

The Rockefeller Foundation Welcomes Official Launch of The Centre for Epidemic Response Innovation, a Key Partner to the pandemic prevention institute

The Centre for Epidemic Response and Innovation (CERI) will help improve genomic sequencing throughout sub-Saharan Africa and train the next generation of African scientists

Washington DC, Nairobi and Stellenbosch | September 23, 2021 – The Rockefeller Foundation and its pandemic prevention institute celebrate today’s announcement of the launch of the [Centre for Epidemic Response and Innovation](#) (CERI) and its founding partners Stellenbosch University, the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the Chan Soon-Shiong Family Foundation (CSSFF). Backed by an initial \$4.5M in funding from The Rockefeller Foundation’s pandemic prevention institute, CERI is a leader in ongoing work to expand pathogen surveillance capacity in Africa.

“The Center for Epidemic Response and Innovation is a key collaborator in our efforts to forge a new path when it comes to pandemic prevention in Africa and around the world,” said Dr. Rick Bright, Senior Vice President of Pandemic Preparedness at The Rockefeller Foundation. “The Rockefeller Foundation’s pandemic prevention institute aims to build a global pathogen surveillance network that can rapidly detect and prevent infectious disease outbreaks. This starts with connecting scientists across the world and ensuring they have the resources they need to build fast, accurate genomic sequencing systems.”

The Rockefeller Foundation is supporting CERI’s [Genomics Africa Fellowship](#) Africa Program, which offers training and support to African scientists establishing or expanding genomic sequencing in their home countries. The Foundation is also supporting CERI’s to establish and coordinate strategic sampling strategies that ensure representative data are collected from across sub-Saharan Africa. Under the leadership of CERI’s head, Prof. Tulio de Oliveira, CERI seeks to increase the volume and timeliness of sequencing data collected in African countries by African scientists, and to support systems for sharing, analyzing and acting on this information through streamlined bioinformatics, a skilled workforce and a common agenda.

“The Rockefeller Foundation’s support through the pandemic prevention institute is crucial to our work,” said Prof. Tulio de Oliveira, founding director of CERI and a professor at Stellenbosch University and University of KwaZulu Natal. “The Center for Epidemic Response and Innovation aims to support, collaborate and catalyze African-led and -based genomic surveillance as part of its mission to detect and prevent pandemics. The Rockefeller Foundation has embraced our holistic approach, which combines sequencing technology on site at CERI with training via our Genomics Africa Fellowship. African scientists trained in our labs are able to take protocols and knowledge back to their countries and generate their own genomic data.”

“The Rockefeller Foundation is dedicated to solving complex social problems at the grassroots level. Equitable access to science and data is essential to this mission,” said William Asiko, Managing Director of The Rockefeller Foundation Africa Region Office. “Through support to African scientists and institutions, we are building the power to detect and respond to disease

threats in countries across the region. Local solutions, ownership and leadership from groups like CERI are central to ending global pandemics.”

CERI, Stellenbosch University, UKZN and their collaborators have already shown the impact of this investment. Earlier this month, the journal [Science](#) published the first comprehensive genomic analysis of Covid-19 in sub-Saharan Africa. Prof. de Oliveira and his team provided the analytics and coordination for an effort involving 112 African and 25 international organizations. The Rockefeller Foundation pandemic prevention institute supports several of these collaborators via subgrants from Stellenbosch University, including the [International Livestock Research Institute](#) (Kenya) and [African Centre of Excellence for Genomics of Infectious Diseases](#) (Nigeria). This support from The Rockefeller Foundation’s pandemic prevention institute advances its mission to help the world detect, prevent, and mitigate pandemic threats to achieve containment as quickly as possible through collaboration and cutting-edge technology.

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About CERI

The Centre for Epidemic Response and Innovation (CERI) primary goal is to challenge the status quo on epidemic response and innovation in Africa and allows Africa to control its own epidemics and pandemics. Our vision is to effectively respond to epidemics through pathogen genomic surveillance to enhance biomedical discovery, improve the treatment, diagnosis and prevention of human diseases in Africa. CERI founding academic partners in South Africa are Stellenbosch University and the KwaZulu-Natal Research Innovation and Sequencing Platform (KRISP) at UKZN. CERI will receive core funding from the Chan Soon-Shiong Family Foundation (CSSFF) to setup the largest genomics facility in the African continent and funding from Rockefeller Foundation to setup the Genomics Africa Fellowship Program. More info: <https://www.ceri.org.za>

About The Rockefeller Foundation

The Rockefeller Foundation is a pioneering philanthropy built on collaborative partnerships at the frontiers of science, technology, and innovation to enable individuals, families, and communities to flourish. We work to promote the well-being of humanity and make opportunity universal. Our focus is on scaling renewable energy for all, stimulating economic mobility, and ensuring equitable access to healthy and nutritious food. For more information, information, sign up for our newsletter at [rockefellerfoundation.org](https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org) and follow us on Twitter [@RockefellerFdn](#).