



# Building Sustainable Partnerships and Networks for Research and Innovation

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The Research and Innovation  
Ecosystem in Africa

November 2025

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This material has been funded by UK International Development from the UK Government; however, the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK Government's official policies.



# Introduction

**In an increasingly complex and interconnected world, innovation rarely happens in isolation. Collaboration between researchers and innovators is key to solving complex challenges, finding new opportunities, and driving sustainable development.**

The International Development Innovation Alliance (IDIA) [Strengthening Innovation Ecosystems paper](#) emphasises building a collaborative culture as a key to advancing innovation. Promoting a culture of networking and collaboration enables the sharing of knowledge, expertise, and resources, which amplifies impact and leads to more effective solutions. However, achieving this requires intentional efforts to overcome barriers such as competition, mistrust, and low awareness of roles and responsibilities among ecosystem actors, which often hinder potential partnerships. By bridging these divides, networking and collaboration not only facilitates collective problem-solving but also strengthens the broader innovation ecosystem, making it more resilient and capable of addressing evolving societal needs.

A Research and Innovation (R&I) ecosystem refers to the interconnected institutions, actors, policies, and infrastructure that support the generation and application of knowledge to solve real-world problems. While a research ecosystem focuses on knowledge creation through academic and

scientific inquiry, an innovation ecosystem—as defined by IDIA—is *“the dynamic and interdependent set of actors, institutions, policies, and enabling conditions that work together to develop and scale innovations for social and economic impact.”* The two are increasingly viewed as interdependent where research provides the evidence base, while innovation ensures its application and impact. R&I ecosystems work usually with the objective of commercialisation. In recent times, the international development space has seen a growing interest and intention among funders in strengthening the networks, partnerships and convenings as the foundation of efficient R&I ecosystems.

[The Research and Innovation Systems for Africa \(RISA\) Fund](#), supported by the UK’s Foreign Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO), as part of the African Technology and Innovation Partnership (ATIP) and the Strengthening Research in Africa (SRIA) programmes, collectively designed to identify and support linkages between research and innovation systems that will improve integration and coordination focusing across six countries in Africa. By leveraging and adapting [IDIA’s Ecosystem Strengthening Goals \(ESGs\)](#), RISA seeks to create more sustainable, inclusive, and effective R&I ecosystems that are built on cutting edge research addressing Africa’s challenges with the potential for market viability and sustainable impact.

# The RISA Fund and Partnerships

Between 2021 and 2025, RISA Fund awarded grants to over 25 partners implementing research and innovation (R&I) projects across Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, Ghana, and Nigeria (a table in Annex 1 highlights the list of all the partners and their focus areas). These projects focused on 11 Ecosystem Strengthening Goals (ESGs) adapted

from the IDIA framework, with particular emphasis on ESG 6: *Supporting networking assets that enable productive relationships between actors*. For innovators, universities, investors, and government agencies, strong networks are vital for exchanging knowledge, accessing critical resources, and driving solutions that deliver real impact.



Partners have benefited from a range of convening events and networks that are facilitated by RISA Fund, enabling them to develop and strengthen key partnerships with stakeholders like innovators, government bodies, research institutes/ universities, and entrepreneurs within their local and broader ecosystems.

This piece explores partnerships, convenings, and networks within the RISA Fund where these terms are often used interchangeably. For clarity, we define them as follows:

## Term Definitions:

- **Partnerships** refer to 2-3 key actors working together on a specific, time-bound goal or project. While success here means achieving specific goals and producing concrete results, like reports or new products, it can be hard to know exactly who contributed to the success, especially when other factors like funding come into play.
- **Networks** are broader, organised groups of like-minded actors united by a common goal, where smaller subsets may form partnerships for specific tasks or projects. In networks, success is about sharing knowledge, resources, and working together on new projects. However, networks are difficult to measure because they change over time, and many important interactions are informal.
- **Convenings** are episodic events designed to bring ecosystem actors together to raise awareness of each other and the opportunity to work together as an ecosystem. For convenings, success happens when people connect, learn about each other, and start working together. However, the challenge is knowing if the connections and ideas from the event lead to real, long-term results. It's also hard to measure things like trust and relationships, which develop over time.

