**Chapter 5**

**The Formation of the African Policy and Research Consortium**

**Introduction**

Africa stands at a decisive crossroads in the twenty-first century. With its demographic momentum, vast natural resource endowment, and expanding middle class, the continent is positioned as a global growth frontier. Yet, deep structural challenges persist. Limited regional integration, climate vulnerability, food insecurity, widening skills gaps, and enduring governance deficits continue to constrain development. Moreover, African policymakers have too often relied on fragmented and externally driven policy advice, producing a weak alignment between research, policy, and the lived realities of African societies. The trajectory of Africa’s development has thus been shaped more by external donors and foreign think tanks than by African scholars, practitioners, and institutions.

In response to these gaps, African think tanks have sought to bridge knowledge and governance. While their contributions are significant, they remain constrained by limited resources, inadequate networking mechanisms, and the duplication of efforts. Recognizing these systemic challenges, the Africa Think Tank Platform (ATTP) Project, launched in July 2025 with the support of the World Bank and in alignment with the African Union (AU), offers a historic opportunity to strengthen Africa’s intellectual infrastructure and empower its knowledge-producing institutions.

It was against this backdrop that the African Policy Research Consortium (APRC) was conceived. The consortium was envisioned not as another project, but as a bold initiative to establish an African-owned and African-led platform for policy innovation and research excellence. The APRC was formed under the convening leadership of Dr. Edward Agbai, working in collaboration with Prof. Mondy Gold, Chairman of the African Democratic Congress Board of Trustees and Co-Chairman of the Governing Council, and Prof. N’Dri Thérèse Assié-Lumumba, Ph.D., President of the Global Africa Comparative and International Education Society (Global Africa CIES), serving as Co-Chair of the Board of Trustees. In addition, Prof. Steve Azaiki, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of the Azaiki Foundation, assumed the role of Executive Coordinator. Together, these leaders brought credibility, vision, and the organizational foundation necessary for building a Pan-African policy consortium of consequence.

To deliver on this vision, the APRC mobilized leading think tanks across the continent. The institutions that successfully met the capacity requirements of the ATTP call for proposals included IMANI Center for Policy & Education (Ghana), the Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (MISTRA) (South Africa), and the African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development (CentreLSD) (Nigeria). Each of these organizations contributes extensive experience, institutional strength, and regional expertise, providing a robust foundation for addressing Africa’s policy challenges in a coordinated and impactful manner.

In addition to these core members, the consortium drew on the expertise of several organizations under a sub-contracting arrangement to ensure comprehensive coverage of the proposal’s scope. These included the Center for Social Action Studies (Democratic Republic of Congo), the South African Forestry Company SOC Ltd (South Africa), and the International Society of Comparative Education, Science & Technology (ISCEST) (Nigeria). Their inclusion broadened the thematic and geographical reach of the consortium’s work.

Further strengthening the initiative, APRC partnered with international and regional organizations committed to advancing Africa’s development agenda. These included the Prairies Africa Partnership (PAP) in Saskatoon, Canada; the Hensard University; the Marcus Garvey Institute for Human Development in Florida, USA; the Abuja Chamber of Commerce and Industry; International Society of Comparative Education, Science & Technology (ISCEST) (Nigeria); CSR & Governance Institute; Think Progress (Ghana); and the Azaiki Foundation. Among these, the IMANI Center for Policy & Education (Ghana) was designated as the Lead Institution, serving as the fiscal host and ensuring compliance with World Bank requirements, while also providing logistical and technical support.

The APRC thus represents far more than a consortium assembled to compete for the ATTP project. It is a Pan-African response to the urgent need for a coherent, sustainable, and inclusive policy research ecosystem, one rooted in African ownership and leadership. This chapter traces the journey of the APRC from its conception to its formal submission, reflecting on the processes, challenges, and broader implications for Africa’s intellectual independence and policy sovereignty.

**Laying the Groundwork: From Idea to Institution**

The African Policy Research Consortium (APRC) emerged from deliberate conversations among visionary institutions and individuals who discerned a critical need: to move beyond fragmented research efforts and toward a unified, collaborative, and accountable consortium.

