. Strengthening research methodologies (both qualitative and quantitative) was also emphasized as critical for improving the quality of I&D research.

In terms of policy engagement, participants stressed the importance of bridging the gap between research and practice. This includes producing policy briefs, engaging with policymakers, supporting internships in policy institutions, and contributing to the design of contextually relevant policy frameworks rather than relying on imported models. Greater engagement with continental STI bodies and initiatives was also identified as a priority.

4. *Cross-Cutting Themes and Strategic Priorities*

Across all discussions, several overarching priorities emerged:

- The need for stronger coordination and communication across RCAs, including cross-RCA working groups.
- A focus on contextually grounded, high-impact research that contributes to theory-building.
- Increased emphasis on multi-stakeholder engagement, including policymakers, practitioners, and development actors.
- The importance of visibility and dissemination, including publications, policy outputs, and knowledge-sharing platforms.

STI measurement RCA

The AfricaLics STI Measurement RCA, established in November 2022, aims to strengthen Africa's knowledge base and research capacity in innovation measurement. Its core mission is to develop an Africa-led research agenda on measuring STI that reflects local realities rather than relying solely on frameworks developed in the Global North. Emphasis is placed on collaboration among researchers, policymakers, and practitioners, ensuring that measurement approaches are both theoretically sound and practically relevant.

The presentation outlined the evolution, current state, and future direction of Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) measurement in Africa, as coordinated under the AfricaLics Research Coordination Area (RCA). It reflects a growing, yet still underdeveloped, field that seeks to better capture innovation realities across African contexts. Significant progress has been made in fostering dialogue and scholarly engagement. Activities such as webinars, conference sessions, and international panels have brought together diverse stakeholders from over 20 countries. These platforms have enabled critical reflection on whether existing STI metrics are appropriate for African contexts, while also encouraging the exchange of ideas and experiences. One of the AfricaLics webinars organised by the RCA was organised jointly with AUD-NEPAD.



Dr. Abiodun Egbetokun presenting the SOA report on behalf of the STI measurement RCA.

Bibliometric and thematic analyses revealed that STI measurement research in Africa is emerging but expanding. Historically, the field has been influenced by OECD-led frameworks,

focusing on standard innovation indicators and their adaptation to developing economies. Over time, the research focus has evolved:

- Pre-2017: Emphasis on innovation indicators and their role in shaping policy.
- Post-2017: Increased attention to innovation policy and its link to economic development.
- Post-2019: Stronger focus on Africa as a distinct research context, alongside growing interest in digitalization and Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technologies.

The analysis identified four major thematic clusters, including traditional STI metrics, innovation in developing countries, South Africa-specific studies, and emerging themes such as digital transformation and technology policy across Africa. Despite progress, the report highlighted critical gaps in how innovation is conceptualized and measured in Africa. To address these, a forward-looking research agenda is proposed, focusing on:

- Aligning STI measurement with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and broader societal impact.
- Developing high-quality datasets and data governance systems.
- Advancing new analytical frameworks, especially for firm-level innovation.
- Conducting empirical research on informal sector innovation, a major yet under-measured component of African economies.
- Measuring the impact of digital technologies and 4IR developments.
- Integrating environmental sustainability into STI metrics.

These priorities reflect a shift toward context-sensitive, inclusive, and impact-oriented measurement approaches.

The RCA proposed several initiatives to deepen research and collaboration:

- A webinar and comparative research project on informal sector innovation (e.g., South Africa and Nigeria).
- Special journal issues in leading STI and development journals.
- A proposed edited handbook on STI measurement in Africa.
- Continued conference engagement to sustain dialogue and visibility.

The SOA report underscores that STI measurement in Africa is transitioning from adapting external models to developing contextually grounded frameworks. The emphasis was placed on capturing the complexity of African innovation systems, particularly informal economies and digital transformation, while linking measurement to Africa's development outcomes.

Global Value Chains RCA

The GVC Innovation, and Industrialization RCA aims explore how African countries can leverage GVCs, foster innovation, and promote industrialisation to improve their economic standing in an increasingly interconnected global economy. The presentation provided a comprehensive and forward-looking account of how African economies participate in, and can upgrade within, global production systems. It situates the research agenda within both empirical realities of African industrial structure on GVCs, innovation systems, and firm capabilities.

The presentation began by highlighting a central structural challenge: despite its large population and resource base, Africa contributes relatively little to global economic output and remains marginally integrated into high-value segments of global value chains. Instead, most African firms are concentrated in low-value-adding activities, such as raw agricultural production, mineral extraction, and basic processing. The low value positioning of Africa in the GVC reflects a broader industrialisation and productivity gap, where African economies export raw materials but capture limited value from downstream activities like manufacturing, branding, and distribution. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is framed as a key opportunity to restructure regional production and support industrial upgrading, though its impact depends heavily on complementary capabilities and policies.



Dr. Oluseye Jegede presenting the SOA on behalf of the GVC RCA.

The presentation identified a set of interconnected constraints that keep African firms “locked” in lower segments of GVCs:

- Technological constraints: limited access to automation, digital tools, and advanced production systems
- Low productivity and quality: restricting competitiveness in export markets
- Weak innovation systems: underdeveloped R&D ecosystems and limited firm-level innovation capacity
- Institutional fragmentation: poor coordination and implementation of industrial and innovation policies
- Low absorptive capacity: firms struggle to adopt and effectively use new technologies

These challenges align closely with broader GVC literature, which shows that upgrading requires not just participation, but capability building, institutional support, and learning mechanisms.

A key motivation for the RCA is the lack of robust empirical evidence linking firm-level technology adoption and institutional and policy support systems. This gap limits policymakers' ability to design effective interventions for upgrading. The report positions the RCA as a response to this deficiency, aiming to generate data-driven insights across multiple African contexts.

The research was grounded in a rich interdisciplinary framework combining:

- Global Value Chain Theory (Gereffi et al.): explains how firms enter and upgrade within global production networks.
- National Innovation Systems Theory (Lundvall, Freeman): emphasizes institutional support for innovation.
- Absorptive Capacity Theory (Cohen & Levinthal): focuses on firms' ability to learn and adopt external knowledge.
- Institutional Theory (North): highlights governance and policy environments
- Dynamic Capabilities Theory (Teece): explains how firms adapt and innovate in changing environments.

Together, these perspectives reflected a consensus in the literature that upgrading is a systemic process, requiring alignment between firm capabilities, networks, and policy frameworks. The study adopted a comparative, multi-region approach, focusing on sectors where Africa is globally significant but underperforming in value capture:

- West Africa (Cocoa): dominant in production (~70% of global supply) but limited processing and manufacturing
- Central Africa (Mining): critical supplier of strategic minerals (e.g., cobalt in DRC) but little downstream industrialisation
- East Africa (Coffee & Agriculture): emerging examples of upgrading through quality, certification, and branding

These cases illustrated a consistent pattern: Africa participates in GVCs primarily as a supplier of raw inputs, while higher-value activities remain externally controlled.

The SOA was structured around five major objectives:

- Assess technology adoption (digital, production, organisational) across firms
- Identify firm-level determinants of upgrading (skills, R&D, management)
- Evaluate policy effectiveness in supporting GVC participation
- Develop a strategic framework for innovation-driven upgrading
- Explore network learning and collaboration for sustainable industrialisation

These objectives reflected a shift from simply analysing participation in GVCs to understanding how upgrading occurs in practice. Over a 36-month period, the RCA aims to deliver:

- Firm-level datasets and technology adoption indices
- Comparative cross-country analyses
- Policy briefs and academic publications
- A strategic framework for innovation-driven GVC upgrading
- Practical industry roadmaps for policymakers and firms

The emphasis is not only on academic contributions but also on policy relevance and stakeholder engagement, including partnerships with institutions such as the African Development Bank, UNCTAD, and national research bodies. The GVC RCA SOA report framed Africa's development challenge not as a lack of participation in global markets, but as a failure to upgrade within them. The proposed research agenda reflects a maturing perspective in the literature: that integration into global value chains is not sufficient; what matters is how firms learn, innovate, and move into higher-value activities.

