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## **Framework to Guide the Implementation of Strategic Initiatives and Innovation at the APHRC**

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### **1. Introduction**

The African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) is driven by its mission to generate scientific evidence aligned to local and international development agendas, strengthen research and related capacity in the African research and development (R&D) ecosystem, and engage policy to inform action on health and development. In line with this, APHRC recognizes the need to strengthen key strategic initiatives such as the ideation process, the strategic innovation pipeline, and outcomes of the signature issues identified by research themes. Other strategic initiatives may include seed grants, fellowships, and those with a career strengthening focus. The aim of this Framework is therefore to outline a structure through which support to develop long-term ideas and programs for sustained policy engagement at APHRC can be provided.

The objectives of this framework are three fold:

- To provide guidance to Themes and Units on how to promote their signature issues and leverage the Signature Issue Approach as a pathway to impact;
- To guide the development of big ideas from which programs can be built to address key focus areas of the Strategic Plan;
- To enhance the strategic innovation and enable early career researchers and professionals to refine and develop ideas through an innovation pipeline.

#### **1.1 Why is ideation necessary within the 2022-2026 Strategic Plan?**

The ideation process is critical to enhancing the long-term financial and programmatic stability of the Center, as it will provide a bank of ideas that APHRC can draw on to submit to funders and partners. The ideas will form the basis for development of multi-year grant proposals that have the potential to provide a strong base for future projects and programs at the Center. The ideas and innovations developed through the ideation process need to promote synergy as the fundraising space lays a lot of emphasis on collaboration among researchers, teams and institutions. The Framework therefore stresses the need for building partnerships and consortia within and outside the Center.

Once ideas have been conceptualised, they will be awarded funding by the Center that will allow them to try out innovative approaches, test or pilot an unproven approach, and explore the feasibility of new approaches.

Through this process, program teams will position themselves to submit ideas for funding as soon as calls for proposals are released. Further, the ideas could be used as the basis of engagements and interactions on fundraising prospects with potential funders.

Currently, there is consensus that innovations that seek to change the lives of Africans should be spearheaded by Africans within African institutions. More specifically, the conversations have focussed on how to support early career professionals and build their capacity while being mentored by senior professionals to actualize their career aspirations. The ideation process will therefore go a long way in providing the opportunities that young professionals need to grow and thrive in their careers.

## **1.2 Where big and pipeline ideas should originate from**

The ideation process will accommodate ideas from both early career and senior professionals in each of the programmatic and Operations Divisions. However, pipeline ideas will be restricted to young researchers and professionals who would like to build their niche and careers.

Young career professionals are encouraged to submit their big and pipeline ideas in partnership with their mentors, and/or supervisors, in order to in-build mentorship, career progression and capacity strengthening. This will allow for strengthening of those ideas in readiness for submission at the theme level, and eventually to a center-wide independent review panel, and/or external funding.

## **1.3 The Premise of the Signature Issues**

Signature issues are niche areas that were identified for APHRC's 2017-2021 Strategic Plan as being both reflective of the body of evidence generated over our years of operation, prevailing challenges and opportunities in the population, health and education realm. This was an outcome of our desire to contribute to our vision of using evidence to transform lives in Africa. Each of our six research units (then) had a signature issue(s) around which we conducted a comprehensive policy analysis and review to identify both areas of opportunity for engagement in countries where we operate, and potential research questions for further exploration. Signature Issues (SIs) have been reinforced in the current Strategic Plan 2022-2026, to ensure that the body of evidence that has been generated creates traction with the policy making process through sustained policy engagement. The model to ensure that evidence gets traction with the policy process is the Signature Issue Approach (SIA).

The SIA is an in-house model for achieving policy and programmatic impact with scientific evidence and expertise guiding decisions across the policy continuum. It entails drawing on the Center's defined focus areas (signature issues) and contributing to the use of evidence to influence, guide, and advocate for improved policy development, or program design and implementation.

