

THE NATIONAL RESEARCH AND INNOVATION COUNCIL BILL, 2026

By way of Background, Cabinet approved drafting of a Bill to establish the National Research and Innovation Council on 7th May 2025. And following extensive consultation of stakeholders in the research and Innovation space, on 8th June 2026, Cabinet approved the Bill to establish the National Research and Innovation Council as an autonomous body to oversee implementation of policy on Research & Development, and Innovation.

Current Situation

Mr Chairman, The Current Situation of Botswana's National System of Innovation consists of regulators, policy making entities, public and private sector knowledge generators, educators, incubators, funders, and promoters who provide policy, support, & carry out STI activities. Knowledge generators in this regard are largely Research and Technology Organisations whose mandate is to primarily conduct applied research and technological development to support innovation, policy and decision making across various sectors. Examples of these institutions are BITRI, NARDI, BVI, BGI, and partnerships such as Harvard, Baylor, HIV/AIDS.

Educational institutions provide higher education essential for developing national research and innovation capacity. These also conduct in research activities, though currently on a smaller scale. These, just to name a few, are UB, BOU, BIUST, BUAN, BAC, in the public sector, and Botho University, Limkokwing University, Ba Isago University in the public sector. Non-governmental organisations and commercial entities also conduct and support research to drive innovation that supports their business strategies, improve their competitiveness, and market growth.

Incubators, such as BDIH, act as a bridge between discovery and commercialisation in the process to valorise research or innovation output.

Problem

Mr Chairman, despite the developments that are taking place the national landscape such as establishment of institutions, and development of policies, the current performance of the Botswana National System of Innovation is much below potential. By international standards the innovation capacity measured in terms of the Global Innovation Index is low, being 87th out of 139 countries in 2025, 4th in SubSaharan Africa. Research and development intensity measured as Gross Expenditure in Research and Development expressed as a percentage of the GDP is also below 0.5%, far below the African Union and SADC target of 1%, and the national target of 2%. The slow progress of national research and innovation is largely attributed to:

- i. Weak coordination of research and innovation at national level;
- ii. Weak linkages and collaboration among stakeholders leading to duplicated efforts, fragmented research, and missed opportunities;
- iii. Institutional mandate drift, which has led to the rationalisation of some public institutions e.g. BOTECH & RIPCOT to form BITRI; NAFTRC, DAR, BNVL to create NARDI;
- iv. Financial model heavily reliant on public funding, which is unsustainable;
- v. The absence of accreditation for laboratories, limiting industry trust and international collaboration;
- vi. Limited skills (at post graduate level) and infrastructure development in universities, diminishing the country's ability to foster innovation and technological advancement;

The frequent research and innovation leadership changes, mainly due to rationalisations of Ministry mandates, have adversely affected

coordination capacity. Hence, the need for a centralised, clearly defined national coordination agency.

The Solution

Mr Chairman, in assessing the mandates of the already existing organisations such as BITRI, NARDI, BDIH, none of these can be expanded to include governance, policy coordination, and national funding. Going the route to include governance in the mandates of these could:

- a. cloud their core mandates,
- b. lead to conflicts of interest, perceptions of bias, blurred lines of accountability,
- c. damage legitimacy and reputation, and
- d. render them ineffective either by impairing their core research or innovation activities, or hindering effective higher- level governance.

Building and maintaining credibility for the research and innovation oversight body is crucial as it is transparent and fair by local, regional and international stakeholders. Actually, foreign partners tend to favour a formal, autonomous council for granting partnerships and collaborations. Therefore, a fit-for-purpose independent oversight body, with clarified roles and responsibilities is required for Botswana to advance the national research and innovation to globally competitive levels.

Impact of establishing the Council

Mr Chairman, having an entity designated as the central coordinating entity of the Botswana NSI will result in:

- a. enhanced value chain from research to product/service due to bridging the gap between scientific discovery, industrial application, and societal benefit;
- b. Increased funding for RSTI activities through local partnerships, including government ministries;

- c. A well-coordinated RSTI landscape in Botswana without duplicating mandates of the already existing institutions;
- d. Academia and industry research collaborations supported and yielding tangible results in terms of knowledge generation and innovation;
- e. Linkages between local institutions and with international to advance RSTI strengthened, with more funds for strategic partnerships in research secured;
- f. Redundancies reduced as duplications in research will be monitored;
- g. Botswana's research and innovation recognised internationally;
- h. More enterprises established from successful commercialisation of research and innovation outputs established;
- i. High international rating of Botswana's research and innovation;
- j. Improved participation of communities in research and innovation as more yields are experienced.

Sustainability of the Council

Mr Chairman, the Apex body is envisaged to implement a blended revolving financing model that mobilises resources from the private sector, financial institutions, and donors. Coupled with that, it recycles financial returns from successful innovations and research outputs back into new projects. Thus, operating a conditional recoverable grants hybrid model rather than pure grants only.