Innovation and Sustainable Energy Transition in Africa (i-SET)

The i-SET RCA seeks to promote sustainable, inclusive, and innovation-led energy transitions in Africa. Key objectives include: Promoting research on inclusive, sustainable energy transitions; Strengthening local innovation systems and technological capabilities; Enhancing gender-sensitive approaches to energy innovation; Facilitating stakeholder dialogue through workshops, webinars, and panel sessions; Informing policy through evidence-based research and strategic communication. Its conceptual foundation lies in the Learning, Innovation, and Competence-Building Systems (LICS) framework, which emphasizes that sustainable energy transitions depend on the co-evolution of technologies, institutions, and human capabilities, rather than isolated technological adoption. The presentation highlighted the structural challenges and opportunities shaping Africa's energy future. At its core, the presentation is built around what it describes as the African energy paradox: a continent richly endowed with renewable energy resources, yet characterized by widespread energy poverty, technological



Dr. Aodu Babatunde presenting the SOA report on behalf of the I-SET RCA.

dependence, and limited participation in global clean energy systems. Despite contributing minimally to global carbon emissions, Africa bears a disproportionate burden of climate

impacts, while approximately 600 million people still lack access to electricity and millions rely on harmful traditional fuels for cooking, with severe health consequences.

The presentation justified the need for this research coordination effort through four interrelated structural concerns. First is the ecological imperative, as Africa's biodiversity is increasingly threatened by climate change. Second is the persistence of energy poverty, which continues to constrain economic and social development. Third is technology dependence, reflected in the continent's reliance on imported energy technologies and limited domestic manufacturing capacity. Finally, the presentation highlighted gender blindness, noting that women are disproportionately affected by energy insecurity but remain underrepresented in energy innovation systems. Together, these challenges underscore the need for inclusive, locally driven, and system-oriented approaches to energy innovation .

Drawing on a review of over 38 African-authored studies, the SOA report mapped the evolving intellectual landscape of energy transition research on the continent. It identifies several dominant perspectives, including the push for clean energy and decarbonisation, the transition from traditional to modern household energy systems, the concept of a just energy transition that integrates development, employment, and climate goals, and the growing importance of off-grid and decentralized energy solutions. Renewable energy deployment particularly solar, wind, and hydro power features prominently across the literature. However, the report emphasizes that these approaches are increasingly being complemented by calls for more holistic frameworks that incorporate local industrial development, gender inclusion, and labour market transformation.

In examining the innovation landscape, the report highlighted a diverse but uneven set of developments. Technological innovation is evident in the expansion of renewable energy systems and the integration of digital technologies associated with the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Policy innovation is also emerging, with instruments such as renewable energy auctions and carbon pricing mechanisms. At the same time, there is growing attention to business model innovation, gender-responsive design, and niche areas such as green hydrogen. Despite these advances, the report underscores that innovation in Africa's energy sector remains externally driven and structurally constrained.

A central finding of the SOA analysis was the presence of significant capability gaps. While African countries have demonstrated relatively strong capacity in deploying renewable energy technologies especially solar photovoltaic systems they lack the manufacturing and technological capabilities needed to produce these systems domestically. Large-scale energy projects are typically dominated by foreign engineering, procurement, and construction firms, while local firms are confined to smaller-scale activities. Even in decentralized energy systems such as mini-grids, ownership and control are largely foreign. This pattern reveals a critical limitation: Africa is participating in the energy transition primarily as a consumer and installer of imported technologies, rather than as an innovator or producer.

In response, the i-SET RCA proposed a forward-looking research agenda that seeks to address these structural weaknesses. Central to this agenda is the need to build technological and institutional capabilities, including the development of indicators to measure progress and the evaluation of local content policies aimed at enhancing value addition and job creation. The analysis also emphasizes the importance of interactive learning processes, examining how knowledge is generated and shared across different energy projects and institutional settings. Another key priority is the development of digital competencies to support the emerging

green economy, alongside a strong commitment to mainstreaming gender in energy innovation systems.

The presentation also documented early progress made by the i-SET RCA, including capacity-building initiatives such as webinars, contributions to academic publications, and the submission of multiple research proposals addressing topics such as critical minerals, climate resilience, and sustainable trade. These efforts reflect a broader strategy of community building and network formation, bringing together researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to co-produce knowledge and influence policy. Overall, the i-SET RCA SOA report advances a clear and important argument: Africa's sustainable energy transition cannot be achieved through technology transfer alone. Instead, it requires the development of robust, inclusive, and context-specific innovation systems that enable the continent not only to adopt clean energy technologies, but also to produce, adapt, and innovate around them.

Advancing Inclusive Agricultural Innovation for Climate Resilience in Sub-Saharan Africa (AACRA) RCA

The AACRA RCA seeks to advance conversations around inclusive agricultural innovations for climate resilience in sub-Saharan Africa with particular emphasis on gender, inequalities and promoting the production of underutilized and indigenous crops through agrobiodiversity, using an agricultural innovation systems approach. This RCA aligns with the AfricaLics agenda, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and the African Union Agenda 2063 by contributing to knowledge production and dissemination in the field of I&D, build research capacity and collaboration among scholars, and providing data and evidence to inform policy decisions on the continent. The RCA SOA report presented a rich and policy-oriented narrative on how agricultural innovation can be reimagined to address the intertwined challenges of climate change, food insecurity, and social exclusion across the region. The report argued that while innovation in agriculture has expanded significantly over the past two decades, it has often failed to deliver equitable and resilient outcomes, largely because it has not been sufficiently inclusive or context sensitive.

The presentation began by situating the discussion within the broader vulnerability of Sub-Saharan Africa to climate change. The region is described as one of the most severely affected globally, facing frequent extreme weather events and possessing limited adaptive capacity. This vulnerability is particularly concerning given that more than 60 % of livelihoods depend on rain-fed agriculture, making rural populations highly exposed to climatic shocks. These pressures are further intensified by global and regional disruptions, creating a complex risk environment for food systems. The report introduced a striking paradox: despite the proliferation of agricultural innovations and development interventions, hunger and food insecurity persist. The explanation offered is not a lack of innovation per se, but rather a lack of inclusiveness in how innovation is designed and how innovative solutions are (or are not) implemented and distributed.



Dr. Mercy Salami presenting the SOA report on behalf of the AACRA RCA.

Smallholder farmers, women, and marginalized groups are often excluded from innovation systems, while indigenous knowledge systems are insufficiently integrated. Moreover, many interventions have prioritized productivity gains without adequately addressing resilience, sustainability, or equity. The report emphasized South–South collaboration, interdisciplinary approaches, and the development of a knowledge base that reflects African realities. In doing so, it aligns agricultural innovation with broader development frameworks such as the African Union’s Agenda 2063 and continental science, technology, and innovation strategies. Methodologically, the SOA report was grounded in a systematic literature review (SLR) combined with bibliometric analysis, covering studies published between 2000 and 2025. This approach allowed the authors to trace the evolution of research themes, map collaboration networks, and assess the extent of African authorship and knowledge production. The findings revealed that early research in the field was largely theoretical, but over time has shifted toward empirical and region-specific studies, with a growing emphasis on practical, technology-driven solutions and resilience-oriented interventions. The literature was dominated by themes such as climate-smart agriculture, food security, nutrition, gender inclusion, and innovation systems approaches. More recent scholarship reflects an increasing awareness of “polycrisis” conditions where environmental, economic, and social challenges intersect and calls for integrated responses to agricultural transformation. There was also evidence of strengthening collaboration networks, with African countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa playing more central roles in knowledge production, alongside growing South–South partnerships.

Despite these advances, the report highlighted several persistent weaknesses in the research and policy landscape. The evidence base remains fragmented, with significant contextual diversity across countries and regions. There are notable gaps in how innovation is conceptualized and measured, particularly in relation to informal systems and indigenous

practices. Data limitations further constrain the ability to assess long-term resilience outcomes. At the same time, however, the report identified emerging opportunities, including the rise of African-led, interdisciplinary research and a stronger focus on inclusivity and policy relevance. Building on these insights, the AACRA RCA outlined a forward-looking research agenda centered on four priority areas. First, there is a need to better understand African modes of inclusive and informal innovation, which often operate outside formal systems but play a critical role in resilience. Second, the report called for deeper integration of gender, youth, and indigenous knowledge into climate adaptation strategies. Third, it highlighted the importance of agrobiodiversity, including neglected and underutilized species, as a pathway to more resilient food systems. Finally, it emphasized the development of context-sensitive metrics and longitudinal data to better capture resilience and innovation outcomes over time.

The report also drew out important implications for policy and practice. On the policy side, there is a strong call to support locally adapted innovations, strengthen access to inputs and markets, and build institutional frameworks that promote inclusion and adaptive capacity. On the practice side, the emphasis is on co-creation of solutions with farmers and communities, leveraging informal knowledge systems, and providing targeted capacity-building support for marginalized groups, particularly women and youth.