# Insights from RISA Fund's Approach to Strengthening Partnerships in the R&I Ecosystem

RISA has enabled the building of significant partnerships within Africa's R&I ecosystem, promoting a culture of collaboration, and facilitating cross-country ecosystem partnerships.

**Establishment of new partnerships:** Through virtual and in-person gatherings focused on Research to Commercialisation (R2C) and knowledge sharing, RISA has connected people from different countries and sectors sparking new collaborations and helping existing partnerships grow. For example, in Ethiopia, Dr. Daniel Nigussie from the University of Gondar shared that *"certain crucial partnerships between ecosystem players have been created through RISA which weren't there before."* These partnerships facilitated the **creation of a Multi-Stakeholders Innovation Platform** between the government, institutions, researchers and innovators, which in turn provided an enabling environment for female researchers and agriculture experts to scale up innovative agricultural technologies improving the livelihood of female-headed and rural poor households.

In Ethiopia, RISA supported the creation of a platform that unites farmers, universities, innovators, and government organisations to share knowledge and transfer technology. This partnership resulted in an agreement between universities, research institutes, and the Bureau of Agriculture to work together on technology transfer and commercialisation. Dr. Nigussie described this success, noting that *"with the support of RISA, a multistakeholder platform that includes farmers, universities, innovators, and government which facilitates knowledge and technology transfer was established."*

In Nigeria, RISA facilitated the creation of the CONESAM Network (Coalition of Stakeholders in Agricultural Mechanisation), a multi-stakeholder platform that brings together research institutes, local fabricators, agro-processors, farmer associations, and regulatory bodies. Through virtual and in-person forums, CONESAM has enabled collaboration on technology development, standardization, and commercialisation of locally made agricultural machinery. This partnership model has strengthened linkages between innovators and end-users, reduced reliance on imported equipment, and opened new opportunities for MSMEs and women-led enterprises to scale sustainable agribusiness solutions.

Similarly, in Ghana and Nigeria, RISA supported the establishment of the ESO Collaborative—a network of enterprise support organizations, innovation hubs, accelerators, and policy actors working together to strengthen entrepreneurship ecosystems. Through national ESO forums, digital platforms, and capacity-building programs like the SCALE tool, this collaborative has improved the quality of support services for startups and MSMEs, fostered knowledge sharing, and enhanced investment readiness. By connecting ESOs with investors and development partners, the initiative has created a more coordinated and resilient environment for innovation-driven enterprises to thrive.

**CONESAM** stands for Coalition of Stakeholders in Agricultural Mechanisation, while **ESO** stands for Enterprise Support Organisation Collaborative.

**Empowerment of women researchers through networks:** The Mawazo Fellowship empowers women PhD researchers with essential non-technical skills, funding, and access to networks and mentorship. The fellowship is delivered by the women-led Mawazo Institute in Kenya in partnership with several institutional actors. Furthermore, Mawazo Institute implemented the project *"Supporting Africa's Next Generation of Female Research Leaders in Academia and Beyond"* via its Mawazo Learning Exchange (MLEx) Fellowship programme and the Mawazo Fellows Fund. This initiative is developing African women researchers across all disciplines, with the goal of **strengthening Africa's research ecosystem**, advancing knowledge and innovation, and influencing regional development policy across multiple sectors.

**Strengthening R&I ecosystem collaboration through strategic convenings:** RISA has facilitated and supported strategic convenings, bringing together key stakeholders across multiple R&I ecosystems to engage with each other with the prospect of collaboration. One of those convenings is the [Commercialisation and Entrepreneurial Institutions Leaders \(CEIL\) Summit](#) which brings together universities, research institutions, the private sector, startup incubators, accelerators, and government to unlock the future of innovation and entrepreneurship, with a focus on Research to Commercialisation (R2C).

RISA has promoted a **culture of collaboration and trust:** RISA's local staff, including Country Technical Leads (CTLs) and R&I technical advisors (TAs), have been key in promoting a culture of collaboration

and trust, helping partners to connect with the right networks, find the relevant partners and facilitate collaboration between partners and ecosystem stakeholders. They have also supported R&I ecosystem convenings focusing on R2C, outcome harvesting, RISA partners partnerships sessions and continue to support partners to organise country and regional level convenings to support the strengthening of the R&I ecosystem in Africa. According to *Dr. Terseer (Team Lead ASI)* "RISA staff are deeply embedded in the success of our programming outputs, particularly through their support for convenings. Their contribution include developing session briefs to gather feedback, providing strategic technical guidance and facilitating connections to key networks and partnerships - such as the invaluable linkage to NASENI. Moreover, their effective organisation of partnership sessions has significantly enhanced collaboration and trust within the ecosystem."