At the outset of responding to the ATTP proposal call, Dr. Edward Agbai reached out to Prof. Mondy Gold as the initial point of contact. Prof. Gold, recognizing the importance of broader engagement, subsequently connected with Prof. Steve Azaiki, and together they convened the first meeting to discuss strategies for inclusive participation. The goal was to engage key stakeholders and inspire them to mobilize their networks within the African diaspora, thereby laying the foundation for a strong and capable team.

Through these efforts, distinguished participants from both the diaspora and the African continent were identified and invited to join the process. A date was set, and at the inaugural meeting, more than thirty intellectuals gathered to deliberate on the critical questions raised by the proposal call. What emerged from this gathering was not merely a response to an immediate challenge, but the beginning of a larger vision: the creation of an institution capable of shaping urgent policy debates while simultaneously strengthening Africa’s long-term capacity for knowledge production and intellectual independence.

Very early practical and crucial steps were taken to boost and updated existing institutional platforms to reflect the formation of the consortium:

* The **International Society of Comparative Education, Science & Technology (ISCEST)** restructured its website to showcase APRC’s objectives.
* The **Azaiki Foundation**, with its long history of supporting intellectual development, also revised its platform to highlight its partnership in the consortium.
* The Nigeria **National Think** platform was envisaged and proposal in motion, situating APRC within a broader movement for national policy innovation.

**Leadership and Institutional Anchors**

At the heart of APRC’s emergence lies the institutional support of the **Nigeria National Think Tank**, co-chaired by two distinguished figures:

* **Professor Steve Azaiki, OON** – academic, policy advocate, and visionary founder of the Azaiki Foundation, whose leadership and networks have been central to shaping the consortium’s direction.
* **Professor Bolaji Akinyemi, CON** – former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Nigeria and former Director-General of the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA), bringing unparalleled diplomatic and intellectual experience to the table.

The involvement of these leaders has been more than symbolic. It has provided APRC with credibility, gravitas, and a strong foundation of trust both within Nigeria and across Africa’s policy community. Their stewardship underscores that the consortium is not only a new initiative but also part of a long intellectual and policy tradition in Nigeria.

These actions were not mere public relations exercises. They were symbolic gestures of credibility, announcing to the world that APRC had entered the intellectual arena with seriousness of purpose.

**2. Historical Precedents: African Think Tanks in Context**

The idea of a continental policy research consortium builds on decades of African intellectual cooperation.

1. **Early Post-Independence Institutions**
In the 1960s and 1970s, regional bodies such as the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) provided vital platforms for critical research and debate on postcolonial development strategies. CODESRIA’s success stemmed from its ability to foster Pan-African scholarly networks, although it faced ongoing challenges related to sustainability.
2. **The African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF)**
Established in 1991, the ACBF supported think tanks, policy centers, and training institutions across Africa. While it enhanced national-level policy research capacity, its impact was uneven, with many beneficiary institutions struggling with sustainability and integration into policymaking.
3. **Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Policy Research**
Institutions such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) developed policy research units, but these often operated in silos, limiting cross-regional collaboration.

The APRC builds on these legacies while seeking to avoid their pitfalls. Unlike earlier efforts, it is deliberately structured as a multi-country consortium embedded within a global financing initiative, and it explicitly emphasizes sustainability, gender inclusion, and policy uptake.

**3. The ATTP Project as a Catalyst**

The ATTP Project provides the structural and financial framework for the APRC’s formation. As a five-year, US$50 million Investment Project Financing (IPF) initiative, it aims to establish a sustainable platform for African think tanks to collaborate on cross-border issues.

**3.1 Alignment with Global and Continental Agendas**

* **Agenda 2063** (*The Africa We Want*): The ATTP’s thematic areas—economic transformation, climate change, regional trade, food security, human capital, and digitalization—directly align with the AU’s long-term vision for inclusive growth and sustainable development.
* **The World Bank Africa Strategy**: The ATTP operationalizes the World Bank’s emphasis on regional integration, resilience, and human capital development.
* **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**: The initiative supports SDG 2 (*Zero Hunger*), SDG 8 (*Decent Work and Economic Growth*), SDG 13 (*Climate Action*), and SDG 17 (*Partnerships for the Goals*).

