

**PRESS RELEASE**

**Top African and European Universities Unite and Establish a Cluster of Excellence on Genomics for Health**

[Stellenbosch, June 25, 2023] -The African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) and The Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities (The Guild) proudly announce the launch of the Cluster of Excellence (CoE) named Genomics for Health in Africa, an innovative collaboration aimed at advancing genomics research and improving healthcare outcomes across the African continent. The lead universities for this cluster are Stellenbosch University (SU) in South Africa, the University of Bern in Switzerland and University of Tübingen in Germany.

The formation of this cluster is a significant milestone following South Africa's successful endeavours in genomics surveillance of COVID-19, during which the Centre for Epidemic Response and Innovation (CERI) at Stellenbosch University become home to the largest and most advanced genomics facility in the African continent. "We found that it would be natural to expand our genomics capacity to support advances in human genomics as this is a neglected areas in Africa. For example, less than 3% of the human genomes produced in the world are of African origin. There is also a great need to develop effective therapies for cancer and cardio metabolic diseases as non-communicable diseases (NCDs) have become a big problem in Africa with fast urbanization and westernization of lifestyles," said Prof. de Oliveira, director of CERI at Stellenbosch University.

In addition to expanding to NCDs, the CoE could help save lives of young children by allowing appropriate diagnosis of genetic diseases "The research fields of the African and European partners of this proposed Cluster of Excellence will focus on rare diseases diagnostics and treatments. Rare diseases are responsible for over 60% of the genetic diseases in children and at present almost nothing had been done to characterize these in Africa" said Prof. Shahida Moosa, head of the Tygerberg Hospital Paediatric Rare Diseases Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and one of the co-leads from Stellenbosch University.

Stellenbosch University has already established long-standing collaborations with multiple African and European Universities. Led by Stellenbosch University and the University of Bern, African universities in this consortium include the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Rhodes University, University of Nairobi, University of Rwanda and University of Ghana.

Prof. Sibusiso Moyo, Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research, Innovation and Postgraduate Studies) at Stellenbosch University, further affirms the significance and potential impact of this establishment and said, " The potential impact of this project on public health in Africa cannot be overstated. Millions of people in Africa currently suffer from undiagnosed or untreated rare genetic diseases, which not only poses a high health risk but also has negative consequences on local and national economies".

The Cluster of Excellence in Genomics for Health in Africa represents an unprecedented opportunity to leverage the power of genomics research and transform healthcare outcomes in Africa and beyond. By fostering collaboration, capacity building, and innovation, this cluster will pave the way for groundbreaking discoveries, tailored therapeutics, and improved healthcare delivery.

About ARUA: [<https://arua.org.za/>]

About The Guild: [<https://www.the-guild.eu/>]

About CERl at Stellenbosch University: [<https://ceri.org.za/> & <http://www.sun.ac.za/english>]

About the [Rare Disease Genomics](#) at Stellenbosch University

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