In terms of activities and progress, the AACRA RCA has begun to establish itself through webinars, conference contributions, and research collaborations focused on topics such as digital financial inclusion, youth participation in agripreneurship, and sustainable agricultural technologies. These efforts reflect a broader commitment to building a community of practice that connects researchers, policymakers, and practitioners. Overall, the AACRA RCA SOA report placed emphasis on a shift toward inclusive, participatory, and contextually grounded innovation systems that recognize the diversity of actors, knowledge systems, and environmental conditions across the continent. By placing inclusion at the center of agricultural innovation, the report envisions a transformation of food systems that is not only more productive, but also more equitable and resilient in the face of ongoing climate challenges.

Panel discussion: Funding of networked research in Africa and policy implications

The panel discussion on funding of networked research provided a critical and experience-driven reflection on the realities of conducting collaborative, multi-country research in Africa, while also examining how such efforts intersect with policy and practice. The session was framed around three guiding questions: 1) the challenges and opportunities of networked research, 2) the dynamics of policy-relevant research, and 3) the implications of these for funding strategies and proposal development.

Challenges and opportunities of networked research

Panellists highlighted that while networked research is increasingly necessary given the rise of interdisciplinary, multi-institutional, and transnational research, it is often constrained by practical and structural challenges. Key issues include limited financial resources for implementation, difficulties in mobilizing and coordinating teams across institutions and countries, and communication barriers, particularly when collaboration is not supported by regular in-person engagement. In addition, participants noted challenges in articulating the

value of I&D research to non-academic stakeholders, such as industry, which can limit opportunities for broader engagement and funding. Concerns were also raised about ensuring academic and policy impact, as well as the need for clearer boundary-spanning approaches and stronger support systems for resource mobilization.



Panellists during the panel discussion session

Despite these constraints, the discussion underscored significant opportunities associated with networked research. These include the ability to leverage diverse skills and expertise, enhance research quality through collaboration, and promote conceptual rigor and methodological innovation. Participants also emphasized the value of engaging with stakeholders beyond academia, contributing to more inclusive and impact-oriented research. Networked approaches were seen as particularly well-suited to advancing inclusive innovation and sustainability agendas, while also fostering pan-African research communities. Importantly, RCAs were identified as a promising platform for collaborative, cross-country research, including initiatives that may initially be unfunded but driven by shared research interests and long-term vision.

Dynamics, challenges and opportunities of policy- and practice-relevant research

The panel also explored the complexities of conducting research that is both academically rigorous and relevant to policy and practice. A central challenge identified was the persistent difficulty of bridging the gap between research and policymaking, often exacerbated by limitations in data availability and measurement frameworks. Participants also noted the need for greater clarity regarding what drives research agendas, particularly in contexts where external funding priorities may shape research directions.

At the same time, the discussion highlighted important opportunities for strengthening the relevance and impact of research. These include the need to rethink conceptual approaches and research questions, ensuring that they are grounded in African contexts and responsive to real-world challenges. Participants emphasized the importance of adopting a strategic and systems-oriented vision, engaging with diverse policy instruments, and drawing on interdisciplinary expertise. A key recommendation was to move toward more collaborative and participatory research models, including the co-creation of research agendas with policymakers, practitioners, and other stakeholders. This approach not only enhances relevance but also increases the likelihood of policy uptake and real-world impact. The formation of broader research consortia beyond RCAs was also identified as a pathway for strengthening both research quality and impact.

Implications for funding strategies and proposal development

The insights from the panel have important implications for how RCAs approach funding and proposal development. Participants emphasized the need for a more strategic and selective approach to funding, focusing on high-quality research that addresses clearly defined challenges. Leveraging existing networks and social capital, as well as learning from previous engagements with funders, was highlighted as critical for improving funding success. The discussion also underscored the importance of engaging with policy communities early in the research process, ensuring that proposals are aligned with policy priorities and demonstrate clear pathways to impact. Participants called for a shift toward decolonizing research agendas, promoting African-led priorities, and reducing reliance on externally driven frameworks.

In addition, there was recognition of the need to expand funding sources, including tapping into regional and continental mechanisms, while also advocating for greater investment from local governments in research and innovation. Strengthening the visibility of I&D research, building capacity among policymakers, and developing a better understanding of policy implementation processes were identified as key strategies for enhancing both funding prospects and long-term impact.

Overall, the panel discussion highlighted that while networked and policy-relevant research presents significant challenges, it also offers substantial opportunities for advancing high-impact, collaborative, and contextually grounded I&D research in Africa. The session reinforced the need for strategic alignment between research design, stakeholder engagement, and funding approaches, positioning RCAs as critical platforms for driving both academic excellence and meaningful developmental outcomes.

Conclusion: Day one of the RCA workshop

Day one of the RCA workshop served as a foundation for the discussions and activities that followed, bringing participants together to reflect on the current state of Innovation and Development research in Africa while establishing a shared understanding of priorities and challenges. The day successfully created a space for collective sense-making, where participants examined existing knowledge, identified gaps, and highlighted the need for more theoretically grounded and contextually relevant research approaches. A central outcome of the day was the recognition that advancing I&D research in Africa requires not only stronger conceptual frameworks but also more coordinated and collaborative approaches, particularly in relation to cross-country and networked research. Discussions underscored persistent structural challenges ranging from funding constraints to publication barriers while also

pointing to opportunities for rethinking policy narratives and research impact, especially through the development of more context-sensitive indicators and methodologies.

Importantly, day one clarified the evolving role of RCAs as dynamic, co-created platforms that extend beyond discussion to include agenda-setting, proposal development, and engagement with policy and practice. By situating RCAs within the broader AfricaLics ecosystem, participants were able to better understand their role in contributing to research capacity strengthening and the long-term development of the field. In conclusion, day one laid a strong foundation, generating momentum, shared purpose, and a clear direction for subsequent sessions. It set the stage for more focused proposal development and collaboration, reinforcing the importance of alignment between research priorities, funding opportunities, and collective action in advancing I&D research in Africa.

DAY 2

Setting the scene for day 2

Day two of the RCA workshop marked a clear transition from the reflective and exploratory discussions of day one to a more focused, action-oriented phase centered on developing research proposals. The overall aim of day two was to support RCAs in translating initial ideas into structured research proposals. To achieve this, the day was organized into two intensive working sessions designed to guide participants through the core elements of proposal development.

- Session 1 focused on refining the problem statements and rationales underpinning each proposal. RCAs were encouraged to clearly articulate the “why” of their research, ensuring that proposed projects address critical gaps and priority challenges within their thematic areas. This session also emphasized the importance of agreeing on a shared theoretical and empirical framing, providing a solid conceptual foundation to guide subsequent research design and analysis.
- Session 2 shifted attention to the operational aspects of proposal development, including the selection of appropriate research methodologies, data sources, and analytical approaches, as well as the development of realistic timelines. This session also provided space for RCAs to refine and consolidate their proposals, ensuring clarity, coherence, and readiness for presentation. Together, these sessions created a structured pathway for RCAs to move from broad conceptual discussions to well-defined, collaborative research plans, laying the groundwork for presentations, feedback, and further refinement in the subsequent stages of the workshop.

Presentations on RCA proposal overviews

A key highlight of the day was the series of presentations delivered by different RCAs, which provided insight into the diverse thematic priorities and methodological approaches emerging across the network. These presentations not only showcased initial research ideas but also created space for critical feedback and collective learning.

- The STI Measurement RCA focused on the urgent need to rethink how innovation is measured in African contexts. Building on innovation systems literature, the group emphasized alternative frameworks such as DUI (Doing, Using, Interacting) and STI (Science, Technology, Innovation) modes of learning, alongside efforts to develop contextually relevant indicators. A central ambition of this group is to contribute to a “Cape Town Manual” i.e. a conceptual and methodological guide for measuring innovation in Africa, potentially supported by collaborative research projects or curated academic outputs if funding is secured.
- The GVC RCA presented an ambitious research agenda aimed at understanding how African economies can achieve innovation-driven upgrading within global and regional value chains. The group outlined multiple research objectives, including examining the efficiency of industrial and trade policies and developing frameworks for strengthening participation in value chains. Empirical focus areas such as cocoa, coffee, and mining sectors across different regions of Africa were identified as entry points. However, the discussion also highlighted important challenges, including the need for clearer conceptual focus, alignment between theory and empirical work, and manageable scope of initiatives taken by this RCA.
- The I-SET RCA addressed the intersection of innovation and sustainability, particularly in the context of Africa’s energy challenges. The group highlighted the continent’s diverse energy resources alongside persistent issues such as limited electricity access and climate vulnerability. Recognizing the breadth of the topic, the RCA proposed a set of prioritized research areas to guide their work, focusing on feasible and impactful entry points within the broader energy transition agenda.
- The AACRA RCA presented a proposal centered on knowledge integration for climate resilience in agriculture and forestry systems. Their framework emphasizes the role of institutional arrangements, socio-economic conditions, gender dynamics, and land governance in shaping innovation and resilience outcomes. The group proposed a mixed-methods approach, including systematic reviews and country-level case studies across several African countries, while remaining open to refining their proposal through feedback and collaboration.