**RISA has facilitated cross-border partnerships strengthening R&I Financing Systems.** For instance, RISA supported collaboration between Impact Investing Ghana and Nigeria's Impact Investors Foundation. Impact Investing Ghana and Nigeria's Impact Investors Foundation are collaborating through the Deal Source Africa and Enterprise Support Organisation programmes to **strengthen enterprise and innovation financing systems** across Ghana and Nigeria, as part of RISA Fund's Scaling Systems for R&I Financing initiative.

These RISA-backed efforts have influenced significant progression by supporting accelerated collaboration between R&I ecosystems in Africa.

# Steps to Building Effective Partnerships and Networks: Lessons from RISA

The RISA Fund implementation and experience provides practical steps into building partnerships and networks that drive meaningful collaboration across Africa's R&I ecosystems.

**1 Identify and Engage Diverse and Relevant Ecosystem Actors:** This includes government agencies, research institutions/universities, the private sector, innovators, and local communities. RISA's partners such as Impact Investing Ghana (IIGh) and Adam Smith International (ASI) in Nigeria that have successfully built partnerships and networks began very early by mapping and engaging these key stakeholders. In addition, building trust among actors has enabled collaboration. For example, RISA has supported this by facilitating regular convenings, co-creation workshops, and cross-sector working groups, which have fostered mutual understanding and trust. Structures such as country-level technical working groups and thematic communities of practice such as the one of University of Ghana Business School have proven effective in sustaining engagement.

**2 Encourage Knowledge Sharing and Formalise Network Structures:** Collaboration thrives when knowledge flows freely among partners and is supported by structured networks as well as the creation of frameworks that both enable and guide engagement. In Nigeria, through RISA fund support, Adam Smith International (ASI) facilitated the establishment of the national Coalition Network of Stakeholders in Agricultural Mechanisation (CONESAM) as a formal network structure in the country with over 2,000 members across seven states. A formal network structure, such as CONESAM, operates with a defined purpose, clear governance, and regular mechanisms for engagement, enabling consistency and continuity in collaboration. It brings together diverse actors—research institutions, industries, maker spaces, and processor clusters under a shared agenda, while encouraging distributed leadership and active participation. Through the CONESAM network, ASI provides technical support and capacity building to institutions and industries in the agricultural mechanisation value chain, fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing. By connecting maker spaces, processor clusters, and technology centres, the project is making efforts to

help strengthen research ecosystems and promote co-creation, driving commercialisation and innovation.

**3 Leverage Technology and Innovation:** Digital technology helps people communicate easily, share knowledge quickly, and scale solutions across different regions. One of the key lessons from RISA is that digital tools are helping to strengthen collaboration and networks across countries and sectors. For example, in South Africa, the Entrepreneurial Planning Institute's DigiBiz programme partnered with ecosystem actors, including the African Development Bank (AfDB), to support women and youth entrepreneurs in townships. By offering digital skills training and online resources, the programme helped 39 women grow their businesses and expand their reach with AfDB support. In Nigeria, the CONESAM network used a virtual platform to connect stakeholders in the agricultural mechanisation space, making it easier for more than 2,000 members across seven states to coordinate and share knowledge.

RISA is also supporting the use of emerging technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) to improve research and innovation outcomes. In South Africa, Mintek is leading a project on glucose monitoring sensors for advanced diagnostic management using AI. The project brings together partners such as the governments of South Africa and Ethiopia, the University of South Africa, and Kutleng Dynamics Electronics. This kind of innovation shows how digital and AI-powered tools can improve health solutions while creating new opportunities for collaboration between research institutions, governments, and private sector partners. Digital platforms also make it possible to reach wider and more diverse groups of people, including those in remote or underserved areas. But there are still challenges. Many people lack reliable internet access or digital devices, which can limit their ability to participate. This is why digital efforts must be designed to be inclusive, and where needed, combined with in-person engagement to make sure no one is left behind.