**3.2 Project Components**

* **Component 1: Institutional Capacity** – Building the ATTP Secretariat, a Steering Committee, and engagement mechanisms with AU and RECs.
* **Component 2: Research Quality and Uptake** – Funding high-quality studies, creating an Africa Knowledge Repository, and supporting fellowships.
* **Component 3: Platform Sustainability** – Developing long-term resource mobilization mechanisms, including crowdfunding and AU support.

The APRC positions itself as an early adopter and implementer of this framework, ensuring that Africa’s think tanks become proactive rather than reactive in shaping the continent’s policy agenda.

**4. Governance of the APRC**

Effective governance is central to the Consortium’s credibility. The APRC adopts a **multi-tiered governance model** designed to balance leadership, accountability, and inclusivity.

1. **Convener/Compliance Officer (Dr. Edward Agbai)**
Provides overall vision, ensures alignment with ATTP objectives, and mobilizes networks across the African continent and diaspora.
2. **Co-Chairman, Governing Council (Prof. Mondy Gold)**
Provides strategic decision-making, chairs key meetings of the Governing Council, ensures adherence to governance principles, and represents the Consortium in external engagements.
3. **Executive Coordinator (Prof. Steve Azaiki)**
Oversees daily coordination, ensures research quality control, and facilitates communication between participating institutions.
4. **Lead Institution (**IMANI Center for Policy & Education**, Ghana)**
Acts as fiscal host, ensures compliance with World Bank requirements, and provides logistical and technical support.
5. **Thematic Leads**
Senior researchers from member institutions are appointed to lead work on each of the ATTP’s priority themes.

This governance model mirrors best practices in international research consortia, while remaining adaptable to Africa’s political and institutional realities.

**APRC ORG – PROPOSED ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

1. **Board Level**
* Board of Trustees
* Governing Council
1. **Executive Leadership**
* Host Institution
1. **Strategic Coordination**
* Executive Coordinator
1. **Regional Leaders/Deputy Cordinators:**
	* Central Africa
	* East Africa
	* West Africa
	* Southern Africa
	* North Africa
2. **Advisory & Oversight**
* Senior Fellows
* Country Leaders
1. **Thematic Leadership**
* **Thematic Leaders** (oversee the following areas):

**Hierarchy Overview**

Board of Trustees → Governing Council → Host Institution → Coordinator → Senior Fellows / Country Leaders → Thematic Leaders → Regional Leader

**ORGANOGRAM**

* ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION & GOVERNANCE
* DIGITIZATION
* REGIONAL TRADE
* CLIMATE CHANGE
* FOOD SECURITY
* HUMAN CAPITAL
* SECURITY & CONFLICT RESOLUTION
* CENTRAL AFRICA
* EAST AFRICA
* NORTH AFRICA
* SOUTH AFRICA
* WEST AFRICA

COUNTRY LEADERS

SENIOR FELLOWS

THEMATIC LEADER

HOST INSTITUTION

DEPUTY COORDINATOR

COORDINATOR

GOVERNING COUNCIL

BOARD OF TRUSTEE

**7. Gender and Inclusivity Imperatives**

The Consortium integrates gender considerations at three levels:

* **Research Design**: All studies include gender-disaggregated data.
* **Capacity Building**: Establishing a peer mentorship network for female researchers.
* **Leadership**: Ensuring women serve as Thematic Leads and Steering Committee members.

This aligns with ATTP’s goal of fostering a gender-responsive policy research ecosystem.

**5. Comparative Models from Other Regions**

The APRC draws inspiration from similar consortia around the world:

1. **Latin America – Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO)**
CLACSO, established in 1967, has successfully built a network of over 800 institutions in 55 countries, promoting collaborative research and influencing policy across the region.
2. **Europe – European Policy Institutes Network (EPIN)**
EPIN coordinates European think tanks on EU integration issues, emphasizing collective voice and policy uptake. Its ability to influence EU policy demonstrates the value of regional research networks.
3. **Asia – ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS)**
This track-two diplomacy network illustrates how think tanks can complement intergovernmental regionalism, particularly in sensitive policy domains.

By studying these models, the APRC adapts their lessons: strong governance (EPIN), wide membership (CLACSO), and policy complementarity with regional institutions (ASEAN-ISIS).