Participants during the RCA workshop

Beyond the presentations, day two also served as a platform for collectively advancing proposal development. Each RCA moved from broad thematic interests toward more structured research plans, including clearer articulation of research questions, theoretical foundations, and methodological approaches. A recurring feature across the proposals was the balancing act between ambition and feasibility. While many groups proposed wide-ranging and interdisciplinary research agendas, feedback from discussants and participants emphasized the importance of narrowing focus, clarifying conceptual linkages, and ensuring coherence between different components of the research design. This was particularly evident in discussions around the GVC proposal, where questions were raised about the relationship between innovation, industrial upgrading, and policy analysis, as well as the appropriate level of analysis. Participants actively engaged with each other's ideas, offering suggestions on case selection, methodological innovation, and potential outputs.

Several cross-cutting insights emerged from the day two sessions. First, there was a shared recognition of the need to ground research more firmly in African contexts, while still engaging with and contributing to global theoretical debates. Second, the importance of methodological innovation and rigor was repeatedly emphasized, particularly in relation to data collection, comparative analysis, and interdisciplinary integration. Third, the discussions reinforced the need for clear pathways from research to impact, whether through policy engagement, capacity building, or the development of practical tools such as indicators and frameworks. Finally, the value of peer feedback and iterative refinement became evident, as groups used the opportunity to test and improve their ideas in a supportive but critical environment.

Overall, day two of the workshop represented a significant step forward in moving RCAs from conceptual discussions to concrete research planning. Through presentations and interactive discussions, participants were able to clarify their ideas, identify gaps, and strengthen their proposals, while also gaining insight into the work of other RCAs. The day concluded with a sense of collective momentum, as participants recognized the importance of continued collaboration and cross-RCA engagement. By sharing ideas and providing constructive feedback, the workshop fostered a stronger sense of community and laid the groundwork for more refined, collaborative, and impactful research initiatives moving forward.

DAY 3

Recap from Day 2 and setting the scene for Day 3

Day 2 highlighted that all RCAs had successfully moved from broad thematic discussions to the development of initial project ideas, ranging from book projects and special issues to large-scale, multi-country research proposals. However, the feedback received during the presentation sessions also underscored several important areas for improvement. A recurring theme was the need to ensure strong alignment between theory, research questions, and overall project objectives. In several cases, participants were encouraged to revisit their conceptual frameworks to ensure that they meaningfully supported the research aims. Another key insight related to managing ambition. While the proposals were widely recognized as innovative and forward-looking, participants were advised to remain realistic in scope, including the importance of developing "Plan B" options in case of constraints such as

limited funding or data availability. This reflects a broader understanding that successful research design requires a balance between ambition and feasibility.

The importance of clearly articulating the “why” or purpose of the research was also emphasized. RCAs were encouraged to refine their rationales, recognizing that projects may simultaneously serve multiple objectives, such as strengthening the RCA, advancing a particular research field, and contributing to broader societal or policy impact. In addition, the discussions highlighted the need for stronger coordination and collaboration across RCAs. Participants proposed the establishment of coordinating mechanisms or focal points to ensure regular communication, identify synergies, and avoid duplication of efforts. While funding pathways had been identified in several proposals, these were often not yet fully developed, indicating an area for further work.

Setting the scene for day 3: from ideas to actionable plans

Day three was framed as a dedicated working session, providing RCAs with the time and space to refine their proposals and integrate feedback. Unlike the previous day, no formal presentations were scheduled, allowing participants to focus entirely on collaborative work and internal discussions. The emphasis for the day was on translating initial ideas into more coherent and actionable research plans. Participants were encouraged to revisit their project designs with particular attention to:

- Strengthening the alignment between theory, methods, and objectives
- Clarifying research questions and intended contributions
- Identifying feasible pathways for implementation and funding
- Incorporating feedback from peers and discussants

Given the limited time available, RCAs were encouraged to focus on developing well-structured initial concepts, rather than fully polished proposals. This iterative approach acknowledges that research development continues beyond the workshop setting. RCAs were tasked with developing a clear annual work plans by the end of the session, outlining concrete next steps, responsibilities, and timelines. This included answering practical questions such as:

- Who will take the lead on specific components of the proposal?
- What are the immediate priorities for further development?
- How will collaboration be sustained after the workshop?

These annual workplans and progress reports will be reviewed by the AfricaLics Scientific Board through the AfricaLics Secretariat. The final session of the day was designed to bring participants together to discuss these next steps collectively, ensuring alignment across RCAs and reinforcing the sense of a shared research community. The overarching message was clear: while the workshop provided a valuable space for intensive engagement, its true impact would depend on the ability of RCAs to carry this momentum forward, transforming initial ideas into sustained research collaborations and impactful outputs.

Working session: RCA proposal revision

The working session on proposal revision provided a focused and collaborative space for RCAs to refine their research proposals considering the feedback received during day two presentations. Facilitated by the RCA leads, the session emphasized peer learning, critical

reflection, and iterative improvement, aligning with established approaches that highlight the value of structured feedback in strengthening research design and coherence. During this session, RCA members revisited their proposals with particular attention to key issues raised previously, including the alignment between theoretical frameworks and research questions, the need to clarify project objectives and underlying rationales, and the importance of ensuring feasible scope and methodology. Discussions within groups were highly interactive, allowing participants to collectively interrogate their assumptions, refine conceptual approaches, and identify gaps or inconsistencies in their proposals.



RCA's group members during the working sessions.

The facilitation by RCA leads played a critical role in guiding these discussions, helping groups to prioritize revisions, structure their ideas more clearly, and maintain focus on achievable outcomes. At the same time, the session reinforced the importance of collaborative revision, where peer input and dialogue contribute to improving both the quality and clarity of research proposals. Overall, the session marked an important step in moving from initial ideas to more coherent and actionable research plans, while also strengthening collaboration within RCAs.

It underscored the iterative nature of research development, where feedback-driven refinement is essential for producing robust and competitive proposals.

Way forward and next steps

The final plenary session, facilitated by Dr. Margrethe Holm Andersen, focused on consolidating the outcomes of the workshop and defining a clear pathway for future collaboration and impact. Building on earlier discussions, the session reaffirmed the role of RCAs as co-created platforms for advancing research, fostering collaboration, and contributing to the development of I&D in Africa. A key area of discussion was RCA engagement in the AfricaLics Conference 2026, with participants encouraged to submit papers and explore opportunities for thematic and special sessions. This was positioned as an important milestone for showcasing RCA research, strengthening visibility, and deepening engagement with broader academic and policy communities.



Dr. Margrethe Holm Andersen facilitating the way forward and next steps session.

Looking further ahead, the planned 2028 RCA event was highlighted as a strategic opportunity to take stock of progress, strengthen networks, and prepare for future conference participation. This underscored its importance for sustaining momentum and reinforcing collaboration across RCAs. The session also established practical agreements on how RCAs will work and communicate moving forward. The creation of a coordination mechanism

across RCAs was proposed to enhance synergies, cross-RCA collaboration, and collective contributions to theory-building in African I&D research.

In her concluding remarks, Dr. Andersen emphasized that RCAs should play a proactive role in shaping the future of the field by aligning research with continental priorities, strengthening cross-country collaboration, and contributing to knowledge platforms, teaching, and policy engagement. The session concluded with a forward-looking challenge to participants: to ensure that RCA activities translate into meaningful theoretical contributions and empirically grounded insights that reflect the diverse African contexts.

Summary of participant feedback from the RCA workshop

As part of the workshop evaluation process, participants were invited to provide feedback on their experiences, key takeaways, and suggestions for improving future RCA events. The feedback survey sought to capture reflections on the workshop, the effectiveness of the sessions and collaborative activities, and areas where future events could be strengthened. The responses provide important insights into how participants perceived the workshop's contribution to research collaboration, networking, proposal development, and research capacity strengthening within the AfricaLics community. Overall, the feedback reflects a highly positive assessment of the workshop, while also highlighting several considerations that can inform the planning and organization of future RCA activities. Further details of the details are provided in Annex 4.