The Center has created a significant pool of knowledge through its research activities on its SIs over the years. This archive of scientific evidence is aligned with the key development priority areas at both local and international levels. The Center, through this Framework, aims to tap into this body of knowledge to generate impactful ideas and innovations. This Framework proposes that teams within the Research Themes and PEC Division reflect on the achievements they have had within their SIs in terms of research outputs to formulate new ideas. Thus, the SIs will form the basis for ideation that may result in new ideas and

innovations and serve as new frontiers in policy engagement. The need to focus on the SIs is driven in part by the realization that in the last strategic plan period, the Center did not: a) achieve the anticipated evidence-to-policy impact; b) attain continuity in program achievements beyond project cycles; c) have sustained policy engagement; and, d) take projects to scale in order to achieve impact.

Due to the Center's emphasis on SIs and the SIA, program teams are encouraged to incorporate signature issues in the developed ideas. One consideration in the use of the SIA is that this process should be guided by the signature issues that have been prioritised by specific themes. Additionally, the developed concept ideas should to the extent possible include information on how policy engagement and advocacy activities will incorporate the SIA. This will be a collaborative effort involving teams from the Research and PEC Divisions who will designs ideas aligned to the development and/or implementation of Strategic Policy Engagement Plans (SPEPs). The SPEPs will provide a clear roadmap on the manner in which identified stakeholders will be engaged to ensure their buy-in and to increase the likelihood of sustained impact. Some SPEPs may be used to guide future program implementation related to a specific SI. The funding for these future programs may be obtained through competitive grants.

## **2. Components of the Framework**

The Framework has the following components: Setting the context for the big and pipeline ideas; Review process and selection criteria; Outlining the implementation plan and approach; and Monitoring and Evaluation.

### **2.1. Context**

#### **2.1.1. Big ideas**

The need to develop big ideas is driven by a gap that was identified in the 2017-2022 Strategic Plan period. This gap was related in part to the limited geographical scope of the evidence generated at the Center, which resulted in restricted reach and influence within and outside Kenya. Although this has somewhat improved with the opening of the West African Regional Office (WARO) in Dakar, Senegal, there is still room for further expansion. On the other hand, there has been the urgency for more strategic fundraising through having a bank of ideas formulated from a multidisciplinary perspective, incorporating pathways to impact, while assembling strong networks of partners. It is envisaged that this process makes the ideas solid and hence more likely to succeed in competitive and non-competitive funding when shared with potential funders.

##### **2.1.1.1. Review process for the big ideas**

For the big ideas the review will be conducted once, at two levels:

- The first level of review will consist of a panel of staff from each of the thematic areas who have subject knowledge in the proposed area. This panel of reviewers will be convened by the Unit or Thematic leads;

- The second level of review – also called the independent level of review – will comprise senior staff across the Center, who have subject or discipline expertise on the proposed areas. This panel will be convened by the Director of Programs.

### **2.1.1.2 Selection criteria for the big ideas**

Ideas to be funded should be aligned with the Center’s Strategic Plan, and include those that:

1. Demonstrate synergy across programs and thematic areas, and advance collaboration across Units and Themes;
2. Demonstrate to the extent possible that there will be co-creation with policy makers and program actors for sustained impact;
3. Have a laid-out plan for capacity and capability strengthening at the individual and institutional level, and where possible include a capacity building component for stakeholders and policy makers;
4. Espouse the elements of the SIA and are guided by the need to achieve impact;
5. Are multi-year, multi-million and multi-country.

### **2.1.2 Pipeline ideas**

The pipeline ideas have their origins from the innovation prize that the Center has run for the last five years, aimed at encouraging staff to come up with ideas that catalyze innovation, build their niche and support the development of expertise in areas aligned to the Center’s areas of strategic emphasis. The innovation prize was open to all staff. Previously, the innovation prize concept notes were submitted once a year, reviewed, and poster presentations of all submitted ideas done during the Annual Ideas Marketplace, allowing assessors and other staff to listen to all the presentations. The single winning idea was then presented to staff in November when the prize was awarded.

In this Framework pipeline ideas will seek to respond to the gap that was identified in the last strategic plan period. The gap related to little progress being made in research-related innovations particularly those that would enable young researchers and professionals to develop their niche(s). Therefore, the pipeline could be ideas that are very strategic to the Center in the long term, and be a response to some of those areas that are often poorly-funded and yet are strategic to the Center’s areas of work.

#### **2.1.2.1. Review process for the pipeline ideas**

For the pipeline ideas the review will be done twice a year, in April and October. The review for pipeline ideas will be at two levels.