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#### **Capacity Development Support and Stakeholder Convening:**

Building the capacity of stakeholders and beneficiaries, including a meaningful stakeholder convening, are essential ingredients to sustaining partnerships. RISA partners have been leading capacity building efforts and stakeholder convenings through workshop sessions for entrepreneurs, community members, networks and students in a bid to strengthen R&I ecosystems across Africa. For example, In Kenya, [Viktoria Ventures](#) collaborated with the [Kenya National Innovation Agency \(KENIA\)](#) to launch the [Research to Commercialisation Accelerator](#). This initiative trained over 400 innovators and helped secure \$400,000 in funding for startups, demonstrating how capacity-building efforts can empower innovators and catalyse broader ecosystem change.

Furthermore, [Impact Investing Ghana \(IIGh\)](#) collaboratively working with Nigeria's Impact Investors Foundation ([IIF](#)) on strengthening impact investing in Nigeria, Ghana and West Africa. As part of the convenings they have held, IIGh and IIF convened an investor roundtable with stakeholders from the impact investing ecosystem. The event focused on aligning investor preferences with emergent sectoral trends, specifically highlighting renewable energy, green and circular economy initiatives, and agriculture. In Nigeria for example, the convening helped IIF to help structure the \$1 billion Nigeria Wholesale Impact Investment Fund (WIIF), an innovative financing vehicle that seeks to address the SME financing gap and achieve a measurable positive impact on the people and the planet by providing catalytic financing for small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Another example of how capacity building is critical to building meaningful partnerships and networks is the collaboration between [Heritors Labs Limited](#), the Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI) and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) in Ghana, to empower researchers and innovators towards maximising value for their inventions and innovations by acquiring the requisite patents and intellectual property rights to cover their research outputs.

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#### **Align Solutions to Government Priorities:**

Successful partnerships align their goals with national and regional priorities, ensuring relevance, systems level change and securing government support. For example, to improve data and knowledge sharing among ecosystem partners, [Growth Africa Foundation](#) partnered with the governments of Kenya, Ethiopia, and Rwanda. This data collaborative model aims to build national data systems aligned with each country's priorities. By bringing together innovators and entrepreneurs, ecosystem catalysts, innovation agencies, and governments will generate insights on scaling ventures in these countries. This partnership is a testament to the project's impact in shaping data governance landscapes and enhancing data-driven decision-making capabilities across these countries.

In Ghana, [Heritors Labs](#) partnered with the Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology, and Innovation to secure the buy-in for the development of the National Research Fund (NRF) operational framework and Ghana Innovation Agency (GIA) bill in alignment of Ghana's R&I priorities. The Ghana Innovation Agency is expected to drive entrepreneurship and innovation, enabling local industries to thrive through new technologies and solutions. Meanwhile, the NRF will support researchers with essential funding to address national challenges by enhancing Ghana's overall capacity for impactful R&I. Through this partnership, Heritors Labs offers technical and strategic guidance to ensure these initiatives are effective and well-aligned with international standards, positioning them to make a meaningful impact on Ghana's development.

# Benefits of Strengthened and Inclusive Networks and Partnerships Through the RISA Fund

The benefits of working networks and partnerships through the RISA Fund are beginning to produce notable outcomes on Africa's R&I ecosystem. The RISA Fund has facilitated remarkable collaboration across various sectors including agriculture and healthcare, through intentional efforts on advancing research to commercialisation, strengthening local industries and economies, making efforts to improving access to resources, facilitating regional and cross-country collaboration, research and innovation development and empowering entrepreneurs.

## Benefits of Working Networks

The benefits of creating and strengthening networks include a **broader reach and greater impact** for innovations, knowledge, and collaborative opportunities, benefiting innovators, researchers, and the wider RISA Fund ecosystem. Networks enable organisations to connect with diverse actors, amplifying their influence and access to opportunities as demonstrated by CONESAM's ability to connect over 2,000 members across seven states in Nigeria, extending the benefits of agro-processing technologies to broader markets. **Resource Sharing** through networks is another important avenue through which members gain access to shared tools, access to information, knowledge exchange, and access to funding. Finally, networks facilitate rapid exchange of ideas and solutions that lead to **Accelerated Innovation**. The DigiBiz initiative in South Africa demonstrated this by using digital tools to support women entrepreneurs in townships, enabling quick adoption of innovations and business growth.

