

# **Annual Report 2023**

## **Africa-UniNet**

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## **1. 1st Board Meeting on 25 January 2023 and Online Resolution**

The 1st Board Meeting in 2023 began with the introduction of a Nigerian university: *Veritas University* applied for membership in the network. The Board unanimously decided to recommend the admission of the new member to the General Assembly by online resolution. In another decision, it was decided to increase the staff of the Africa-UniNet office by an additional 30 hours per week for an initial period of two years (2023-2024), as the workload far exceeds the current staff resources. The cost of the additional staff will initially be covered by membership fees. In the longer term, the increase in human resources shall be financed by an increase in funding from the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF). The Board also discussed the strategic objectives of the network and expressed the need to further develop the potential of Africa-UniNet. The Board Meeting confirmed that the 3rd General Assembly, to be held in Vienna from 13 to 15 September 2023, should provide space for discussion on this. The provisional programme for the event was approved by the Board members. Finally, the project submissions of the 3rd Africa-UniNet Call (1 September to 30 November 2022), which were under review at the time of the Board Meeting, were presented.

## **2. 2nd Board Meeting on 26 April 2023 and Online Resolution**

Following the 3rd Africa-UniNet Call, the results of the project evaluation were presented at the 2nd Board Meeting of the year. The Board decided to submit the 21 best ranked projects to the General Assembly by online resolution and to recommend them for approval. After approval by the General Assembly, the projects were to be confirmed by the BMBWF.

The programme of the 3rd General Assembly to be held in Vienna in September 2023 was also discussed. Details of the programme were presented and debated among the Board members. The organisation of the General Assembly on an annual basis was also addressed. For environmental and financial reasons, the idea was brought up to hold the event every two years and to use the freed-up resources for new network activities. Further discussion on this was deferred to future Board Meetings. In order to discuss the future direction of the network, it was proposed to hold an additional Board meeting to which Country Representatives would be invited.

## **3. Results of the 3rd Africa-UniNet Call**

Following external evaluation, an online resolution by the General Assembly and confirmation by the BMBWF, 21 of the 30 project applications submitted were selected for funding at the end of May. This represents an acceptance rate of 70%. This brings the total number of projects since the founding of Africa-UniNet in 2020 to 61. The 21 selected projects of the 3rd Call involve partnerships with institutions in 11 different African countries: Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Morocco, Gabon, Ghana, Lesotho, Uganda, South Africa, Nigeria and Namibia. In

total, 22 of the 42 African member institutions and 12 of the 26 Austrian member institutions are involved. More than half of the projects are coordinated by the African partner institution.

The focus areas cover a wide range of scientific fields, including biology, bioinformatics, human genetics, artificial intelligence, machine learning, plant cultivation, organic farming, climate change, water management, epidemiology, public health, fisheries, aquaculture, circular economy and gender mainstreaming.

**Figure 1: Overview of the 21 approved projects of the 3rd Call**

No.	Title	Coordinating Institution	Country
1	Fabrication and Characterization of Dye-sensitized Solar Cells using Locally Sourced Natural Dyes and Synthetic Organic Dyes as Photosensitizers	Redeemer's University	Nigeria
2	Mechanistic Studies of the Vascular and Cardiac Effects of the Aqueous Calyx Extract of Hibiscus sabdariffa	Medical University of Graz	Namibia, Nigeria
3	The influence of HIV treatment on sperm mitochondria	University of Lagos	Nigeria
4	Enhancing Climate and Water Smart Agriculture Solutions in Kenya through Capacity Building in the use of FAO-WaPOR Web-based Tool	Egerton University	Kenya
5	Pathogen surveillance through wastewater in Gabon	Medical University of Vienna	Gabon
6	Gender Inclusion Partnership: Peanut Production Improvements and Aflatoxin Mitigation for Food Security and Nutrition in East Africa	Haramaya University	Ethiopia, Kenya
7	Optimizing Black Soldier Fly Value chain for Sustainable Aquaculture and Food Security in Kenya and Uganda	Maseno University	Kenya, Uganda
8	Land Use and Land Cover Change Effects on Water Quality Characteristics of the Maziba Sub-Catchment, Western Uganda	Kabale University	Uganda
9	Effective Resolution of Exponential Diophantine Equations	Paris Lodron University Salzburg	Uganda
10	Solar driven agri-food processes	University of Innsbruck	Uganda
11	Revisiting Climate Change Mitigation Potential in Smallholder Farming Systems in Kenya	University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU)	Kenya
12	Enhancing Multiple Levels of Disaster Risk Management Professionalization	Bahir Dar University	Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Morocco
13	Monitoring, Management and Mitigation of Environmental Challenges with Collaborative Data Analytics and Machine Learning for Sustainable Development	Johannes Kepler University Linz	Kenya, Uganda, South Africa
14	Engage for Non-Gender Discriminative Higher Education	Gulu University	Uganda, Ethiopia
15	Growing crops without soil-hydroponics: Technology adoption and evaluation of nutritional quality in South Gondar Zone, Ethiopia	Debre Tabor University	Ethiopia

