

Enhancing innovation networks and facilitating cross-border collaboration in Southern Africa

The Southern African Innovation Support (SAIS) programme contributes to the growth of new businesses through strengthened innovation ecosystems and sharing of good practice among innovation role-players in the SADC region.



SAIS 2 Connected Hubs Members during a Scrum workshop



Ms Tuire Ylöstalo
NIRAS Project Manager
T: +358 98 362 4259
tyl@niras.com

Africa has a rapidly growing population featuring a large proportion of youth. Approximately 41% of the African population is under the age of 15, and the population of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) grew at a rate of 2.8% from 2016 to 2017 - almost double the world average at the time.

This rapid population expansion and young population represent a youthful and growing work force, which could potentially drive high rates of economic growth for SADC. However, the region faces a variety of challenges that hamper its chances of maximising its potential for socially balanced economic growth.

SADC has to deal with low entrepreneurship rates, wage competitiveness, and employment rates, all of which contribute to widespread poverty. Approximately half of the region's population live on less than US\$1 per day, which has a severe impact on hunger and malnutrition, gender inequality, morbidity, exploitation, and public health. Compounding this problem further is the fact that these issues and widespread poverty feed into each other, causing a vicious, self-perpetuating cycle. Poverty leads to problems such as the exploitation of workers, which leads to deeper or continuing poverty, which encourages further exploitation, and so on.

To help break this cycle, it is necessary for each of the 16 SADC countries to strengthen their national innovation systems (NIS) both to combat poverty through science and knowledge and endorse these as a source of solutions addressing the challenges facing the region. However, developing a NIS is itself fraught with challenges. Most of the SADC countries lack the infrastructure, supporting structures, knowledge, and financial resources necessary to turn science and technology into innovations in their economies.

Bringing innovation systems to life

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland launched the Southern Africa Innovation Support (SAIS) Programme in 2010 to support the development of NIS in and across selected partner countries in SADC. The programme's overall objective is to enhance innovation cooperation in the region and establish NIS contributing to more inclusive business and development.

Phase I of the programme (SAIS 1) ran from 2011 to 2016 and established a knowledge-sharing network of innovation support among partner institutions, organisations, and stakeholders in Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, and Zambia; strengthened human capacity in innovation at all policy and practical

21 projects

all of which are transregional, are receiving support from SAIS 2's Innovation Fund

levels; adapted and replicated projects and initiatives that enhanced innovation across participating countries; and planned an institutional framework for long-term regional innovation and cooperation that aligned with SADC's and member countries' strategies as well as international best practice.

The second phase, SAIS 2, launched in 2017 and will run until 2021, with Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zambia as partner countries. The programme takes the objectives to the next level by focusing on early-stage entrepreneurship and rela-

Donor

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland

Location

Phase I: Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, and Zambia (South Africa as support partner)

Phase II: Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zambia

Contract value

Phase I: €6.15 million

Phase II: €9.2 million

Duration

Phase I: 2011-2016

Phase II: 2017-2021

Programme implementation

Phase I: FCG International Oy (Lead), NIRAS Finland Oy

Phase II: NIRAS Finland Oy



Launch of SAIS 2's second cohort of innovation fund projects

"Many have ventured in bringing innovation hubs together, and some have succeeded. However, not many have been able to create concrete collaboration between the hubs. SAIS does that with its 'Connected Hubs' initiative
Derrick Kotze, mLabs Southern Africa



ted innovation systems. It is using new approaches such as the SAIS 2 Innovation (Challenge) Fund to support transnational projects driven by consortia constructed by local innovation champions.

To achieve its goals, SAIS 2 takes a multi-helix approach, bringing each country's private and public sectors, academia, and civil society as stakeholders in collaboration to establish programme activities. The multi-helix structure allows for the various actors in the partner countries' economies to interact and build stronger networks together - so-called innovation ecosystems - by stimulating innovation in the marketplace through a more coordinated allocation of resources. SAIS 2 also focuses on the base of the pyramid by assisting innovation support organisations to design and deliver their services with socially and economically excluded populations themselves. In this way, the programme activities are designed to reach those who need support the most.

SAIS 2 engages in training and education, for example through its Connected Hubs Initiative, which brings various innovation support organisations from the private and public sector together to exchange experience and design joint cross-border activities. The programme provides capacity building for its beneficiaries in the partner countries, with the support provided by regional and international experts on data management, inclusive innovation, project management, and investment readiness.

The SAIS 2 Innovation Fund

The main instrument for project support is the Innovation Fund, featuring three thematic windows:

Window 1: Institutional Capacity (Stronger Ecosystems) involves the sharing of best practices and improving cooperation across borders to strengthen the ability and expertise of innovation support organisations in promoting entrepreneurship and business development.

Window 2: Innovation in Enterprises focuses on enhancing the abilities of young entrepreneurs and small businesses to innovate and enter new markets through guidance, advice, and finance provided for practical projects.

Window 3: Inclusive Innovation assists innovation support organisations and enterprises to adopt open approaches in developing and delivering services to and with communities that are excluded due to social and/or economic reasons.

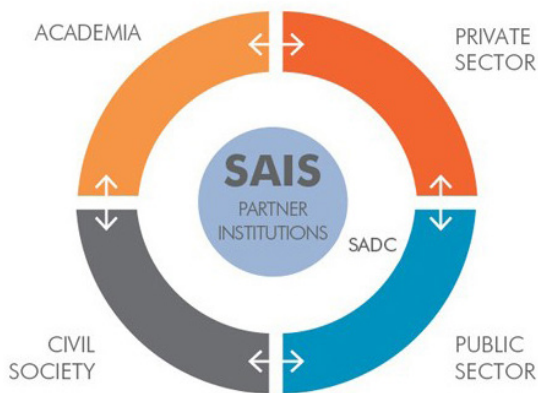


Diagramme of the multi-helix approach

So far, 21 transregional projects with a total value of around EUR3.4 million are receiving support from the SAIS 2 Innovation Fund. Primary stakeholders include around 100 innovation support organisations located in Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and other SADC countries and beyond. The number of individuals and early-stage enterprises benefitting from their assistance can be counted in the hundreds.

More information can be found at the SAIS 2 [website](#).

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