For a start, the budgets of entities whose functions will be transferred to the Council being, the Departments of Research and Knowledge Business, and that of Innovation and Technology, as well as the Botswana Innovation Fund Secretariat under my Ministry will be used to set up and operate the Council. The major revenue streams will be:

1. Government appropriations which will continue being essential to provide support for foundational and high-risk research;

2. Local and international partnerships in research and innovation;
3. Payments for coordination services such as accreditation;

Highlights of the NRIC Bill

Mr Chairman, the object of this Bill is to establish an autonomous body, the National Research and Innovation Council to:

- i. Oversee the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the national policy on research, development and innovation so as to catalyse the country's industrialisation efforts;
- ii. Address the challenges of funding and financing research and innovation through a governance and operational model informed by global best practices and tailored to Botswana's unique needs;
- iii. Collaborate, as the central coordinating body of the NSI, with key NSI stakeholders, and these include: universities, public and private research institutions, industry partners and civil society to unify research and innovation efforts across the country
- iv. Provide for its powers and functions; to provide for the promotion and funding of research, development and innovation and for matters connected or incidental thereto;
- v. Enhance coordination among NSI actors to eliminate redundancies, as well as bridge the gap between scientific discovery, industrial application and societal impact.
- vi. Oversee generation of locally relevant knowledge and its translation into tangible innovations and accelerate progress towards sustainable development.

Mr Chairman, this Bill has eight (8) parts. Part I of the Bill deals with preliminary provisions under clauses 1 to 2 of the Bill, whilst Part II deals with the establishment and functions of the Council under clauses 3 to 5 of the Bill by providing for the establishment of the Council as a body corporate. Whilst clause 5 provides for the seal of the Council, Clause 4 provides for the powers and functions of the Council, and the key amongst these are:

- Provision of strategic guidance on policy matters and advisory role on research and innovation matters;
- leading the processes for research and innovation future planning and priority setting for impactful research and innovation;
- Accreditation of institutions to grant ethical clearance and research permits, as well as for undertaking research;
- keeping and maintenance of databases of researchers and innovators;
- promotion of translation of research and innovation outputs to tangible socio-economic benefits through valorisation and commercialisation of the results.
- Incentivising industry to participate in research and innovation;
- promotion and awareness raising on the value of research and innovation;
- promotion of leveraging, and integration of, indigenous/traditional knowledge with modern science;
- monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment of publicly funded research & development innovation.

Mr Chairman, Part III of the Bill provides for provisions relating to the Board, which shall be the governing body of the Council. Clause 6 provides for the Board as the governing body of the Council, and two (2) members shall be youth. Clause 7 on the other hand provides for the functions of the Board. **And I would like to draw your attention to correction that needs to be made at at Clause 7 (f) to indicate that the Board will keep and maintain databased for researchers and innovators as opposed to registering and licencing them.** Clauses 9 to 11 of the Bill provides for the tenure of office, disqualification,

removal and suspension of members of the Board as well as vacation of office by a member.

Meetings and proceedings of the Board are provided for under Part IV of the Bill, with Clause 14 addressing the election of the Vice Chairperson of the Board by members of the Board, whereas clauses 15 and 16 provide for the meetings of the Board and proceedings of such meetings. Clauses 18 and 19 of the Bill provide the disclosure of interest and confidentiality provisions respectively, by members of the Board.

Mr Chairman, appointment of the Chief Executive Officer, the Secretary of the Board and senior and other staff of the Council are respectively provided for under clauses 20 to 22 of Part V of the Bill.

Part VI of the Bill provides for keeping of the database of researchers and innovators by the Council at clause 23 and the accreditation of authorised accredited bodies and the issuance of the research permit to researchers under clauses 24 and 25.

Mr Chairman, Part VII of the Bill provides for financial provisions relating to the Council's revenue, financial year, accounts and audit, pension and other funds and annual report, under clauses 26 to 31 of the Bill. It is worth noting that the Council will establish and administer two Funds being:

- i. the National Research and Development Fund and
- ii. the National Innovation Commercialisation and Enterprise Development Fund.

Mr Chairman, finally Part VIII of the Bill provides for miscellaneous provisions under clauses 32 to 37 of the Bill for matters such as the protection from personal liability of the Council's staff, reports to the Minister and the regulation-making powers provision. Clause 36 provides for Regulations that I will make for the better carrying out of the provisions of this Bill and for any other matter required or permitted to be prescribed under this Bill.

This last part of the Bill also provides for transition of the functions of the Departments of Research and Knowledge Business and that of Innovation and Technology, to the Council. Similarly, the functions of the National Research Fund and the Botswana Innovation Fund established under the Public Finance Management Act, will transition to the Council.

Conclusion

Mr Chairman, in conclusion, I am targeting to operationalise the Council within 12 months of approval of the Bill. I therefore request support for approval of the National Research and Innovation Council Bill, 2026, which shall establish the National Research and Innovation Council (NRIC) as an autonomous body to oversee implementation of policy on Science and Technology development.

I thank you for your attention