The feedback reflected strong appreciation for the opportunity to network, exchange ideas, and jointly develop research proposals and future collaborations. A recurring theme in the responses was the value of face-to-face interaction and collaborative working sessions. Participants noted that the physical workshop format allowed for deeper discussions, stronger relationship-building, and more effective brainstorming than would have been possible through virtual engagement alone. Many respondents emphasized that the RCA working sessions helped them better understand the thematic scope of the RCAs, sharpen their research ideas, and strengthen their capacity to engage in interdisciplinary and multi-country research design. Several participants also highlighted the importance of the workshop in creating opportunities for mentorship, peer learning, and long-term collaboration, particularly between experienced scholars and younger researchers.

The workshop's focus on proposal development and research coordination was also positively received. Participants appreciated the structured discussions around funding opportunities, collaborative publications, and research agendas, noting that these sessions helped clarify how RCA activities could contribute to broader regional innovation and development challenges. The quality of feedback provided during presentations and discussions was repeatedly identified as a major strength of the event. In addition, participants valued the workshop's role in reinforcing the AfricaLics community and fostering a stronger sense of belonging within the network. The event was seen as an important platform for reconnecting with colleagues, establishing new professional relationships, and building communities of practice around shared research interests in I&D.

Areas for improvement and key lessons for future RCA events

Despite the overwhelmingly positive feedback, participants also identified several areas that could strengthen future RCA workshops.

1. More time for collaborative work

The most consistent recommendation was the need for additional time for group discussions and proposal development. Many participants felt that the three-day format was too short given the depth of engagement required for collaborative research planning. There were calls for future events to be extended to allow for:

- More in-depth technical discussions;
- Greater refinement of research proposals;
- Additional time for follow-up discussions and collaborative planning;
- More interactive working formats and informal networking opportunities.

This suggests that future RCA workshops may benefit from either longer in-person sessions or follow-up virtual engagements to sustain momentum.

2. Improved pre-workshop communication and clarity

Several participants noted that expectations regarding workshop outputs and RCA processes were not always sufficiently clear at the outset. Suggestions included:

- Sharing workshop materials and presentation slides in advance;
- Providing clearer guidance on expected outputs and deliverables;
- Improving communication regarding RCA participation and nomination processes.

Future events could therefore benefit from a more structured pre-workshop orientation process to ensure that participants arrive with a shared understanding of objectives and expectations.

3. Strengthening inclusivity and representation

Participants emphasized the importance of making future RCA activities more linguistically and regionally inclusive, particularly by increasing participation from French-speaking and Portuguese-speaking African researchers. This reflects a broader desire to ensure that AfricaLics and the RCAs represent a wider diversity of African contexts and perspectives. There were also suggestions to improve transparency in how RCA groups are formed and to create more open opportunities for participation across the AfricaLics network.

4. Sustaining collaboration beyond the workshop

Participants highlighted the need for stronger mechanisms to sustain collaboration after the event. Recommendations included:

- Developing a database of relevant funding opportunities;
- Establishing dedicated support structures for resource mobilization;
- Expanding mentorship and postdoctoral opportunities;
- Creating more systematic mechanisms for long-term coordination across RCAs.

These suggestions point to the importance of strengthening the institutional support structures around RCAs to ensure continuity and long-term impact. The participant feedback confirms that the RCA workshop successfully created a productive, collaborative environment that strengthened both individual and collective engagement in I&D research in

Africa. The event was particularly effective in fostering networking, proposal development, and cross-RCA learning, while also reinforcing the role of RCAs as platforms for collaborative research and research capacity strengthening.

At the same time, the feedback suggests that future RCA events should place greater emphasis on: providing more time and space for collaborative work; enhancing clarity and communication before the workshop; expanding inclusivity and representation across linguistic and regional groups; strengthening post-workshop coordination and support mechanisms. Addressing these areas will help ensure that future RCA workshops not only deepen collaboration but also contribute more effectively to sustained, Africa-led research partnerships and impactful knowledge production in I&D studies.

Expected knowledge outputs from RCAs

A central objective of the Research Coordination Areas (RCAs) is to generate high-quality, collaborative knowledge outputs that contribute to the advancement of Innovation and Development (I&D) research in Africa while supporting policy engagement, capacity strengthening, and evidence-based decision-making. Building on the discussions and activities undertaken during the workshop, participants emphasized that RCAs should serve not only as platforms for networking and research coordination but also as mechanisms for producing tangible outputs (see Table I) that strengthen the visibility, relevance, and impact of African scholarship.

Table I: Expected outputs from RCAs based on workshop discussions.

RCA	Expected outputs
STI Measurement in Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Special issue – informal sector ▪ Conference session at AfricaLics 2026 (co-creation of framework to guide country-level research for handbook) ▪ Handbook – laying the foundation for measurement of innovation in Africa ▪ Manual for innovation measurement in Africa
Global Value Chains (GVCs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Final research report ▪ Policy briefs for governments and regional organisations. ▪ Academic journal publications ▪ Industry upgrading roadmap
Innovating Resilience: Advancing Inclusive Agricultural Innovation for Climate Resilience in Sub-Saharan Africa (AACRA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Webinar series (2 webinars) Audience: researchers, community of practice, extension services, and policymakers ▪ Policy briefs (4 briefs) Short, actionable (2–4 pages) targeted to Ministries of agriculture, finance, and donors. ▪ Stakeholder engagement workshops (regional × 3) Multi-stakeholder co-design and validation. {signed MoUs with local partners} ▪ Policy and Practice dialogue Outcome: placement of evidence in national policy roundtables; evidence of commitments ▪ Blog series (4 posts): Translate findings for practitioners; 1,000+ reads per post target

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Peer-reviewed articles (2 papers): Target journals: climate resilience, agricultural systems, innovation studies ▪ Special conference session Present the framework and pilot outcomes at major conference {Africalics, Globelics}
Innovation and Sustainable Energy Transition in Africa (i-SET Africa)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Policy briefs ▪ Paper publications ▪ Policy engagement seminars ▪ Newsletters

The expected knowledge outputs are intended to reflect the diverse thematic priorities of the RCAs while contributing to the broader AfricaLics mission of promoting Africa-led, contextually grounded, and policy-relevant research. These outputs are expected to range from academic publications and collaborative research proposals to policy briefs, knowledge repositories and other dissemination products that support learning, research uptake, and long-term capacity development within the field of I&D.

Conclusion

The RCA workshop, held in Nairobi in March 2026, successfully achieved its core objective of strengthening collaboration, aligning research agendas, and advancing impactful I & D research within the AfricaLics network. Over the course of three days, the workshop brought together a diverse group of researchers, alumni, and experts, creating a dynamic and interactive platform for knowledge exchange, critical reflection, and joint research development. A total of new 7 AfricaLics academy and VFP alumni from 7 countries were brought on board. As a result, the total number of AfricaLics alumni engaged in the AfricaLics RCAs has increased to 16.

A key outcome of the workshop was the consolidation of RCAs as central mechanisms for research coordination and capacity strengthening. Through SOA presentations, participants developed a clear understanding of existing knowledge landscapes, identified critical research gaps, and articulated forward-looking, Africa-centered research agendas. These discussions reinforced the importance of contextually grounded, theoretically robust, and policy-relevant research, particularly in addressing complex challenges such as innovation measurement, industrialization, energy transitions, and climate-resilient agriculture.

The workshop also demonstrated significant progress in moving from conceptual discussions to concrete action. Through structured working sessions, RCAs developed and refined collaborative research proposals, balancing ambition with feasibility while integrating peer feedback. This process not only strengthened the quality and coherence of emerging projects but also highlighted the value of iterative learning and collective problem-solving in research design. Equally important was the emphasis on network-building and sustained collaboration. The workshop created opportunities for meaningful engagement among AfricaLics alumni and researchers at different career stages, fostering new partnerships and reinforcing existing ones. The discussions around the AfricaLics Knowledge Base, research capacity strengthening, and policy engagement further underscored the need for coordinated efforts to enhance the visibility, accessibility, and impact of African research.

Looking ahead, the workshop established a clear pathway for future action. RCAs committed themselves to strengthening their internal coordination, advancing proposal development, and

engaging with upcoming opportunities such as the AfricaLics Conference 2026 and the planned 2028 RCA event. The emphasis on regular communication, joint outputs, and alignment with continental priorities reflects a growing recognition that sustained impact will depend on continued collaboration beyond the workshop.

