



Press Release

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Africa expertise included in global data network to combat the Corona pandemic

The GO FAIR Foundation, Kampala International University and the Philips Foundation have teamed up in an effort to enable distributed access to the critical data needed from Africa to fight and contain the COVID-19 pandemic.

The effort has been launched as part of the [Virus Outbreak Data Network](#) GO FAIR Implementation Network, which addresses current and immediate challenges to use and connect digital health data worldwide to follow the outbreak.

This initiative has been established under the urgent need to connect Africa to the global effort to fight COVID-19, and to ensure Africa's health professionals and data scientists are equipped to harness machine-learning and artificial intelligence (AI) approaches, to discover meaningful patterns in epidemic outbreaks. We need to ensure that data are [FAIR](#) (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable. In this case that also means Federated and AI-Ready).

"There is a fear for undetected spreading on the African continent which may lead to a sudden crisis. To help avoid this, both prevention and containment are critical", states Dr Mpeza, VC of [Kampala International University](#): "As one of the leading universities with a large medical campus and university hospital, we are committed to lead the initiative to build adequate capacity. We have already deployed ten computer- and data scientists to work with our medical experts. As an international university with students from 42 countries, we are committed to make sure that all our efforts strengthen the global fight of the corona virus."

The initiative is supported by the Philips Foundation, whose mission is to provide access to care for underserved communities. "With this donation, the [Philips Foundation](#) supports the establishment of a Virus Outbreak Data Network (VODAN), to ensure that data-intelligence is available to support an effective response to the new corona virus", says Margot Coojmans, director of the Philips Foundation.

The donation allows the set-up of a system that improves the Findability, Accessibility, Interoperability, and Reuse (FAIR) of digital assets, including data from African health systems in the global response. This strengthens preparedness and ensures capacities to improve digital innovation of African health systems.

The African patient data remain under the governance of the countries where they belong, under regulations of Ministries of Health, and the data will not be removed or become unavailable, as happened with the 2014 Ebola-crisis. Algorithms will "visit" the data, under regulatory conditions, so that researchers can find interesting correlations, dependencies and relations, enabling evidence-based insights and breakthroughs. The infrastructure will remain in place after the crisis, to strengthen health systems and to respond to future outbreaks.

Africa's health systems can benefit from digital innovation and support. Data interoperability will help current efforts to contain the virus and help strengthen health services. African partners benefit

from the training to ensure digital health data are useable for the fight against the spread of the pandemic and early detection of the movements of the virus.

The GO FAIR movement welcomes the initiative. Not only the GO FAIR Foundation, but also the GO FAIR international support and coordination office will support this effort, both through its Africa-specific Implementation Network, and the specific Virus Outbreak Data Network. “Our success depends on our ability to reach out globally”, states Barend Mons, director of the GO FAIR international support and coordination office. “We are excited that Africa is included, and we will make efforts to ensure the entire continent will be linked up. This is an important contribution to stop this and future pandemics.”

Data scientists from Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Zimbabwe and South Africa are involved in the establishment of the continental-wide Virus Outbreak Data Network, which is expanding rapidly on the continent. This initiative is led by

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