

**The Rockefeller Foundation Supports the Launch of the Centre for  
Epidemic Response and Innovation to Help Prevent Future Pandemics**  
*Centre for Epidemic Response and Innovation to expand pathogen surveillance  
capability in Africa*

**New York, Nairobi and Stellenbosch | September 23, 2021** – Today Stellenbosch University, the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the Chan Soon-Shiong Foundation (CSSFF) [announced the official launch](#) of the [Centre for Epidemic Response and Innovation](#), for which they are founding partners. Backed by an initial \$4.5 million in funding from [The Rockefeller Foundation’s pandemic prevention institute](#), CERI is a leader in ongoing work to expand pathogen surveillance capability across Africa.

The Rockefeller Foundation’s pandemic prevention institute’s goal is to help the world detect, prevent and mitigate pandemic threats to achieve containment as quickly as possible. The institute is pursuing this through a sector-spanning community of partners, cutting edge technology and collaboration with leaders at every level.

“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 across Africa and around the world,” said **Dr. Rick Bright**, Senior Vice President of Pandemic Preparedness and Response at The Rockefeller Foundation and CEO of the pandemic prevention institute. “With partners worldwide, we are working towards an early warning system that sees the signals of outbreaks, speeds the response to these alerts, and stops the spread of any pandemic-potential threat. To do this, we need to work together to innovate and ensure equity in access to training, technology, information—which is exactly what our partner CERI is doing.”

The Rockefeller Foundation is supporting CERI’s [Genomics Africa Fellowship](#), which offers training and support to African scientists establishing or expanding genomic sequencing in their home countries. The Foundation is also supporting CERI to establish and coordinate strategic sampling strategies that ensure representative data are collected from across Africa. Under the leadership of CERI’s founding director, **Professor 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 Professor de Oliveira, CERI director 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.”

Stellenbosch University and its 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 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 including via subgrants from Stellenbosch University to 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 of working quickly and collaboratively to bridge sectors and build towards an effective, equitable early warning system. This is just a portion of The Rockefeller Foundation’s support for a sustainable, equitable Covid-19 response in Africa. In 2021, [the Foundation provided nearly \\$35 million in funding for the African Covid-19 response](#), including a \$12 million grant to expand the geographic availability of testing centers to both urban and rural areas as well as strengthen community level tracing efforts, and enhance data infrastructure through the [Africa CDC’s Partnership to Accelerate Covid-19 Testing \(PACT\)](#).

##

### **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. The Rockefeller Foundation pandemic prevention institute is also supporting CERI to significantly strengthen and expand genomic surveillance networks in Africa. 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, as well as supporting CERI’s focus on strategic sampling strategies and increasing the volume and timeliness of sequencing data and streamlining bioinformatics. 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://rockefellerfoundation.org) and follow us on Twitter [@RockefellerFdn](#).

### **Press contact**

**The Rockefeller Foundation:** Davina Dukuly

+1 212 852 0000

[ddukuly@rockfound.org](mailto:ddukuly@rockfound.org)

##