16	Strengthening Mental Health Awareness among Secondary School Students in Kenya	Kibabii University	Kenya, Lesotho
17	Joint development of student projects and implementation of joint research areas in the field of sustainability and energy management in Austria and Lesotho	University of Applied Sciences Kufstein	Lesotho
18	Establishing Diverse Application of “Luffa Aegyptiaca” for Functional Objects Production	Nkumba University	Uganda
19	Tamale's Inner Urban Ecologies	University of Applied Arts Vienna	Ghana
20	Dual-functional Nanotechnology - Molecularly Imprinted Polymer Composite: An Efficient Sensor and Photocatalyst for Water Treatment in Developed and Developing Nations	Redeemer's University	Nigeria
21	Teaching the Global Goals: Leveraging teacher educators' professionalism for sustainable development	University of Innsbruck	South Africa

#### **4. 3rd Board Meeting on 5 July 2023 and 1st Meeting of Country Representatives**

At the 3rd Board Meeting, two new institutions applied for membership in the Network: *Mekelle University, Ethiopia* and the *Higher Institute for Accounting and Auditing of Mozambique*. The Board unanimously decided to put the admission of the Ethiopian university to a vote in physical presence at the next General Assembly. The application of the institute from Mozambique was rejected.

The Board Meeting also focused on the upcoming 3rd General Assembly in Vienna, where the status of the thematic and organisational planning for the event was presented. The Board meeting was followed by the first meeting with the Board members and the Africa-UniNet Country Representatives. The Country Representatives were involved in the planning and organisation of the panel discussion to be held during the General Assembly in Vienna and were informed about the status of planning of the event.

#### **5. 4th Call 2023**

The 4th Africa-UniNet Call was open from 1 September to 30 November 2023. All full members of the network were eligible to participate, with a total of 69 member institutions at the end of the call period. A total of 40 project applications were submitted to the Africa-UniNet Office by the deadline.

Of the 40 submissions, 30 projects are coordinated by African institutions and 10 projects by Austrian institutions. 51 out of 69 Africa-UniNet member institutions are involved in the project applications; 34 out of 43 African member institutions and 17 out of 26 Austrian member institutions. Institutions from 14 different African countries and all regions of Africa

are involved in the partnerships: DR Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda.

The proposed projects target all 17 SDGs and cover a wide range of scientific fields, including public health, sustainable agriculture, environmental research, machine learning, social geography, inclusive education, forest conservation and many others.

In total, after thorough review, 33 project applications were confirmed as formally correct, and only 7 applications were formally incorrect. Of the 33 formally correct projects, the planned coordination lies with African institutions for 24 projects and with Austrian institutions for 9 projects.

The formally valid 33 applications are reviewed by a team of international reviewers in early 2024. As with the 3rd Call, the review is based on the criteria:

- Project design, quality of the project proposal and the partnership, contribution to the formation of the Network (max. 50 points)
- Contribution to the SDGs, integration of a gender and diversity perspective (max. 20 points)
- Sustainability and application of results (max. 20 points)
- Risk management and cost-effectiveness (max. 10 points)

## **6. 3rd General Assembly 2023**

More than 140 representatives from 18 countries and 70 universities and research institutions met at the 3rd Africa-UniNet General Assembly from 13 to 15 September 2023 at the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW) in Austria. Never before have so many representatives of African research institutions met with Austrian scientists to present their joint projects and deepen the scientific partnerships between Austria and African countries.

The 3rd General Assembly was the second meeting of the network in Vienna. In addition to the General Assembly, the programme at the Austrian Academy of Sciences included keynote speeches, a panel discussion, workshops and presentations of current Africa-UniNet projects. The participants were invited to a festive evening reception at the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF) by Federal Minister Ao. Univ.-Prof. Dr. Martin Polaschek. At the end of the General Assembly, a second reception was held by the Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs (BMEIA) in the premises of the University of Applied Arts Vienna. The reception was opened by Dr. Franziska Honsowitz, Director General of the BMEIA, and Rector Gerald Bast. The three-day event was concluded with an excursion to the Kaiserbrunn Water Supply Museum and the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) in Laxenburg.