**6. Strategic Orientation and Thematic Focus**

The APRC focuses on **the six ATTP priority areas** and a seventh area

1. **Economic Transformation & Governance** – The thematic leaders is Dr Theophilus Acheampong from Ghana and the research on i) Industrial Policy, Trade, and Economic Diversification, ii) Governance, Institutions, and Public Sector Effectiveness, and iii) Public Finance, Tax and Debt Management.
2. **Climate Change** – The thematic leaders is Prof. Mpoko Bokanga from the DR Congo and the research focuses on weak policy frameworks underpinning climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts including early warning systems and disaster preparedness, absence of clear strategies to leverage Africa’s natural endowments carbon sequestration and global energy transition, need for a hunted voice to advance African interests in global forums, limited accountability in climate policies, slow deployment of digital technology, and persistent institutional capacity gaps.
3. **Regional Trade** – The thematic leaders is Prof Adesoji Adesugba from Nigeria Supporting AfCFTA implementation, customs harmonization, and regional value chains. The team will assess governance frameworks and their impact on regional trade. Identify institutional and policy reform models for African RECs. Recommend actionable governance innovations for AU member states. Finally, the team will develop an institutional performance index for benchmarking.
4. **Food Security** – The thematic leaders is Prof Azwihangwisi Edward Nensamvini. The research will emphasize promoting innovations in agricultural productivity, sustainable land use, and nutrition-sensitive policies. The aim is to develop strategies that strengthen food systems, improve livelihoods, and ensure equitable access to nutritious food, thereby enhancing resilience against hunger and malnutrition.
5. **Human Capital** – The thematic leaders is Prof Sylvester Mpandeli the research focuses on Africa’s demographic dividend—its large and growing youthful population—has the potential to transform the continent into a global growth hub. However, the mismatch between skills supply and demand, fragmented national qualification systems, and limited mutual recognition of credentials have constrained labour mobility and employment opportunities across borders. Labour mobility is not only an economic issue but also a driver of political integration and social cohesion. Inconsistent accreditation frameworks and weak institutional cooperation reduce the efficiency of regional labour markets, exacerbating youth unemployment, underemployment, and skills underutilization. Furthermore, brain drain persists as African professionals often migrate outside the continent in search of recognition of their qualifications, undermining domestic capacity.
6. **Digitalization -** The thematic leaders is Prof Charles Orbih,andthe research focuses on Connectivity and Access, Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), Jobs and Economic Transformation/ Sustainability and Resilience/ Pan-African and Global Positioning, Digital Education and Skills Development, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Africa’s Development.
7. **Security and Conflict Resolution** – Added by members of the consortium to address areas not covered by the ATTP call.

**7. The Invisible Work: Papers, Processes, and Compliance**

Behind every successful institution lies a mountain of unseen work. For APRC, this meant gathering and organizing the vast array of papers, records, and audited accounts required for submission. Financial accountability was non-negotiable; the credibility of the consortium depended on it.

The preparation of audited accounts was particularly significant. In a context where institutions are often dismissed for lacking transparency, APRC’s insistence on rigorous compliance sent a clear message: this was an entity that could be trusted, not only by African stakeholders but also by international partners.

After months of preparation, updating platforms, sorting documentation, and aligning partnerships—the consortium reached its first significant milestone: formal submission.

The submission represented more than a bureaucratic step. It symbolized the transition from aspiration to reality, from preparatory work to active engagement. With submission, APRC emerged as a visible, credible, and institutionally backed actor in the policy landscape of Africa.

To meet the critical submission deadline of 24 September 2025, Dr. Odidi Princewill prepared the preliminary proposal that served as the foundation for the consortium’s work. Building upon this, the compliance team distinguished themselves through steadfast commitment and meticulous attention to detail. Their collective effort ensured that the submission was not only completed on time but also upheld the highest standards of excellence. Special recognition is due to Edward Agbai, Josephine Adjei-Tenkorang, Nhlanhla Nyide, Soromidayo George, Caroline Ackom Dufie, Vincent Dania, Martina Nomsule, Dennis Asare, and Victoria Udoh, whose tireless contributions made this milestone possible.

**Beyond APRC: The Vision of Africa**

From the very beginning, APRC’s leaders understood that the consortium itself was only one part of a much larger ambition. The longer-term goal was to nurture a culture of African think tanks—independent bodies capable of producing ideas, shaping debate, and influencing governance.