In conclusion, the RCA workshop marked an important milestone in the evolution of the AfricaLics network. It not only reinforced the role of RCAs as collaborative, action-oriented research platforms, but also laid the groundwork for long-term, Africa-led contributions to I&D scholarship, policy, and practice. The challenge moving forward will be to maintain the momentum generated during the workshop and translate it into tangible research outputs, strengthened capacity, and meaningful developmental impact across the continent. The AfricaLics Secretariat (with support from the RCS project where feasible) was encouraged to take the lead in constituting an RCA coordination group, which can help keep momentum and ensure follow-up with individual RCAs.

Annex I: An overview of the collaborating partners (institutions and scholars) in each of the AfricaLics RCAs

RCA	Affiliated institution
STI measurement in Africa	De Montfort University, Leicester, United Kingdom
	National Centre for Technology Management (NACETEM) Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria
	Centre for Science, Technology and Innovation Indicators (CeSTII), South Africa
	Science, Technology and Innovation Policy Research Organization (STIPRO), Tanzania
	Centre for Science, Technology and Innovation Indicators (CeSTII), South Africa
Global Value Chains (GVCs), Innovation, and Industrialization	Global Banking School, Leeds, United Kingdom
	Federal University of Technology Akure (FUTA), Nigeria
	Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria
	African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS), Kenya
	Rwanda Polytechnic, Rwanda
	Energy Technology and Management Department, Centre for Energy Research and Development (CERD) Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria.
	University of Johannesburg, South Africa
Innovation and Sustainable Energy Transition in Africa (i-SET Africa)	National Centre for Technology Management (NACETEM) Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria
	Nelson Mandela African Institution of Science and Technology, Tanzania
	Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar (UCAD), Senegal
	University of Johannesburg, South Africa
	Mohammed VI Polytechnic University, Morocco
Innovating Resilience: Advancing Inclusive Agricultural Innovation for Climate Resilience in Sub-Saharan Africa (AACRA)	University of Ilorin, Nigeria
	National Centre for Technology Management (NACETEM) Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria
	University of Ghana, Ghana

	Cavendish University, Uganda
	University of Ilorin, Nigeria
	University of Gondar, Ethiopia
	International Development Adviser, Denmark
	African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS), Kenya

Annex 2: Workshop participants

Names	Institution
Abiodun Egbetokun	De Montfort University, Leicester, United Kingdom
David Adeyeye	National Centre for Technology Management (NACETEM) Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria
Amy Kahn	Centre for Science, Technology and Innovation Indicators (CeSTII), South Africa
Bitrina Diyamett	Science, Technology and Innovation Policy Research Organization (STIPRO), Tanzania
Glenda Kruss	Centre for Science, Technology and Innovation Indicators (CeSTII), South Africa
Oluseye Jegede	Global Banking School, Leeds, United Kingdom
Adeyemi Adepoju	Federal University of Technology Akure (FUTA), Nigeria
Olufemi Afolabi	Global Banking School, Leeds, United Kingdom
Adedutan Segun-Olasanmi	Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria
Ruth Wainaina	African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS), Kenya
Parfait Yongabo	Rwanda Polytechnic, Rwanda
Willie Siyanbola	Energy Technology and Management Department, Centre for Energy Research and Development (CERD) Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria.
Maruf Sanni	National Centre for Technology Management (NACETEM) Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria
Mbeo Ogeyo	Independent senior consultant, Kenya
Aodu Babatunde	National Centre for Technology Management (NACETEM) Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria
Dismas Kimaro	Nelson Mandela African Institution of Science and Technology, Tanzania
Audrey Jennie Djijo Tiakou	Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar (UCAD), Senegal
Elvis Avenyo	University of Johannesburg, South Africa
Rasmus Lema	University of Johannesburg, South Africa
Victor Ongoma	Mohammed VI Polytechnic University, Morocco
Mercy Funke Salami	University of Ilorin, Nigeria
Opeyemi Eytayo Ayinde	University of Ilorin, Nigeria
Caleb Adelowo	National Centre for Technology Management (NACETEM) Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria
Rosalyn Naa Norkor Baddoo	University of Ghana, Ghana
Ahabyoona Faith Mugisha	Cavendish University, Uganda

Adeola Olanrewaju	University of Ilorin, Nigeria
Jemberu Tarekegn Asmare	University of Gondar, Ethiopia
Sanne Chipeta	International Development Adviser, Denmark
Catherine Kilelu	African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS), Kenya
Margrethe Holm Andersen	Holm Andersen Consult, Denmark
Ann Kingiri	African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS), Kenya
Rebecca Hanlin	University of Johannesburg, South Africa
Yvonne Gitu	African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS), Kenya
Ann Numi	African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS), Kenya
Mourine Cheruiyot	African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS), Kenya
Moses Owidhi	African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS), Kenya

Annex 3: RCA workshop programme

RESEARCH WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

Research Coordination Areas (RCAs): Integrating AfricaLics Alumni into I&D Research

9th – 11th March 2026, Eka hotel, Along Mombasa Road, Nairobi
Meeting room (Rosa and Lilium), ground floor

DAY I (Monday): 9th March 2026: Overall Workshop Facilitator: Ann Numi	
Time	Activity
8:30 - 8:50	Introductions <i>Facilitator: Ann Numi</i>
8:50 - 9:20	Overview of anchoring of RCAs: role in AfricaLics network and links to the new AfricaLics RCS project (TOC). (incl. role of alumni in developing the RCAs + role of RCAs in developing the AfricaLics Knowledge Base). <i>Facilitator: Ann Kingiri</i>
9:20 - 9:40	Bibliometric analysis: results from AfricaLics research capacity building (RCB) activities 2012-2024. <i>Facilitator: Maruf Sanni</i>
9:40 - 10:30	World Café: RCA brainstorming session <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How will the RCAs work, communicate and contribute to the development of Innovation and Development studies research in Africa? ▪ Development of Knowledge Base (within and across the RCAs). ▪ Ways RCAs can contribute to building RCS in I&D studies in Africa i.e. teaching and learning, policy work etc. <i>Facilitator: Rebecca Hanlin</i>
10:30 - 11:00	Tea Break
11:00 - 13:00	Presentations, State of Art (SOA) reports by RCAs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ STI Measurement in Africa. ▪ Global Value Chains (GVCs), Innovation, and Industrialization. ▪ Innovating Resilience: Advancing Inclusive Agricultural Innovation for Climate Resilience in Sub-Saharan Africa (AACRA). ▪ Innovation and Sustainable Energy Transition in Africa (i-SET Africa). <i>Facilitator: Ann Numi</i>
13:00 - 14:00	Lunch Break

14:00 - 15:30	<p>A panel discussion on funding of networked research in Africa and policy implications</p> <p>Panelists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ann Kingiri, African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS), Kenya. ▪ Bitrina Diyamett, Science, Technology and Innovation Policy Research Organization (STIPRO), Tanzania. ▪ Glenda Kruss, Centre for the Science, Technology and Innovation Indicators (CESTII), South Africa. ▪ Maruf Sanni, National Centre for Technology Management (NACETEM), Nigeria. ▪ Opeyemi Eytayo Ayinde, University of Ilorin, Nigeria. ▪ Rasmus Lema, University of Johannesburg, South Africa. <p><i>Facilitator: Rebecca Hanlin</i></p>
15:30 - 16:00	Break
16:00 - 17:30	<p>First group sessions</p> <p>Agreeing target funding calls/ outputs to be developed / target challenges to focus on (e.g. is RCA going to focus on a particular up-coming call or develop something that it can pitch down the line but that addresses a critical problem area facing their area of interest.</p> <p><i>Facilitator: Margrethe Holm Andersen (brief introduction to the first group sessions and working modalities in the groups).</i></p>
17:30 - 17:40	Close of Day I
18:00	Departure for dinner at Carnivore restaurant, Nairobi
19:00 - 21:00	Dinner at Carnivore restaurant

Day 2 (Tuesday): 10th March 2026: Overall Workshop Facilitator: Ann Numi	
Time	Activity
8:30 - 9:00	<p>Recap from Day 1 and setting the scene for Day 2, working sessions for RCAs</p> <p>Session 1: Problem statement and rationale of proposals plus Agreement on a theoretical and empirical framing for proposals.</p> <p>Session 2: Agreement on research methodology and timeline plus tidying up and getting ready to present.</p> <p><i>Facilitator: Rebecca Hanlin</i></p>
9:00 - 11:00	<p>Working sessions for the RCAs: proposal writing</p> <p><i>Facilitators: RCA leads</i></p>
11:00 - 11:30	Tea Break
11:30 - 13:00	<p>Working sessions for the RCAs: proposal writing</p> <p><i>Facilitators: RCA leads</i></p>
13:00 - 14:00	Lunch
14:00 - 15:30	<p>Presentations, RCA proposal overviews</p> <p><i>Facilitator: Ann Numi</i></p>
15:30 - 16:00	Close of Day II