- Within-unit/theme review where the submitting staff’s supervisor, the theme/unit lead and one researcher (from ARS and above) shall review the concept notes from theme/unit members. This will enable themes/units to select the best ideas for submission.
- A select panel across the Center, comprising staff with varied subject expertise.

### 2.1.2.2 Selection criteria for the pipeline ideas

We propose to adapt the following selection criteria for the APHRC Prize for Innovation for the pipeline ideas.

1. Innovativeness of proposed idea
2. Incorporation of the SIA approach or address the SI to the extent possible
3. Relevance to APHRC's areas of strategic focus
4. Technical soundness of proposed project
  - a. Comprehensive review of relevant literature
  - b. Strong rationale for importance of the proposed project
  - c. Soundness of proposed methodology/ approach for delivering the project
  - d. Proposed sustainability and scale up of the project ideas
5. Presentation of idea – tactics, materials, skills

## 2.2 Implementation plan and approach

### 2.2.1 Development and funding big ideas and pipeline ideas

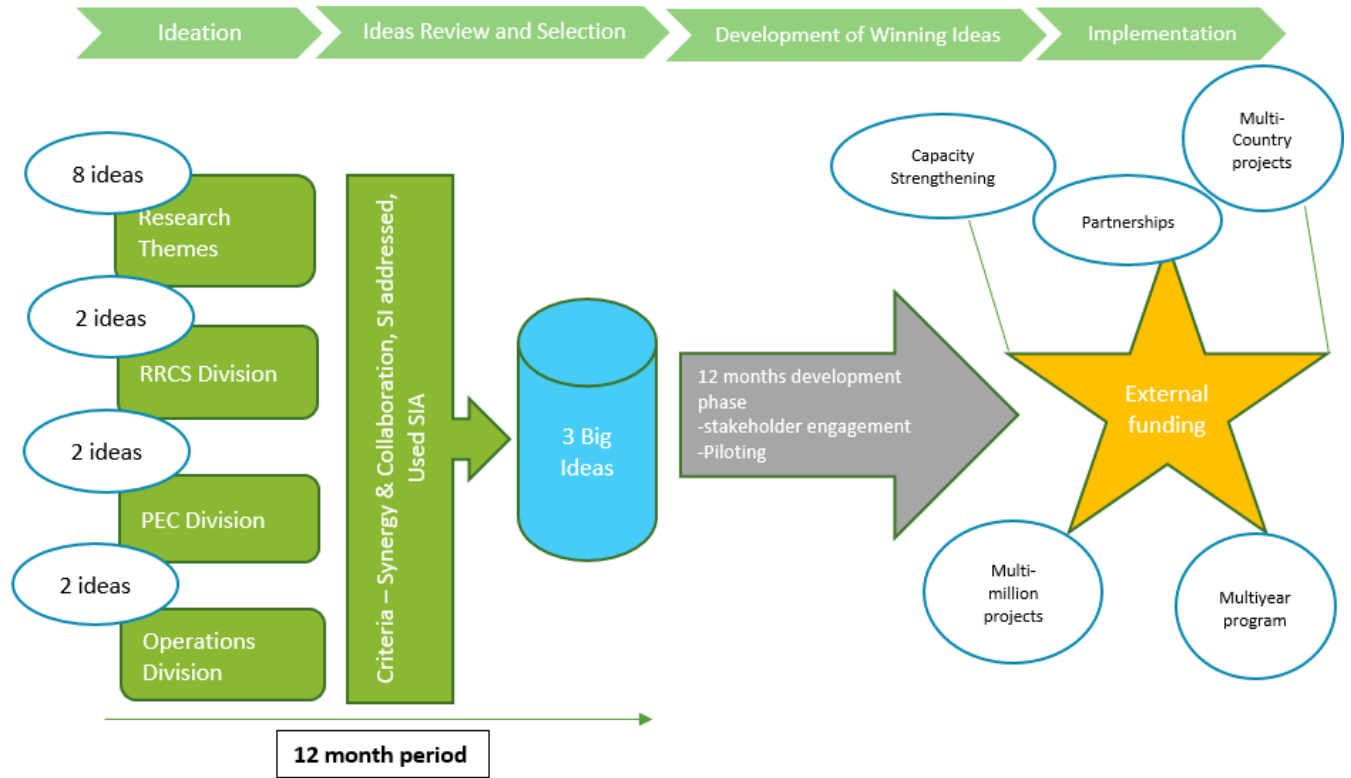
We propose to have all ideas funded from a centralised pot of money within the Center. This will encourage competition for this seed funding at the Center level, thereby encouraging a continuous flow of well drafted and rationalized ideas. This process takes into account that raising funds in the real world is typically a competitive process.

