

Science for Africa Foundation launches \$70m research programme

Africa's scientific leaders are receiving financial support and backing for their research through the Science for Africa Foundation (SFA Foundation), which more recently introduced the second phase of its programme.



Source: Supplied. Tom Kariuki, SFA Foundation executive director at the Deltas Africa II launch event in Nairobi, Kenya.

The multimillion-dollar programme, which is set to strengthen the continent's institutions, will - to this end - provide \$70m through the joint funding support of Wellcome and the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

The Developing Excellence in Leadership, Training, and Science in Africa (Deltas Africa II) programme funds 14 consortia in nine African countries, with partnerships and networks across the globe that produce quality scientific data and information for evidence-based decision making generated by world-class science leaders working in conducive and enabling environments.

It also drives the development of a critical mass of globally competitive research leaders.

African governments have invested in the foundational elements of research and development (R&D) such as higher-education systems and infrastructure. However, African nations contribute 1.3% of global R&D with average national budgets of 0.4% of their gross domestic product (GDP) compared to a global average of 1.4% to 1.7%, according to the Unesco *Science Report Towards 2030*.



MEDICAL RESEARCH

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As a result, the continent's research capacity lags behind the rest of the world. This capacity is paramount addressing the continued health challenges that disproportionately affect the continent with the highest global disease burden of 25%, according to the World Health Organization.

"The Deltas Africa programme paves the way for new scientific leaders who address Africa's most pressing public-health challenges and generate data and evidence that informs policy and Africa's development agenda. Through phase one, we have already seen how impactful science funding can be.

Global policy development

"These scientists have contributed to health policy development globally, improved research infrastructure and increased scientific knowledge through peer-reviewed publications and innovations in health. The funding built a critical mass of globally competitive research leaders who are now internationally recognised," says Alphonsus Neba, deputy director of programmes and Deltas' Africa programme manager at the SFA Foundation.

Deltas Africa II, (2023 to 2026), supports 14 programmes in 75 institutions, across 36 countries, with the inclusion of institutions in North Africa and Lusophone countries that had previously not been covered.

The consortia, led by world-class African research leaders, recognise the interconnectedness of climate change, food security and health and the necessity to balance research excellence and equity.

Deltas Africa II's emphasis is on intra-African collaboration, engagement and partnership between institutions that are relatively well-resourced and those that are low-resourced.

“ [#DELTASAfricaII](#) [@DELGEME1](#) consortium lead Prof Abdoulaye Djimde - [@djimdeab](#) wins the €500,000, 2023 Christophe Mérieux Prize from the Fondation Christophe et Rodolphe Mérieux Institut de France. We are proud of you Prof. <https://t.co/Rb2fMbeELP> [pic.twitter.com/mf1b4kyPpK](https://t.co/Rb2fMbeELP)— Science for Africa Foundation (@SciforAfrica) [May 9, 2023](#) ”

The consortia led from Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Senegal, South Africa, Tunisia and Zimbabwe, are advancing evidence and knowledge on key R&D priorities, including discovery, translation, implementation and operational sciences for infectious diseases such as malaria, HIV and tuberculosis; neglected tropical diseases; non-communicable diseases; and social sciences and humanities.

The leaders will be supported to contribute to science research, policy and practice and stimulate science innovation and entrepreneurship across the continent.

Pan-African, multidisciplinary programme

"In this second phase, we are advancing a programme that is truly pan-African, multidisciplinary and cross-disciplinary. Together, we bring a wide range of expertise to address the challenges faced by our continent and to ensure that researchers and institutions are not left behind in efforts to close the critical gaps in the science ecosystem.

"This, all to ensure healthy and productive nations for acceleration of economic growth," says Tom Kariuki executive director of SFA Foundation.

Deltas Africa II follows an initial five-year programme launched and funded by Wellcome and FCDO in 2017 with phase I of the programme implemented by the African Academy of Sciences (AAS) and African Union Development Agency (AUSA-Nepad).

The success of Deltas Africa I (2015-2022) included, for example, advising the World Health Organization on the development of a protocol to eliminate rabies and creating an affordable test for HIV drug resistance in Botswana.



HIV/AIDS

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Deltas Africa I advanced the economic agenda by producing high-value jobs reflected for example in the 2,011 undergraduate, master's, PhD, postdoctoral and senior researchers trained of whom 50% were women.

The first phase of the programme consortia increased Africa's scientific quality and productivity by collectively producing 1,496 peer-reviewed articles, competed successfully for additional grants worth \$267m, and won 339 prizes for scientific excellence worth \$9.1m.

Tackling pressing health challenges

Deltas Africa II, which is now being implemented by the SFA Foundation, continues to invest and increase Africa's research capacity.

"Wellcome is committed to funding ambitious and creative research across Africa that takes on some of the most pressing health challenges facing our world.

"We are very pleased to be working with the SFA Foundation and partners to support high-quality, world-leading research across Africa, developing the continent's growing research and development sector," said Cheryl Moore, chief research programmes officer at Wellcome.

"In addition to funding research, support from Wellcome and the UK government is directed towards the development of global standards for grant due diligence, research management, open access to science and enabling public participation in research.

"These components are an essential part of strengthening the wider research ecosystem to enable partner countries to deliver sustainable economic growth in line with national and UK priorities," said Jordan Kyong research and innovation adviser at the British High Commission in Nairobi.

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