## Benefits of Working Partnerships

Partnerships bring together and unite diverse expertise to address complex challenges through collaborative approaches which **Enhances Problem-Solving**. Partnerships foster long-term impact by pooling resources and aligning strategies to ensure sustainability. Ghana's Heritors Labs worked with the Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology, and Innovation to establish the National Research Fund (NRF), a sustainable mechanism to finance research addressing national challenges. Strategic partnerships with governments help shape systemic change through adequate **Policy Alignment and Influence**. Viktoria Ventures' collaboration with KENIA in Kenya influenced policies that is working to strengthen entrepreneurial ecosystems. Similarly,

the Heritors Labs partnership in Ghana supported the Ghana Innovation Agency bill, ensuring alignment with national priorities and driving innovation and entrepreneurship.

## Benefits of Equitable and Inclusive Partnerships and Networks

RISA acknowledges that sustainable partnerships and networks depend on both technical expertise as well as **equitable representation and participation** from diverse perspectives. Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) directly impacts stakeholder motivation and long-term commitment, which are the very foundations upon which successful partnerships and networks are built. When partnerships fail to address barriers such as language constraints, geographic limitations, digital infrastructure gaps, and socio-economic disadvantages, they inadvertently exclude valuable contributors and limit access to important research and their potential for innovation and commercialisation.

Conversely, networks that prioritise diversity and meaningful representation of women, youth and marginalised communities **create richer collaborative environments** that draw from broader knowledge bases and cultural contexts. For R&I partnerships to achieve lasting impact, they must be structured around principles of local ownership and shared decision-making. This means ensuring that local partners have a voice in strategic decisions, that support systems exist for underrepresented groups, and that exit strategies are designed to strengthen rather than weaken local innovation ecosystems. When equity and inclusion are embedded at this foundational level, partnerships become self-sustaining engines of innovation that continue to generate value long after initial funding cycles run their course.

# Challenges to Building Sustainable Partnerships in the R&I Ecosystem

Building and sustaining effective partnerships in the R&I ecosystem is complex, with a range of barriers that often impede long-term collaboration. One prominent challenge, as highlighted by a RISA grantee in Kenya, is the **variability of local contexts**. Phyllis Mbiyu from Viktoria Ventures in Kenya noted that *“context in setting up partnerships is important as what works on the ground in Ethiopia will probably not work in Kenya.”* Differences in local ecosystems mean that partnership models successful in one country may not necessarily translate well to another.

Further challenges include **insufficient information, capacity, ineffective communication, and limited opportunities for partnership-focused convenings**.

A lack of trust between ecosystem actors—often due to unclear expectations, power imbalances, or past experiences can also significantly hinder collaboration. Stephen Gugu, Director at Viktoria Ventures Kenya, explained that *“absence of adequate information and capacity, limited trust, unclear communication, and inadequate partnership-focused convenings hinder effective partnership.”* Additionally, partnerships tend to work best when there are clear, mutual incentives for all involved whether through shared funding, access to new networks, or opportunities to scale. When actors do not see tangible value in collaboration, or perceive the risks to outweigh the benefits, partnerships may stall or never fully take shape. These factors create obstacles that prevent partnerships from reaching their full potential within or across other ecosystems across the African region.

As partnerships progress, **sustainability** emerges as a core consideration. According to Savio Wambugu, President of the Association of Countrywide Innovation Hubs Kenya (a RISA grantee), achieving sustainable collaboration requires a dual focus: *“Placing emphasis on infrastructure building and ecosystem strengthening goals, and developing frameworks that allow for structured collaboration and building capacity among partners and ecosystem players are essential.”* By focusing on these pathways, the R&I ecosystem can cultivate partnerships with the resilience needed for lasting impact.