Therefore, the focus of the annual ideation workshops should be more on the development of big ideas which are ready for submission to the centralised pool for review. Our proposal is for the Center to allocate 150K to fund three big ideas at USD 50,000 each, out of those ideas submitted from the seven thematic areas and divisions (four research themes, the PEC, RRCS and Operations divisions). Since the Centre will allocate financial resources to facilitate the ideation process around the big and the pipeline ideas, there should be a requirement that at least one of the two ideas coming from the Themes to a centralised submission system should be centred on a signature issue(s) of the respective Themes and Divisions. Moreover, the Center will allocate USD 100,000 to fund five to ten pipeline ideas, valued at between USD 10,000 and 20,000 each.

For the big ideas, we envisage a process where ideas originating from individuals and teams are consolidated and reviewed within the Themes to identify the best **two big ideas** from each thematic area. These **two ideas** from the themes, in which one of these will be based on the SI will be submitted to the central pool for review. The review will be done by an independent team of reviewers at the Center to pick the **best three big ideas** overall that will benefit from seed funding of USD 50,000 each to further develop the idea, including adding vital data to the concepts, engaging in co-creation with stakeholders, and holding workshops to develop tools and piloting where applicable, as teams seek additional external funding. This phase of development of big ideas will provide teams up to 12 months to develop and implement the ideas further as

needed before seeking external funding. To encourage collaboration and synergy building, the process should go beyond merely acknowledging the originator of the idea or innovation to cover their personnel costs to the extent possible when the funding is secured. A detailed work plan for the big ideas is as highlighted in Table 1. An illustration of the big ideas process is shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Illustration of the big ideas process**



