



Hybrid conference “Catalyzing African science through scientific partnerships”

CONFERENCE REPORT



1. GENERAL INFORMATION:

Event Date: July 24-25, 2025

Venue: Amphitheater of the National Institute of Biomedical Research (INRB) Kinshasa, DRC

Conference Name: “Catalyzing African Science through Scientific Partnership”

Organizers: INRB, Clinical Immunology Department, African Academy of Sciences, Ministry of Scientific Research and Technological Innovation, Ministry of Public Health, Hygiene and Social Prevention, University of Kinshasa (UNIKIN), AU-EU partnership, Euraxess Africa

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1. Terms of Reference

The Ministry of Scientific Research and Technological Innovation of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Ministry of Public Health, Hygiene and Social Prevention, through the National Institute of Biomedical Research (INRB), in collaboration with the African Academy of Sciences (AAS), the Delegation of the European Union to the African Union, and the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS), have engaged the African Union Development Agency - New Partnership for Africa's Development (AUDA-NEPAD), the French Research Institute for Development (IRD), the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) and the CNRS to co-organize a hybrid scientific conference aimed at presenting ongoing research and exploring new avenues of collaboration with African researchers. The two-day conference aimed to encourage scientific collaboration between researchers funded by the AAS (in particular by the African Research Initiative for Scientific Excellence (ARISE), the European Research Council (ERC) and the CNRS multi-year cooperation roadmap.

2.2. Objectives:

2.2.1 Main Objective:

To present the progress of the ARISE-PP pilot program and highlight the launch of the second phase of the ARISE Program for Sustainable Development (ARISE SD) (2025-2030), in line with the AU-EU Innovation Agenda (2023-2032).

2.2.2. Specific Objectives:

- To initiate a dialogue on strengthening collaboration between European and African partners in the fields of science, technology and innovation (STI).
- Inform participants on the implementation and progress of the AU-EU Innovation Agenda (2023-2032).
- Explore opportunities for collaboration between the DRC and EU research stakeholders within the AU-EU framework.

2.2.3 Expected results

- Improving the DRC's preparedness for participation in the next cohort of funded early, mid and late career researchers under the AU and EU Innovation Agenda priorities (public health, ecological transition, innovation and technology, scientific capacity and cross-cutting issues);
- Strengthening collaboration between the DRC and the AU and the EU through current frameworks (Agenda 2063, STISA-2034, Agenda 2030 of the SDGs, AU-EU Innovation Agenda, etc.);
- Improving the visibility of DRC researchers and institutions for joint projects with AU and EU stakeholders within the framework of ARISE-SD, the Horizon Europe-Africa III initiative;
- Create opportunities for collaboration between ARISE grant recipients and other EU-based researchers.

2.3. Participation:

The conference being hybrid, we had:

On Day1: 80 online participations and 100 people in person

On Day2: 80 online participations and 60 people in person

2.4. Key activities

- a) Presentation of ARISE-SD (2025-2030) and upcoming AAS funding calls for early-career, mid-career and senior researchers by Dr. James MUSHORI of the AAS.
- b) Overview of the AU-EU Innovation Agenda by the Working Group Co-Chairs, Mr. Lukovi SEKE (AUDA-NEPAD) and Dr. Vincenzo LORUSSO (European Commission).
- c) Sharing the results of research funded by the ARISE program. Dacquin KASUMBA (DRC), in collaboration with CNRS researchers, on zoonotic viral diseases, opportunities for scientific progress and associated challenges.
- d) Virtual presentations and discussions with ARISE fellows Dr. Christian NKANGA (DRC) and Dr. Grace LOUBOTA PANZOU (Republic of Congo). These sessions were complemented by broader discussions on promoting Horizon Europe and the EU-Africa Initiative III calls to strengthen the DRC's participation in the research and innovation community.
- e) Presentation of the Congolese National Research Council, Congolese research institutes (CREN-K, CoE -CRBN, NCPIR, INRB, etc.), the Congolese engineering incubator and the discoveries (inventions) underway at the University of Kinshasa which must move to the innovation stage.
- f) An overview by the Ministry of Scientific Research of the DRC on financial instruments to support discovery and innovation.

3. CONFERENCE OVERVIEW

Day 1: High-Level Participation and Opening

The event was inaugurated by **HE Prof. Dr. Gilbert KABANDA**, Minister of Scientific Research and Technological Innovation, and was marked by the welcoming words of

Prof. Dr. Jean-Jacques MUYEMBE, Director General of INRB followed by **Mr. William LINDBERG**, Representing the Delegation of the European Union (EU) in the DRC.

Dr. Laurent BOCHEREAU, EU Scientific Advisor to the African Union (AU), and **Prof. Dr. Pius MPIANA**, President of the National Science Council of the DRC, delivered keynote speeches on the challenges and opportunities of EU-Africa/DRC STI cooperation, as well as on the DRC's research priorities. The presentations were followed by a discussion highlighting the DRC's participation in Horizon Europe (the DRC being among the top 10 recipients of AU Horizon Europe funding) and the EU's strategic commitment to scientific partnerships in Africa. Given the DRC's potential, Congolese researchers were encouraged to increase their participation in Horizon Europe funding calls and position themselves favourably for the new EU Africa III Initiative by strengthening existing partnerships and creating new collaborations with European research institutions.