By amplifying reach, driving scale, and offering safe barriers to entry into low-trust environments, **digital technology** remains a key enabler for harnessing partnerships. However, its effectiveness is limited by **accessibility** challenges, including widespread

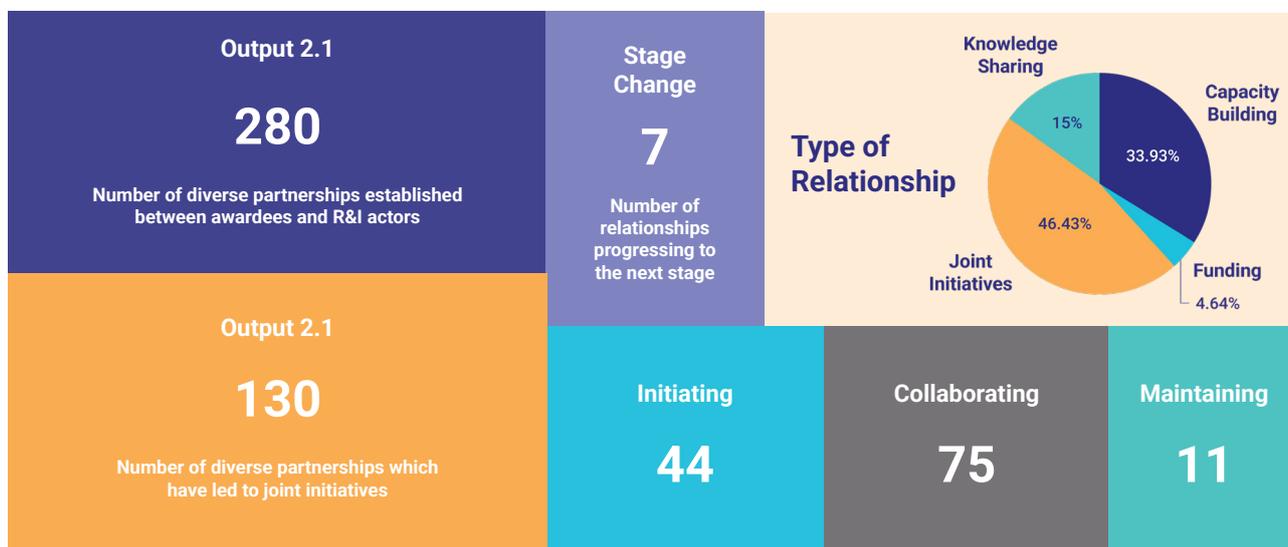
infrastructure problems such as unreliable power and poor internet penetration, and inequality stemming from the digital divide and other sociocultural barriers. Addressing these limitations requires applying GESI considerations at every step of partnership building, exploring low-tech and no-tech solutions where possible, and investing in digital infrastructure and literacy.

Finally, **monitoring and tracking the effectiveness of R&I partnerships** can be **challenging** because it involves many different stakeholders with varying goals and contexts. Like the RISA Fund itself, these partnerships often cover multiple sectors and countries, which makes it hard to align objectives and coordinate activities or develop simple metrics for measurement. However, the RISA Fund employed a monitoring platform as explained in the section below to track and monitor these important partnerships.

# Methodology for Monitoring RISA Fund's work with Partnerships and Networks

RISA's efforts to monitor and support partnerships have led to the development of the monitoring platform, [AKTEK](#), which is beginning to capture,

among other things, valuable data on how partnerships form and evolve.



The data (from Quarter 1 - 2024/2025) illustrated above from the AKTEK platform highlights partners progressing through three key stages: (i) Initiating: identifying potential partners, (ii) Collaboration: forming partnerships with defined roles, and (iii) Maintaining: solidifying collaborations to achieve outcomes like fundraising success, co-creation with governments, and policy influence. While joint initiatives, capacity building and knowledge sharing relationships between partners and their partners

continue to drive the partnerships agenda, we are now beginning to see emerging funding-focused partnerships (such as the IIGH's unlocking pension funds initiative) due to these efforts. Finally, it is important to mention that some partnerships were created through the RISA Fund, while others already existed and were strengthened by its support, helping to build networks, improve collaboration, and strengthen productive relationships across the R&I ecosystem.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

RISA's work across Africa has shown how partnerships, networks, and convenings can drive meaningful collaboration. By bringing together and building trust between diverse stakeholder groups across sectors and portfolio countries, RISA has enabled R&I ecosystem collaborations, shared knowledge, built capacity and supported sustainable development, with recorded achievements in agriculture, healthcare, policy, finance, and entrepreneurship. Despite the barriers, such as local context variability and limited resources, RISA's efforts have made important strides to strengthen ecosystem assets and connected innovators with the support needed to achieve impactful solutions.