**Table 1: Big ideas work plan for 2022-2026**

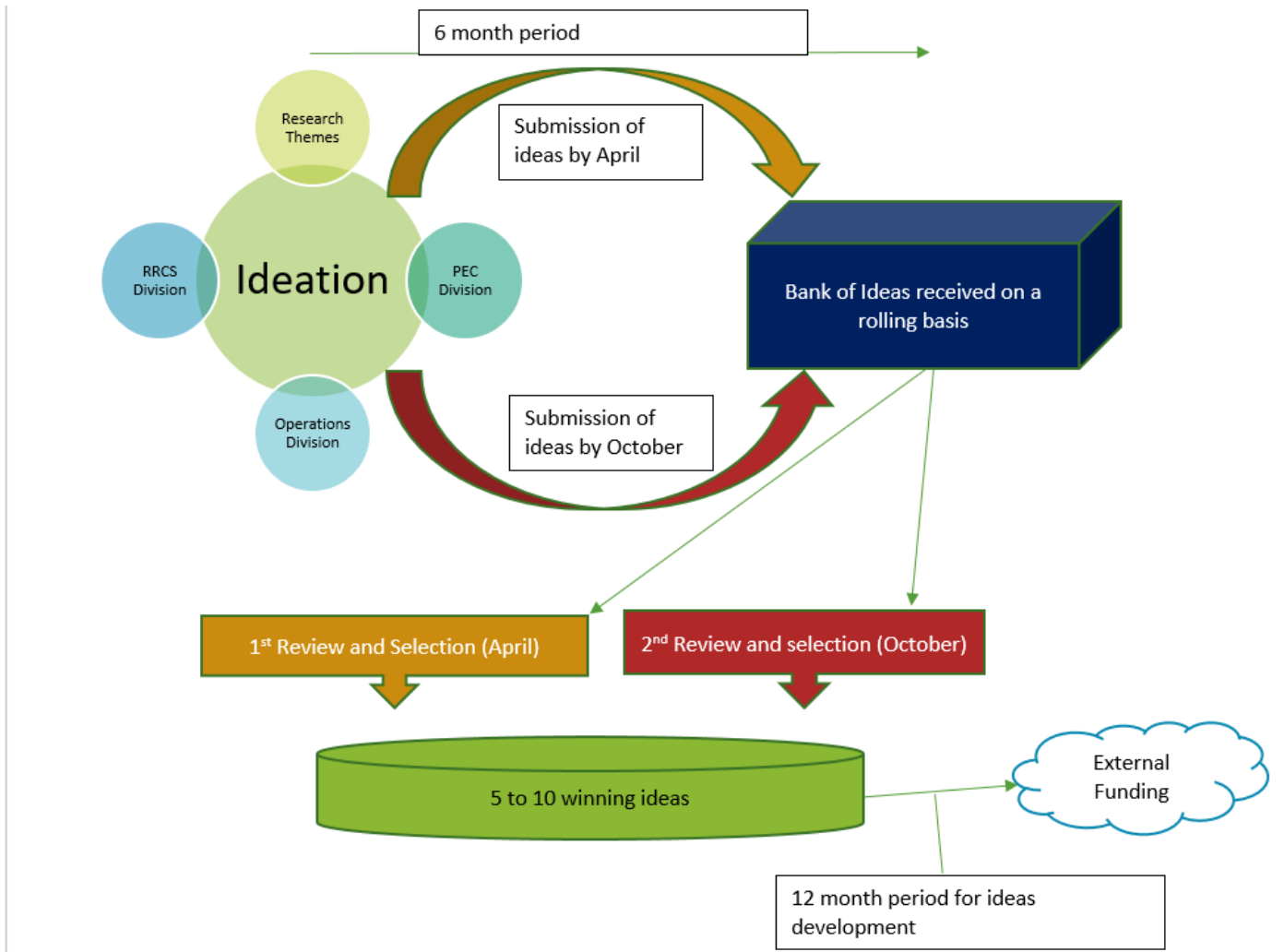
<b>Key activity</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023 - 2026</b>	<b>Responsible</b>
Adverts or calls for submission	August, 2022	February 2023	DoR office/DoPEC office
Development of ideas by staff	September-October, 2022	March–April, 2023	All staff
Review of submissions by thematic teams and independent committee	October, 2022	May 2023	Thematic teams/Independent review committee
Presentation of selected ideas to all staff and award ceremony	November, 2022	June 2023	All thematic areas and all staff
Implementation and evaluation of proposed activities	January-December (2023)	July 2023-June 2024	Winners/DoR/M&E
<b>Note: The subsequent years in 2024, 2025 and 2026 will begin in February.</b>			
<b>The implementation and evaluation of proposed activities will be done over a 12 month period.</b>			

For the pipeline ideas we propose ideas to be submitted on a rolling basis with fixed review deadlines in a given year, in April and October. Annually, the Center will fund five to ten pipeline ideas. Once an idea is approved for funding, the innovators will have up to 12 months to develop and evaluate it. This process will ensure that the pipeline idea is natural and organic, and that staff will develop ideas at any time of the year, while the review sessions will ensure fewer missed opportunities to pitch ideas. After proof of concept and/or pilot, the pipeline ideas can be developed for funding under the big ideas or submitted for external funding.

Capacity building will be embedded for both the big and pipeline ideas to equip the winners with requisite skills to implement their idea. This will happen within the 12 month of the implementation phase.

A detailed work plan for the pipeline ideas is provided in Table 2. An illustration of the pipeline ideas is shown in figure 2.

**Figure 2: Illustration of the pipeline ideas process**





**Table 2: Work plan for pipeline ideas**

Key activity	2022	2023 – 2026	Responsible
Adverts or calls for submission	July, 2022	December, 2022	DoR office/DoPEC office
Development of ideas for seed funding	August-September, 2022	January–March, 2023	All staff
Ideas Marketplace (poster presentations)	October, 2022	March, 2023; September, 2023	All staff
Review and selection of ideas for funding (review committee)	October, 2022	April & October, 2023	Review Committee
Presentation of selected ideas to all staff and award ceremony	November, 2022	May & November, 2023	All thematic areas and all staff
Implementation and evaluation of proposed activities	January- December (2023)	January-December, 2024	Winners/DoR/M&E
Post ideation: Identification of potential funders with piloted ideas	2024	2025	Thematic teams
<b>Note: The subsequent years in 2024, 2025 and 2026 will begin in January.</b>			
<b>The implementation and evaluation of proposed activities will be done over a 12 month period.</b>			

