

**Speech by the Association of African Universities (AAU)
Delivered by Dr. Felicia Nkrumah Kuagbedzi at the Science
Granting Councils Initiative's Peer to Peer Learning Meeting
Avani Hotel, Windhoek,
Namibia**

Wednesday May 7, 2025

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- Professor Anica Peters and the entire team from the National Commission on Research, Science and Technology
 - Mr. Collins Mwesigwa and team members from the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology
 - The Association of African Universities team led by the Project Officer – Mrs. Ruth Dickson Nyarko
 - All Distinguished Participants from the respective councils here gathered
 - Other invited guests and executives
 - Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning and warm greetings to you all.

It is with great honour and heartfelt pleasure that I welcome you all to this pivotal peer-to peer learning meeting, a gathering that symbolizes our shared vision, commitment, and responsibility to Africa's future – specifically the sustainability and improved effectiveness of our Science and Research related initiatives at the country levels.

The Association of African Universities (AAU), established in 1967, has grown from a membership of 34 at the time, to represent over 450 higher education institutions across the continent. As an institution our core mandate is to foster exchanges and collaboration among key stakeholders and we remain committed to providing the opportune platform for learning and sharing among our partners, in a bid to address Africa's most pressing challenges, through Science and research.

As the continent's apex continental higher education institution, the Association of African Universities has been involved in the Science

Granting Council's Initiative since its inception in 2015. In the current phase of the project, which is strengthening the capacities of the Science Granting Councils (or related agencies) from the 17 participating Councils in key thematic areas, the AAU is involved in three projects - The Research Management Project (**RM**), The Research and Innovation Project led by the African Centre for Technology Studies (**ACTS**) and the Supporting African Science Granting Councils (SGCs) to Develop Policy Frameworks and Enabling Structures for Public – Private Partnerships in Research and Innovation (**PPP**) – **mainly the component related to Research Infrastructure Sharing.**

Under the Research Management Project, within which our convening here today falls, we have together with our collaborators improved capacity and provided technical support on research excellence & emerging scientific practices. We have also developed and deployed digitized grants management systems, as well as focused on other critical aspect of the project – including Research Ethics, the development of various research frameworks, & manuals and created key platforms for peer-to-peer learning among Africa's Science Granting Councils.

Our gathering here is the fourth in a series of the provision of a distinct platform to foster peer to peer learning, which is critical in giving the opportunity to the SGCs involved in adopting the online grants management to share lessons, best practices, challenges and opportunities. It is also to promote networking among the SGCI IT community of practice.

The focus this time is on addressing the technical issues and challenges identified in the earlier phase of the project - phase 1, and providing technical training to respond to issues related to the online management system

This workshop is not merely a meeting of minds—it is a convergence of missions. We are here to foster connection, spark collaboration, and achieve alignment. Through rich dialogue and shared insights, It is our hope that by the end of our engagement here this week, action plans to ensure sustainability of our respective efforts, and the Identification of opportunities where as councils, we can leverage the system to mobilise resources to foster its continuous deployment and operation will have been mapped out.

We gather here once again to do something bold: to rethink how we can further strengthen our systems to enable them to thrive even beyond this current phase of the project. This workshop provides us with the opportunity to map out new pathways of cooperation, and to amplify our impact through learning and sharing.

On behalf of the AAU, I express my profound appreciation to each partner represented here for your unwavering dedication and your belief in the power of collaboration. What we begin here today has the potential to ripple across our institutions, nations, and generations.

Permit me to also take this opportunity to extend a warm invitation to you all to participate in the 16th General Conference of the Association of African Universities (AAU), which will be held in Rabat, Morocco, from July 21st to 25th, 2025.

This year's conference will be held under the timely and compelling theme: **“Shaping the Future of Higher Education for Innovation and Sustainable Development of Africa.”**

The General Conference is the AAU's flagship gathering and one of the most influential higher education platforms on the continent. It

brings together university leaders, policymakers, researchers, students, development partners, and private sector actors to engage in high-level dialogue on the transformative role of higher education in driving Africa's development agenda.

Once again, I warmly welcome you all to this significant workshop. Let us work hand in hand to strengthen our online grants management systems.

Thank you, and may our deliberations be fruitful and transformative.

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At this point, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, may I ask that we observe a one-minute silence, in respect of Madam Nodumo Dhlamini, the AAU's Director of ICT, Communication and Knowledge Management, who was a champion and lead person of our various engagements under the Science Granting Councils Initiative and the various successes we have chalked.

In the project – she led the overall coordination, implementation and adoption of the Online Grants Management across most of the councils gathered here. She also led the research management project (since 2020), working with UNCST and each council present, especially in terms of obtaining the buy-in of the management of SGCI that have been engaged in this project.