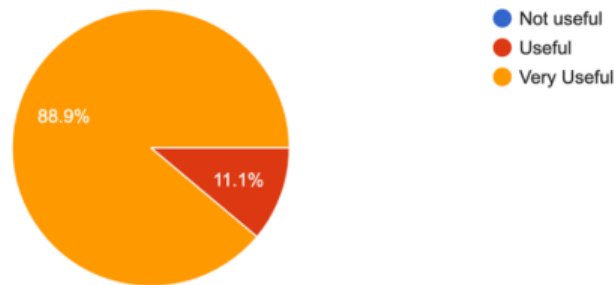
Day 3 (Wednesday): 11th March 2026: Overall Workshop Facilitation: Ann Numi	
Time	Activity
8:30 - 9:00	Recap from Day 2 and setting the scene for Day 3 <i>Facilitator: Ann Numi</i>
9:00 - 11:00	Working session for the RCAs: proposal revision (based on feedback received on Day 2) <i>Facilitator: RCA leads</i>
11:00 - 11:30	Tea Break
11:30 - 13:00	Way forward & next steps <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 2026 conference (paper submissions, special events etc.). ▪ 2028 RCA event (separate or link to 2028 AfricaLics conference). ▪ Agreements on how the RCAs will work, communicate and contribute to the development of I&D as a field in Africa. <i>Facilitator: Margrethe Holm Andersen</i>
13:00 - 13:15	Close of Day III
13:15 - 14:00	Lunch

Annex 4: Responses from the RCA workshop feedback survey

Feedback from post-workshop survey

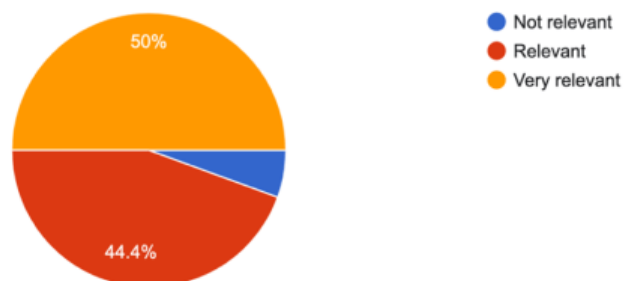
How useful were the working session for the RCAs?

18 responses



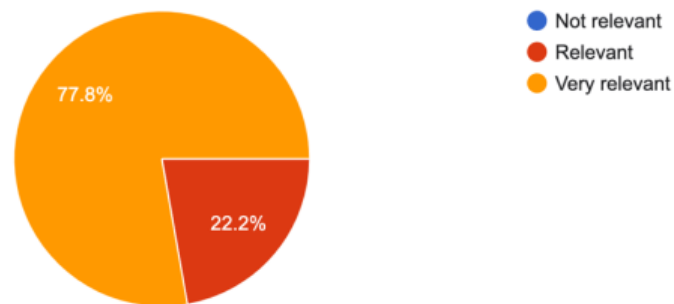
How relevant was the panel discussion on funding of networked research in Africa and policy implications?

18 responses



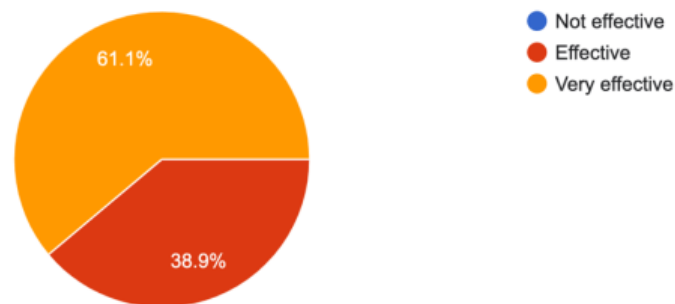
How relevant was the knowledge or information gained to your work?

18 responses



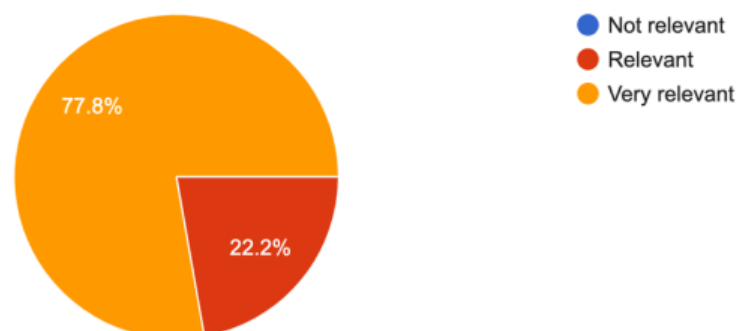
How effective was the event in fostering new connections or partnerships for you?

18 responses



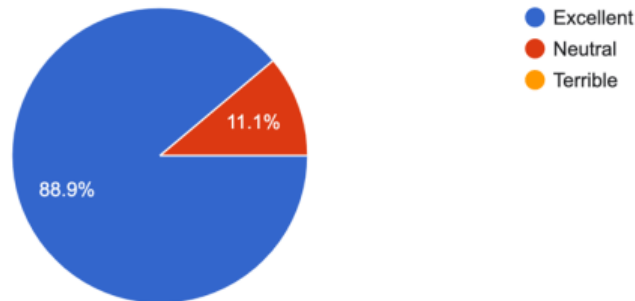
How relevant were the Research Coordination Areas (RCA) presentations?

18 responses



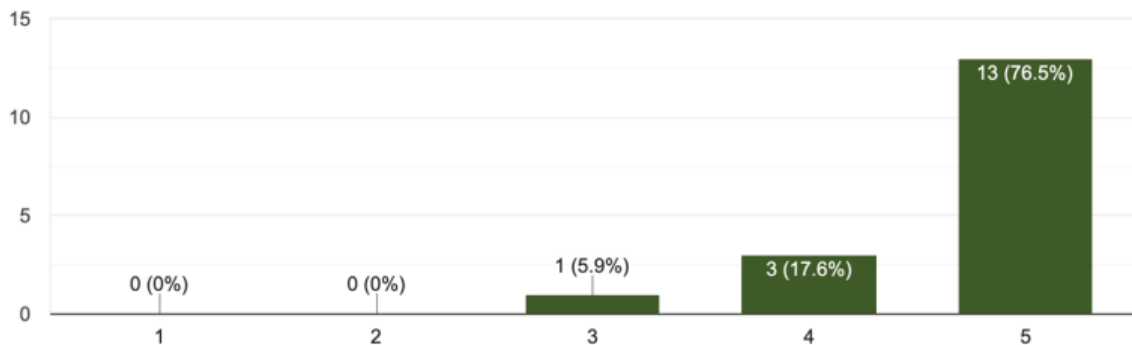
How would you rate the logistics in preparation to the event (information provided prior to the event)?

18 responses



How would you rate the choice of accommodation in Nairobi?

17 responses



What do you think are the most rewarding outputs/outcomes professionally and personally gained from the event?

