

# Connecting African innovators and ideas to industry

There is a disconnect between industry, angel donors, venture capitalists and research in Africa. This has resulted in few Research and Development (R&D) outputs being scaled up or commercialised and a negligible number of patents at 0.6%, according to the World Intellectual Property Organization.



Source: [www.pexels.com](https://www.pexels.com)

The lack of funding also compounds the challenge meaning that quite often African innovations will rarely grow beyond just being an idea or prototype in the laboratories.

The African Academy of Sciences (AAS) recently announced the launch of an innovative platform for African innovators to connect with partners who can provide funding, help them scale-up and commercialize their innovations or promote their uptake in policy.

The Grand Challenges Africa Innovation Network (GCAiN) “will provide innovators with the resources they need to succeed. This includes mentors, potential new markets and funding,” said Dr Moses Aloba, Grand Challenges Africa (GC Africa) Programme Manager. “Innovation is a risky affair that requires long term investment and whose results are not always immediate. This is the reason we at GC Africa are providing this as a sustainable and long-term funding strategy for research and innovation,” he added.

GCAiN is a product of GC Africa, an AAS programme that seeks to promote Africa-led scientific innovations to help countries achieve the African Union Science Technology and Innovations Strategy for Africa (STISA 2024) and the United

Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 2030) by awarding seed and full grants to the continent's most impressive innovators.

GCAiN has been developed in response to a survey carried out in 2018 on 490 African-based innovators who were beneficiaries of the seed and transition to scale grants from Grand Challenges partners, such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, USAID and Grand Challenges Canada. Many of these innovators have developed transformative innovations that are tackling maternal, neonatal, and child health, providing school feeding programmes and sanitary towels that are keeping girls in schools and transforming societies. The innovators have, however, identified limited entrepreneurial capacity development, poor funding, unfavourable regulatory policies, and lack of access to essential market connections as key innovation setbacks.

By enabling innovation partners that include funders, venture capitalists, incubators and policymakers to also be part of the virtual network, GCAiN will link innovators with the various innovation players in a cost-effective way to ease access to information across the value chain and also to shed insights on the growth of innovations across the continent.

GCAiN also seeks to promote intra-African collaboration to ensure local solutions for local problems.

“This is a game-changer for the innovation space and will be crucial in ensuring that our ideas get the support they need to make it to market and to impact African lives,” said Laud Anthony Basing of Incas Diagnostics in Ghana.

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