While RISA's journey clearly shows significant progress, it also underscores the need for systemic immediate and long-term actions that will transcend the programme's operational timeline particularly as it enters its final phase.

Building on these successes, the wider R&I ecosystem can adopt similar approaches to amplify and sustain its impact. *In the short term*, the focus

should be on promoting stronger connections through identification and engagement of relevant ecosystem actors, convenings, workshops, and targeted capacity-building efforts tailored to local contexts. Leveraging tools to track and measure partnerships will ensure progress is actionable and effective. Immediate advocacy to integrate R&I into national and regional development plans will further strengthen this foundation. All these elements were outlined in the Steps to Building Effective Partnerships and Networks.

*In the long term*, the ecosystem must establish sustainable financing models, institutionalise cross-country collaborations, and embed R&I into development frameworks. Addressing barriers to inclusivity and promoting diversity will ensure the ecosystem is equitable and accessible to all. Finally, driving system-level changes through enabling policies, infrastructure development, and a culture of innovation will help secure the long-term growth and transformation of the R&I ecosystem.

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## Annex I: List of partners and their focus areas

S/N	Name of Partner	Country of Operation	Focus Area
1	Adam Smith International Limited	Nigeria	Agriculture
2	Distributed Manufacturing Ltd	Kenya	Policy
3	University of Lagos Innovation and Technology Management Office	Nigeria	Entrepreneurship
4	Nigerian Academy of Science (NAS)	Nigeria	Policy
5	Heritors Labs Limited	Ghana	Policy
6	iSpace Foundation	Ghana	Entrepreneurship
7	University of Ghana Business School	Ghana	Entrepreneurship
8	Katapult Africa	Rwanda	Entrepreneurship
9	Impact Investing Ghana (IIGh)	Ghana	Finance
10	Accra Technical University (ATU)	Ghana	Healthcare
11	Viktoria Solutions Limited	Kenya	Entrepreneurship
12	University of Rwanda	Rwanda	Entrepreneurship
13	Technical University of Kenya (TUK)	Kenya	Entrepreneurship
14	The Mawazo Institute	Kenya	Education
15	University of Tourism, Technology and Business Studies (UTB)	Rwanda	Technology
16	Growth Africa Foundation	Kenya	Entrepreneurship
17	Institut d'Enseignement Supérieur de Ruhengeri (INES)	Rwanda	Agriculture
18	The International Service for The Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA)	Kenya	Policy
19	University of Nairobi	Kenya	Technology
20	Research Institute for Innovation and Sustainability (Pty) Ltd (RIIS)	Rwanda	Policy
21	Technological Higher Education Network South Africa (THENSA)	South Africa	Technology
22	University of Gondar	Ethiopia	Agriculture
23	Aybar Engineering PLC	Ethiopia	Entrepreneurship
24	Jimma University	Ethiopia	Healthcare
25	Entrepreneurial Planning Institute (EPI)	South Africa	Entrepreneurship
26	Wits Health Consortium	South Africa	Healthcare

# Annex II: Recommendations for RISA and general reflections

RISA should focus on sustaining and expanding its partnership efforts, joining, establishing and bolstering networks across the R&I ecosystem. To build on this progress, here are several actionable insights around partnerships and networks. These are particularly relevant for RISA's bridging year.