### 2.3 Monitoring and Evaluation

This framework proposes a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) component aligned to the Centre’s existing M&E plan. The purpose of the monitoring is to track the ideation process for the big ideas and pipeline ideas from inception to fully developed ideas. This will ensure accountability of both time and financial resources invested in this process. It will also provide learning opportunities for improvement of the process. The process should be documented to ensure that the originator(s) of the idea is (are) adequately credited throughout the process. When the idea gets funded, the contribution to outcomes and impact should also be adequately attributed to them. The evaluation will focus on measurement of the outcomes resulting from implementing the innovative ideas and their impact at both institutional level and their contribution to the Center’s vision as outlined in the 2022-2026 Strategic Plan. Table 3 outlines some key indicators relating to the ideation process and outcomes.

**Table 3: Key indicators**

<b>Objective 1:</b> To provide support to Themes and Units to promote their signature issues and leverage the Signature Issue Approach as a pathway to impact				
<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Frequency of reporting</b>	<b>Responsible</b>	<b>Targets</b>
Increased evidence use in policy formulation and implementation	Number of policies influenced by evidence from the Center’s implemented ideas ( disaggregate by signature issue, big ideas, pipeline ideas, themes/divisions)	Annually	Implementing teams	-
	Proportion of ideas using the signature issues approach	Annually	Implementing teams, PEC	50%
<b>Objective 2:</b> To guide the development of big ideas from which programs can be built to address key focus areas of the Strategic Plan				
Increased ideation across the strategic plan focus areas	Number of big ideas generated (disaggregated by themes/units)	Annually	Themes/Divisions	14
	Number of research outputs from implemented big ideas (disaggregated by type)	Annually	Themes/Divisions	-
Increased synergy through the ideation process	Number of ideas with cross-theme collaboration	Annually	Themes, Reviewing Committee	TBD
	Number of partnerships developed through co-creation of ideas	Annually	Implementing teams, Reviewing Committee	2
	Number of ideas based on the systems thinking approach	Annually	Reviewers, Implementing teams	TBD
Increased funding through big ideas	Proportion of big ideas that resulted in external funding (disaggregated by competitive and non-competitive grants)	Annually	Implementing teams	100%
	Amount of funding in USD raised from big ideas (disaggregated by each idea)	Annually	Implementing teams, Finance	Multi-million
<b>Objective 3:</b> To enhance the strategic innovation and enable young career researchers and professionals to refine and develop ideas through an innovation pipeline				
	Number of pipeline ideas generated (disaggregated by career level of individual researchers, themes)	Bi-annually	Themes/Divisions	5

Increased strategic innovation from early career researchers	Number of research outputs from implemented pipeline ideas (disaggregated by type, career level of researchers, themes)	Quarterly	Themes/Divisions	-
	Number of research capacity strengthening activities resulting from pipeline ideas (disaggregated by type)	Bi-annually	Implementing teams RRCS	-
Improved efficiency in ideation process	Proportion of ideas completing the piloting phase within the 1 year timeline (disaggregate by big ideas, pipeline ideas)	Annually	Themes, Implementing teams	100%
	New expertise sourced to implement ideas	Annually	Themes, HR	-
Enhanced ownership and recognition for ideators of big and pipeline ideas	Proportion of time (LoE) spent in implementing the funded idea. (disaggregated by individual researcher)	Annually	Themes, Finance	-
Increased funding through pipeline ideas	Proportion of pipeline ideas that resulted in external funding (disaggregated by competitive and non-competitive grants)	Annually	Implementing teams	100%

**Note**

Reporting timelines (frequency) will apply as from 2023 when the first idea, either big or pipeline is fully developed and ready for funding and/or has been funded.

**3. Linkage with the Go/No Go process.** It is not necessary to have the go/ no go process instituted at the ideation or innovative stage. However, the review at the thematic level should enable the “good ideas” to go through the pipeline, while allowing those other ideas selected at any stage of this review to be refined further to become grand ideas. All reviewed ideas should ideally have a “go” when a call for funding opportunity becomes available.