(Photo: OeAD\_Nina Zuckerstätter)

During the General Assembly, which was attended by the official representatives of Africa-UniNet member institutions, *Mekelle University, Ethiopia* and *Veritas University, Nigeria* were introduced as new members and officially welcomed to the network. This brought the total number of member institutions to 69 (26 from Austria and 43 from African countries). It was also decided that the General Assembly meeting will be held in person every two years, instead of every year. The proposal that a "Seasonal School" (1-2 weeks) could be organised in an African member country in the year between the General Assemblies, involving institutions from African countries and Austria, was welcomed. It is envisaged that the member institutions will organise the meeting with financial support from Africa-UniNet.



(Photo: OeAD\_Nina Zuckerstätter)

### Voices and feedback from the participants:

„What can one say? Fantastic and really caring organisation. This is unique.“

„This was an excellent Assembly, and I enjoyed the interaction, discussions and motivation of all participants a lot. The only thing I missed was something like a "find-a-match" session, where potential project partners can meet and discuss potential collaborations. We had such event at the 2nd Assembly in Egerton. Otherwise, everything was excellent!“

“[...] deeply appreciate Africa-UniNet and other partners for this opportunity to make African scientists and their research output visible.”

“Maybe the true transdisciplinarity of the different scientific fields and partners from Africa-UniNet can be taken up as a challenge. Not sure, how this could look like, but it is a unique opportunity.“

“This event sets standards”

“Networking and presentation of funding opportunities beyond the Africa-UniNet”





(Photo: Jonas Bunte)

The programme for the 3rd General Assembly can be downloaded from this [link](#).

A video of the General Assembly is available at this [link](#).

## **7. Country Talk Kenya & Africa-UniNet Photo Exhibition**

Following the General Assembly, the Country Talk Kenya took place on 18 September 2023 on the premises of the OeAD. This way the African guests who had travelled to Austria for the Africa-UniNet General Assembly were also able to take part in the event. Numerous lectures and cultural contributions by Kenyan and Austrian speakers presented the many forms of cooperation at university and research level between the two countries. The Vice President of Africa-UniNet, Dr. Nzula Kitaka, introduced the network and presented how Africa-UniNet contributes to internationalising the member institutions and creating transformative paths and new knowledge for social and human progress. As part of the Country Talk, an exhibition was opened with photographs of the 2nd General Assembly held at Egerton University in Kenya in 2022. At the end of the reporting period (December 2023), the photos were still on display at the OeAD premises, illustrating the work of Africa-UniNet.

## **8. 4th Board Meeting on 5 December 2023 and Online Resolution**

Following the 3rd General Assembly, several African institutions applied for membership in the network. At the fourth and final Board Meeting of the year 2023, the following institutions were given the opportunity to present themselves to the Board:

- *University of Saïda, Algeria*
- *University of Nangui Abrogoua, Cote d'Ivoire*
- *Fine Arts Academy Kinshasa, DR Congo*
- *Pwani University, Kenya*
- *Adekunle Ajasin University, Nigeria*
- *Bowen University, Nigeria*
- *International Multidisciplinary School EPI Educational Group, Tunisia*

The first five institutions were unanimously approved by the Board and then submitted to the General Assembly for a vote by online resolution. At the end of the reporting period, the outcome of this resolution had not been finalised. *Bowen University, Nigeria*, has been invited to the next Board Meeting to resolve open issues before a decision on membership could be taken. The *International Multidisciplinary School EPI Education Group* from Tunisia was unable to meet the criteria for admission to the network and its application for membership was unanimously rejected by the Board.

In addition, the framework conditions for the first call for proposals for the organisation of Seasonal Schools were defined. In the years in between the General Assembly, African members of the network can apply for funding of up to € 40.000 (subject to confirmation of funding by the BMBWF) to organise a Seasonal School at their institution. The Seasonal School (Spring School / Summer School / Autumn School / Winter School) brings together doctoral students, early career researchers, researchers and teachers to work together on a specific research area and to discuss it from different approaches and from an interdisciplinary perspective. The school aims to contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and builds on the existing project work of Africa-UniNet. Funding will be provided for travel and material costs in accordance with the terms and conditions for funded projects. The first Seasonal School is expected to take place in 2024.

Finally, planning for the 4th General Assembly, to be held at an African member institution in 2025, was also initiated during this Board meeting. As a first step, the Board defined the framework for the future host institutions. In the first half of 2024, the African member institutions will be invited to submit their bids, taking into account the framework defined by the Board. The proposals will be discussed by the Board and then submitted to the General Assembly.

## **9. Status Projects**

As of December 2023, 59 Africa-UniNet projects were active, and two projects were completed in 2023. The coming year 2024 will see the completion of the majority of the projects from the 1st Call, most of which were extended by one year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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