- 1. Document and Share Key Learnings:** RISA should prioritise capturing and sharing its key insights, tools, and frameworks, including case studies of effective partnerships, network and functional convening models. These repositories of knowledge and shared experiences will form the basis of successful blueprints available to ecosystem actors and result in even more successful partnerships in the long run.
- 2. Continued Engagement:** The focus should remain on advancing stronger connections through convenings such as workshops, conferences and targeted capacity-building efforts tailored to local contexts ensuring that beneficial cooperation is encouraged and enabled. Support for in-person events will allow partners to share their work achievements across the sectors they are working in, exchange ideas, and strengthen networks across countries.
- 3. Measure Outcomes:** It will be critical to periodically conduct focused reviews of RISA-funded and enabled partnerships and networks, while leveraging tools such as AKTEK, to identify what worked, challenges encountered and what could be done differently to inform future ecosystem-building strategies across Africa.
- 4. Foster Regional Synergies:** RISA should continue to support and facilitate cross-border collaborations, such as those between Impact Investing Ghana and Nigeria's Impact Investors Foundation. These partnerships demonstrate the value of regional approaches in tackling shared challenges and scaling innovation.
- 5. Promote Ethical Partnerships and Networks:** The key is moving beyond extractive or overbearing models toward genuine collaboration where African researchers, innovators, and institutions are full partners in shaping the continent's R&I future. It also requires equitable participation from typically marginalised groups such as women and disabled people in the process of setting up these networks and partnerships to ensure that their concerns and realities remain accounted for.

## Reflections on R&I Partnership Models and Successes

The successes of specific RISA-funded partnerships and networks offer valuable lessons for the broader ecosystem. Initiatives like Ethiopia's multistakeholder platform for technology transfer and Ghana's National Research Fund exemplify the impact of aligning partnerships with local priorities. Meanwhile, networks such as CONESAM highlight the benefits of structured frameworks that foster collaboration and scale solutions effectively. By embedding these insights into future ecosystem efforts, Africa's R&I landscape can evolve into a more resilient, inclusive, and innovation-driven force. Beyond RISA, stakeholders across the continent must collectively address systemic barriers, build on proven strategies, and reimagine pathways for transformative change.

# Annex III: Beyond RISA: Looking Broadly at the African Region's R&I Ecosystem

While RISA has provided a valuable foundation, the broader African R&I ecosystem requires transformative, long-term interventions that extend beyond donor-led programmes. Stakeholders across governments, the private sector, development partners and academia must work together to address systemic challenges and unlock the region's full innovation potential.

- 1. Develop Sustainable Financing Mechanisms:** Partnerships and networks within the R&I ecosystem must shift from reliance on external funding to establishing regionally managed, sustainable funding models. Innovation endowments, public-private partnerships, and regional investment funds should be prioritised to ensure consistent support for ecosystem growth.
- 2. Institutionalise Inclusive Networks:** Promoting inclusive networks that integrate underrepresented groups—such as women, youth, and marginalised communities—is essential for equitable development. Programmes like South Africa's DigiBiz initiative provide a replicable model for empowering underserved groups.
- 3. Promote Local Ownership:** Transferring ownership of established partnerships and networks to local actors is crucial for sustainability. Trust and capacity building initiatives should prioritise the full handover of relationships and networks to institutions and innovators who can then leverage on and expand those efforts going forward.
- 4. Strengthen Cross-Border Collaboration:** The creation of regional platforms to facilitate cross-country knowledge sharing, funding, and innovation scaling is crucial. Initiatives like the East African Science and Technology Commission (EASTECO) illustrate the potential for regional frameworks to institutionalise and harmonise convening and collaboration efforts across borders while continuing to coordinate with relevant stakeholders in advocating for the integration of R&I into national and regional development plans that further strengthen this foundation.
- 5. Expand Knowledge-Sharing Platforms:** There is a need to codify protocols and structures for continuous knowledge sharing, such as regional hubs, digital repositories, and convening platforms. These can facilitate the constant and where applicable, real-time exchange of best practices, insights, experiences, learnings and enable ecosystem players to work together more effectively.

## About the RISA Fund

The RISA Fund (2021-2025) is a multi-country initiative funded by UK International Development from the UK government designed to strengthen research and innovation systems across Africa. It brings together two complementary programmes under the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's (FCDO) Research and Evidence Division—Strengthening Research Institutions in Africa (SRIA) and African Technology and Innovation Partnerships (ATIP)—to harness synergies and drive systemic change. Managed by a consortium comprising Chemonics UK, Results for Development, and SOAS University of London, RISA collaborates with a wide range of implementing partners including universities, innovation hubs, government agencies, private sector actors, and international development firms. The programme operates in six countries: Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, Rwanda, Ethiopia, and South Africa, supporting locally driven solutions and fostering cross-sectoral learning and impact.

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