This initiative identified several **priority areas of need**:

1. **Education and knowledge systems** – to reform curricula, strengthen research capacity, and foster intellectual independence in the era of artificial intelligence.
2. **Public policy and governance** – to advance institutional reform and promote accountability.
3. **Economic transformation and entrepreneurship** – to drive inclusive growth and tackle unemployment.
4. **Climate change and sustainability** – to confront Africa’s vulnerability while championing green innovation.
5. **Digital futures and technology** – to prepare for the disruptions and opportunities of the fourth industrial revolution.

The initiative reflects a fundamental belief: that African challenges demand **African solutions**, grounded in the continent’s contexts and aspirations.

**Expected Outcome**

1. A fully operational Secretariat supporting coordination across Africa.
2. An Africa Knowledge Repository centralizing outputs for policymakers.
3. At least four major policy studies annually, informing AU and REC agendas.
4. Strengthened policy-research linkages through fellowships and secondments.
5. Sustainability mechanisms ensuring the APRC’s survival beyond the ATTP project cycle.

**Partnership with Hensard University: A Strategic Anchor**

A pivotal moment in APRC’s story was its partnership with **Hensard University**. Unlike many collaborations that remain abstract, this one was designed to be concrete and generative. Hensard University was envisioned as an anchor institution, providing an academic home for APRC’s activities in Nigeria while benefiting from the consortium’s networks and research agenda.

Through this collaboration, APRC positioned itself not merely as a think tank, but as a catalyst for capacity-building. Young scholars and students at Hensard University would gain exposure to policy research, while the consortium would leverage the university’s academic space to nurture dialogue, incubate ideas, and expand its intellectual reach.

**Reflections: The Significance of APRC’s Journey**

The story of APRC offers important lessons about institution-building in Africa:

1. **Visibility matters.** By updating websites and institutional platforms, APRC signaled its legitimacy and seriousness from the outset.
2. **Compliance builds trust.** The preparation of audited accounts and proper documentation underscored the consortium’s credibility.
3. **Collaboration strengthens institutions.** The partnership with Hensard University demonstrated how academic institutions can anchor policy innovation.
4. **Vision must extend beyond the immediate.** APRC’s broader initiative to foster African and Nigerian think tanks reflects its commitment to long-term intellectual independence.

**Conclusion**

The formation of the African Policy Research Consortium (APRC) represents far more than a response to a single funding call. It marks a historic step toward Africa’s intellectual sovereignty and policy independence. By convening a Pan-African network under strong and visionary leadership, including Dr. Edward Agbai as Convener, Prof. Steve Azaiki as Executive Coordinator, Prof. Mondy Gold as Co-Chairman of the Governing Council, Prof. N’Dri Thérèse Assié-Lumumba as Co-Chair of the Board of Trustees, and IMANI Center for Policy & Education as Lead Institution, the APRC positions itself as a central driver of Africa’s Agenda 2063 aspirations.

Like CLACSO in Latin America or EPIN in Europe, the APRC seeks to emerge as a continental hub of knowledge and influence, ensuring that Africa speaks with one coherent and authoritative voice in global and regional policy debates. Its mandate transcends the production of research papers. It is about embedding African scholarship, perspectives, and priorities into the very architecture of policymaking and governance across the continent.

As the Africa Think Tank Platform (ATTP) rightly emphasizes, the real task before Africa is the building of intellectual infrastructure fit for the next century. The APRC is precisely that infrastructure in motion, mobilized, inclusive, accountable, and transformative. Its collaborative design, which integrates leading think tanks, sub-contracting partners, and diaspora organizations, reflects both its depth and its breadth of engagement.

Over time, the APRC and the broader think tank ecosystem it is nurturing may fundamentally reshape how policy is conceived, debated, and implemented in Africa. If sustained and supported, it will ensure that Africa is no longer merely a recipient of external ideas but a global producer of knowledge, a center of innovation, and a leader in shaping the policy frontiers of the twenty-first century.

The challenge and opportunity before us now is clear. To governments, policymakers, donors, and civil society actors, the APRC extends an open invitation to partner in building the intellectual infrastructure that Africa urgently needs. Together, we can ensure that African knowledge systems are empowered, African voices are amplified, and African solutions drive the continent’s transformation. The APRC is not just a consortium. It is a movement toward a new era of African intellectual leadership.