A round table on research opportunities and challenges in the DRC and internationally then brought together stakeholders from different horizons in this sector. The Ministry of Scientific Research and Technological Innovation was represented by **Mr. Leon NDUMBA**, Director of Planning and representative of the Secretary General, who highlighted the efforts of his ministry to support scientific research in the DRC in perspective of national and continental objectives as set by the African Union (AU). **Mr. Lukovi SEKE**, co-chair of the AU-EU innovation agenda, on behalf of his organization, AUDA-NEPAD, recalled the objectives of this agenda at the continental level. This allowed the researchers who were members of this panel (**Prof. Dr. Dacquin KASUMBA** and **Prof. Dr. Eddy LUSAMAKI**) to discuss the challenges they face as well as the proposed solutions. **Dr. Ahmed MAALEL** spoke at this panel discussion on the challenges and opportunities of international scientific cooperation before giving a practical workshop on “EURAXESS Africa: How to apply for Horizon Europe funding.” The session provided practical advice on using EURAXESS platforms for networking partners and identifying available funding.

Day 2 : The second day was launched by **Prof. Dr. Dieudonné MUMBA**, Head of Department and Acting Administrator of the INRB, who presented the long history of collaboration between INRB and European academic and research institutions. Dr. **Benoit HAZARD** then presented the roadmap of the CNRS, a French research center, which would like to expand its collaborations with researchers from the DRC. **Dr. Laurent BOCHERAUX** then explicitly presented the new research support and funding program , the Horizon Africa III program, which is part of the Science, Technology and Innovation cooperation agenda between the EU and the AU. This program offers numerous opportunities for collaboration and research funding for African researchers, particularly those from the DRC, whom he encouraged to apply. **Dr. Boniface USHIE**, represented by **Dr. James MUSHORI**, finally presented the ARISE program, detailing the specificities of the next ARISE-SD edition, which will be launched in the coming months. He encouraged the beneficiaries of the ARISE pilot program, including **Prof. Dr. Dacquin KASUMBA**, and all other Congolese researchers at various stages of their careers to bid and compete for these research funds.

This day was also dedicated to promoting the ARISE program, with the presentation of research results by three ARISE beneficiaries. **Prof. Dr. Dacquin KASUMBA** presented his work on the factors influencing the outcome of Ebola patients who received specific monoclonal antibody treatments. **Prof. Dr. Christian NKANGA** then spoke about his work on banana waste as a source of high-value nanoparticles for multi-sectoral health applications. **Dr. Grace LOUBOTA PANZOU** finally presented on the quantification of the impacts of anthropogenic disturbances on the relationships between biodiversity and ecosystem functioning in Central Africa. This was followed by a round table discussion about research on hemorrhagic diseases and vaccine development. This discussion brought together young researchers from the INRB, **Prof. Dr. Dacquin KASUMBA** and **Prof. Dr. Antoine NKUBA**, as well as those from the National Center for Biotechnology (CNB) at the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC), **Dr. Juan GARCÍA-ARRIAZA**. Researchers engaged in the discussions, which they resolved to continue, on the potential for collaboration on projects of common interest between the two countries.

Prof. Dr. Dacquin M. KASUMBA finally facilitated the closing discussions of this high-level conference by presenting a summary of the presentations from the two days as well as the perspectives and opportunities to be seized.

This was followed by the closing remarks of **Prof. Dr. Jean-Jacques MUYEMBE**, Director General of INRB, and **Prof. Dr. Jean-Marie KAYEMBE**, Rector of UNIKIN. The two head of institutions encouraged partnerships between our academic and research institutions with European institutions. The representative of **HE Prof. Dr. Gilbert KABANDA**, Minister of Scientific Research and Technological Innovation, **Prof. Dr. Aimé LAY- EKUAKILLE**, Scientific Advisor to the Minister, on behalf of the Minister, closed the meeting by emphasizing the DRC's commitment to supporting researchers and institutions in the DRC through the development of their potential, the establishment of the necessary tools for their development but also through access to international opportunities.

4. CRITICAL ANALYSES:

4.1 Highlights of the conference:

- Good organization ;
- Number of respondents in person or online;
- The arrival time of the participants;
- Time management;
- The importance of the different themes covered and the discussions that resulted.

4.2. Weaknesses of the Conference and measures taken for future conferences:

- Technical issues with Zoom connection, interpretation and online media team.
 - Preventive measuresIn future conferences, it will be important for the link for videoconference participation to be generated and controlled locally. This will allow for technical adjustments to be managed promptly.

- Shortcomings in the sound system with speakers and wireless microphones in the amphitheatre.
 - Preventive measures

All equipment must be tested the day before the conference. No equipment, including sound and video equipment, will be accepted on the day of the event without prior testing the day before.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Congolese scientists were encouraged to interact more frequently to stimulate collaboration at the national level.
2. Partnerships were strongly encouraged.
3. Congolese scientists have been encouraged to seek external funding while awaiting the operational development of a national scientific research funding program.
4. The government has been urged to ensure that the improvement in the budget allocated to scientific research becomes a reality in research centers across the DRC.
5. Training workshops for scientists on writing research proposals to be submitted to research granting organizations should be organized once or twice a year.
6. Training workshops for administrators on the management of subsidized projects should be organized once or twice a year.

6. APPENDICES

- Photos from the conference can be downloaded from the following link:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/aasciences/albums/72177720327869665>

- Video of the report on national television RTNC (from 29 minute 30sec):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=im4IN8NNu3k>

- Articles published in the online press:

<https://aasciences.africa/news/strengthening-african-science-through-partnership>

<https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/worldwide/africa/news/successful-holding-hybrid-conference-catalysing-african-science-through>