



## International Policy Engagement Case Study

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**Title:** *Collaborating with Rwanda's National Council for Science and Technology on capacity building programmes*

**Project leads:** Dr Julius Mugwagwa, Dr Carla Washbourne, Remy Twiringiyimana, UCL STEaPP

The project “Capacity Strengthening for Science System Actors (C3SA)” is a collaboration between UCL, the University of Rwanda ([UR](#)) and Rwanda's National Council for Science and Technology ([NCST](#)).

Dr Julius Mugwagwa, Dr Carla Washbourne, Remy Twiringiyimana and other colleagues at UCL's Department of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Public Policy (STEaPP) have been working with their Rwandan partners on the delivery of a training programme for Science Granting Councils (SGCs) and other science system actors in Sub-Saharan Africa.



*Image Unsplash*

### **Building the relationship**

To initiate the relationship with the policy partner, Remy and colleagues were able to leverage their positive partnership with the local partner institution.

The relationship with the University of Rwanda itself started back in 2019 when a team of UCL researchers began a collaboration around understanding the role of African Science Granting Councils, including NCST, in their national science systems, as part of the Science Granting Council Initiative in SSA ([SGCI](#)).

The relationship with Rwanda's NCST started in 2020, when, following initial interactions through the aforementioned research activities, the NCST approached STEaPP looking to source expertise and support for an international multidisciplinary research grant application. It was

through these existing relationships between UR and NCST that in 2021, inspired by the opportunity offered by the UCL Global Engagement Africa and Middle East (AME) Teaching Initiative Funds, STEaPP's team approached the two organisations to collaborate on the C3SA project.

Throughout the design and implementation of the project, Remy and his colleagues kept in touch with their policy partners through regular communications via email, and occasional catchup sessions via Teams. In parallel, UCL and UR continued to enjoy a lively programme of collaborative activity, which also helped to hone the scope and content of the training. All partners maintained a strong element of co-creation and the NCST also facilitated some of the final training sessions.

However, developing the interpersonal side of the relationship with the policy partner was more difficult. COVID-19 travel restrictions and the resulting lack of face-to-face contact, which is especially valuable in Sub-Saharan-Africa, had an impact on building trust quickly.

Additionally, the project benefited from great support from leadership teams at both ends. This included making time available for tasks such as nputting into the training programme and officiating the opening and closing of workshops, as well assigning of invitation letters and certificates of participation..

The relationship with NCST and with UR has provided a space for mutual learning: UCL researchers were able to contribute their scientific expertise whilst benefitting from the contextually-grounded “know-how” and “know-why” of Rwanda's academia and policy community.

### **Reflections and lessons learned**

Reflecting on the project and the relationship with the NCST, Remy's advice for colleagues at UCL interested in engaging international policy stakeholders is: “Whilst international policy engagement can be fascinating from a scientific point of view, the success of it often demands a contextual understanding of the place (country/region/organisation) from the social, economic and policy perspective.”

He highlights the importance to identify the right local partner organisations. In this case, he thinks that the success of the two training workshops was largely due to UR acting as an intermediary and reaching out to the relevant stakeholders in Rwanda's policy community.

Remy also recommends that for greater impact, it is useful for a policy engagement activity to include elements of co-creation to leverage the expertise of the local stakeholders. E.g., during the second C3SA training workshop, one session of the training programme was facilitated by one of the local participants.

### **Successful outcomes**

Through this policy-academia partnership, the collaborators were able to produce fruitful outcomes. They developed a training module for strengthening science system interactions in Sub-Saharan Africa; carried out two one-day, hands-on training sessions in Rwanda to test out and validate the module and then further developed the module with hopes for future use as a UCL-UR CPD programme for Science Granting Councils in SSA.

### **Links:**

- UCL's Department of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Public Policy (STEaPP) Innovation Ecosystems Laboratory ([IEL](#))
- Rwanda's National Council for Science and Technology ([NCST](#)).
- the University of Rwanda ([UR](#))
- Science Granting Council Initiative in SSA ([SGCI](#))