- How to generate groundbreaking ideas put in mega project development within a day in collaboration.
- Connecting with the team and reflecting the substance of RCA and how I can contribute.
- I gained more from the group discussions and work
- The possibility to understand work of the RCAs better and learn how we can support them through the AfricaLics RCS project to help get more collaborative I&D research going.
- I had a chance to catch up with people I haven't seen in a long while. I had some very productive conversations and agreed on some specific research work with some colleagues.
- The Research Coordination Areas (RCA) and the possible research, funding and network opportunities that could emerge from different set of collaborations.
- inspiration from the quality of research projects proposed
- Collaboration

- The workshop was highly rewarding both professionally and personally. Professionally, one of the most valuable outcomes was the opportunity to engage with state-of-the-art reports across the different Research Coordination Areas (RCAs), which significantly deepened my understanding of current research frontiers and gaps within the AfricaLics network. The interactive feedback sessions were particularly enriching, as they allowed for critical reflection and refinement of research directions. Another key outcome was the collaborative development of a joint proposal within the RCA, which strengthened my experience in interdisciplinary and multi-country research design. Additionally, identifying potential funding opportunities and contributing to the nomination of an RCA representative provided practical insights into research coordination and leadership within international networks. Personally, the integration of alumni and experts fostered meaningful networking and mentorship opportunities. I was able to build new professional relationships and reconnect with colleagues, which I believe will lead to future collaborations. The workshop also enhanced my confidence in contributing to high-level academic discussions and reinforced my commitment to advancing research on innovation systems in Africa.
- yes
- The output from each RCA
- Networking and experience for great discussions
- Learning about how collaborative research operates in practice.
- group discussions and their outcomes
- For the RCAs, more concrete and coherent proposals could be achieved because of the physical engagement, which is much more effective than communicating virtually. Personally, I gained a new network/community of experts and growing experts in my research field. My knowledge of the scope of the assignment of our RCA also deepened during the programme.
- Networking—and I already see this as a real opportunity to increase my publication rate, because as a young researcher, I'm working alongside senior researchers who have extensive experience with peer review processes.
- The most rewarding outcome was the opportunity meet new potential collaborators and reconnect with a number of research associates that I last interacted with directly in 2013 during AfricaLics conference in Maputo. The opportunity helped to revive research collaborations beyond the AfricaLics scope.
- Personally, I have got an opportunity of connecting with experienced professionals in the field of I&D in Africa and offers a potential opportunity for learning from them on how effective the field needs to be engaged. Professionally, the event has been an eye-opening opportunity for defining my research contribution in I&D research, especially considering the understanding/contribution of the field under the LICs lens

What did you find most valuable about the event?

- I gained high commitment, collaboration, networking, knowing virtual academic AfricaLics supports, and gained system thinking approach in innovation and development areas.
- The knowledge and experience sharing within individual RCA and among RCAs
- The time out from our busy schedule back home to come together physically discuss, create ideas and work together
- Bringing the RCAs together and including new alumni in the event

- The time management was exceptional and the quality of feedback on the work of the different teams was very high.
- Openness of the discussions and the quality of feedback provided to RCAs.
- The opportunity to do constructive work and deep thinking as an RCA team. Insights into the intersecting research themes in AfricaLics and how they can feed into STI measurement work
- The team were able to understand the need of the organisers and we were able to come together and brainstorm.
- The networking opportunities throughout the workshop were invaluable. The event created space for building new professional relationships, strengthening existing ones, and exploring future collaborations. These connections are likely to have long-term benefits for joint research, knowledge exchange, and career development.
- yes
- The technical sessions offered time for the team to improve the proposal
- The discussions on the RCAs and the discussions around funding for projects but the new area on systems' capacity to innovate
- Networking with, and getting to know, peers. Learning more about AfricaLics. Being able to work face-to-face with colleagues to plan research for the next few years - far more useful and productive than working virtually.
- Themes covered most of the African pressing problems and search for alternative funding
- The working sessions allowed focused time for RCAs to brainstorm and synchronise their thoughts together - sometimes disagreeing to agree or agreeing to disagree. It was interesting to see how perspectives were sharpened and knowledge broadened during the event.
- What I found most valuable was meeting and interacting with the other researchers. It was truly a wonderful opportunity to connect with others, opening great prospects for research collaboration among researchers from the Global South.
- The brainstorming on research ideas and coming up with a research proposal and outline for manuscripts. The research proposal will be finalized and submitted to a potential funder. On the other hand, the manuscript findings; mostly systematic literature reviews, will strengthen the proposals. In the long run, the publications will greatly contribute to professional development.
- The conducted RCAs Workshop was highly valuable in several ways. Most importantly, the event created a collaborative platform that brought together AfricaLics alumni and researchers working on innovation and development issues across Africa. This interaction fostered meaningful exchanges of ideas, experiences, and research perspectives among participants from diverse disciplinary and geographical backgrounds. One of the most valuable aspects of the workshop was the opportunity to engage in structured discussions around the RCAs. These discussions helped clarify the thematic priorities within the AfricaLics research agenda and demonstrated how individual research interests could be aligned with broader continental innovation and development challenges. Through these sessions, I gained a clearer understanding of how coordinated research efforts can generate stronger academic outputs, inform policy, and contribute to solving real development problems in African contexts. Another important value of the event was the exposure to collaborative research opportunities. The workshop encouraged participants to form thematic research groups and explore potential joint projects under the RCA framework. This provided a practical pathway for strengthening long-term research partnerships among AfricaLics alumni. The discussions on collaborative publications, grant opportunities, and joint research proposals were particularly

insightful, as they highlighted mechanisms for sustaining academic collaboration beyond the workshop. The event was also valuable in terms of capacity building and mentorship. Senior scholars and AfricaLics coordinators provided guidance on how to frame research questions within the innovation and development scholarship, how to position African research within global academic debates, and how to enhance the policy relevance of research outputs. These insights were particularly useful for early-career researchers, like me, seeking to strengthen the theoretical and methodological rigor of our work. Furthermore, the workshop strengthened the importance of network building within the AfricaLics community. The interactive sessions, group work, and informal discussions created opportunities to build professional relationships with fellow researchers who share similar interests in innovation systems, technological change, and development policy in Africa. Such networks are essential for fostering future collaboration, knowledge exchange, and academic support.

What should be improved in future events?

- Time constraints
- More time for groups to work together.
- More time in terms of days
- More analysis of which alumni to integrate might be useful
- Pre-event communication could be better. For example, members of one RCA apparently did not get the information that they could nominate alumni.
- Quality control of the RCAs and extended time for feedback on presentations.
- Programme could be scheduled over more days to allow for deeper work - although costs are likely to be prohibitive - are there ways to downscale accommodation etc.
- The requirements should be well understood from the beginning.
- The three-day duration of the research coordination area workshop, while productive, felt somewhat limited given the depth and breadth of engagement required to fully realize its objectives. Extending the duration of future meetings would significantly enhance both the quality and impact of the interactions. With additional time, participants would be able to engage more deeply in technical discussions, allowing for more thorough exploration of research ideas, methodologies, and potential collaborations. A longer workshop would also provide greater flexibility in scheduling, reducing the need to compress multiple sessions into tight timeframes. This would create room for more interactive formats such as breakout groups, hands-on sessions, and informal discussions, which are often where the most meaningful exchanges occur. Furthermore, extended time would enable participants to follow up on initial conversations, refine collaborative ideas, and begin outlining concrete plans for joint research initiatives.
- yes
- No time for fun or visit Nairobi. One of the main pillars of Lics events is "having fun". This was missing from this event!
- We need to speak more on systematic theme for the year that aligns with the Continental agenda on the sector.
- Slides could be shared prior to presentations.
- How groups should be formed. I think there should have been a widespread advert so that every member of the AfricaLics has an opportunity to participate in their group of choice.

People applying to join group should write a brief motivation for joining the group and their ideas on how to best mobilize funds.

- Even though a concept note was shared, the expectations as to the output of the RCA by the end of the session were not very clear at the beginning (or perhaps they changed along the line), leading to having to make major revisions on scope and content during the very short period of engagement. Also, if more funds are available, a slightly longer period (three to four full days) may be more beneficial for achieving the objectives of the workshop.
- We really need to consider including more French-speaking researchers, and even Portuguese-speaking researchers. AfricaLics conferences have a strong presence from East Africa, South Africa, Nigeria, and Ghana. It would be truly wonderful if the research areas promoted by AfricaLics were expanded to encompass a broader range of African countries and break down language barriers.
- The whole event, from organization to execution, was good.
- In general, the workshop was very successful and highly engaging, particularly considering that it was the first time members of the various RCAs had the opportunity to meet and interact in person. The atmosphere was both productive and exciting, as participants were able to exchange ideas, learn about each other's research interests, and begin building collaborative relationships. One area that could be improved in future events is the allocation of more time for thematic group discussions and collaborative project development. While the sessions allowed for meaningful exchanges, dedicating additional time specifically to developing concrete research ideas would enable participants to move beyond conceptual discussions and begin outlining potential joint projects, publications, or funding proposals. Such extended discussions could strengthen the prospects for sustained collaboration among RCA members. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that increasing discussion time may also be constrained by available resources and the overall workshop schedule.

Do you have any other comments or suggestions that you wish to share?

- None
- No
- Please continue these commitments to pave ways for scholars. Considering Postdoc position as a program may be depending on the availability of funds.
- A database for relevant funding instruments for RCA should be developed and it might be a good idea to have a team for resources mobilization under AfricaLics to support RCAs.
- None for now
- The AfricaLics network (ASB and secretariat) should consider carefully if there are other research areas that would warrant the establishment of an RCA.
- The organising team did a fantastic job and Ann did a great job moderating the sessions. Kudos to the ACTS team.
- thank you to the team