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UCT launches African Bioinformatics Institute to transform health and research across Africa

In a significant step for African scientific collaboration and capacity building, the [African Bioinformatics Institute \(ABI\)](#) has officially launched, with interim hosting support from the **University of Cape Town's (UCT) Institute of Infectious Disease and Molecular Medicine (IDM)**. This transformative new organisation is set to drive a data-powered future for the continent, advancing bioinformatics research and infrastructure to unlock Africa's full potential in health, development and innovation.

The launch followed a landmark convening of more than 200 scientists, policymakers and institutional leaders from across Africa and beyond, all committed to building an integrated, Africa-led ecosystem for data-driven discovery.

Currently hosted by UCT's IDM, the ABI benefits from a strong institutional foundation and a deep legacy of leadership in genomics, health and bioinformatics research. In the coming months the ABI will be established as a non-profit organisation (NPO), reinforcing its long term independence and Africa-led mandate. The ABI's formation signals a significant leap forward in empowering African researchers to lead from the front.

"The launch of the ABI marks a major milestone towards the goal of building a truly Africa-led research ecosystem," said Professor Nicky Mulder, interim lead of the ABI and head of the Computational Biology Division at UCT. "Bioinformatics and data science are the cornerstone of research to help us achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The ABI is poised to play a foundational role by investing in world-class training, infrastructure and collaboration, which will enhance Africa's scientific growth."

Enabled by seed funding from [Wellcome](#) and the [Chan Zuckerberg Initiative](#), the ABI aims to be a catalyst for cutting-edge genomics research, health breakthroughs and the development of African infrastructure to independently analyse pathogens, track diseases and drive evidence-based policy.

Technology Manager for Data for Science and Health at Wellcome, Ekin Bolukbasi, said: "Given the rapid pace of technological advancement, bioinformatics and data science have become essential to research-driven decision-making. With a huge demand for data-

intensive projects across Africa, the ABI has an exciting vision to establish itself as a continent-wide skills and infrastructure hub which will catalyse the use of biological data to improve the lives of African citizens.”

In recent years, Africa has experienced an exponential increase in biological and environmental data, driven by advances in genomics, public health surveillance and biodiversity research. Yet the infrastructure and expertise to manage and interpret this data remain uneven. The ABI seeks to bridge that gap by enhancing training, creating interoperable systems and supporting local leadership in data science.

Dario Taraborelli, science program officer at the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, added: “Africa's leaders in genomics, biodiversity research and disease surveillance have been working without the unified data infrastructure they deserve. We're proud to support the African Bioinformatics Institute as it provides the data and bioinformatics backbone needed across the continent, serving the priorities of its scientific community and helping unlock breakthrough discoveries that will benefit its unique and diverse populations.”

The African Bioinformatics Institute will work towards aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the African Union’s Agenda 2063 by:

- Enhancing the continent’s capacity in bioinformatics through training, infrastructure and collaborative networks.
- Establishing infrastructure dedicated to enabling African researchers to analyse, interpret and integrate complex datasets critical to local and continental challenges.
- Supporting pandemic preparedness by providing access to high-quality, interoperable bioinformatics tools and platforms.
- Facilitating the implementation of One Health by linking human, animal and ecosystem health to strengthen responses to emerging health threats.

Since January 2025, the ABI has established an interim governance council and begun identifying regional nodes to ensure broad geographical representation and research diversity. Its interim hosting at UCT’s IDM – a globally recognised leader in health research – underscores UCT’s role as a continental anchor for scientific excellence.

In April 2025, the ABI supported the ISCB-Africa ASBCB Bioinformatics Conference in Cape Town, which convened students, early-career researchers and established scientists to foster collaboration and exchange. In the months ahead, the institute will roll out its first training programme and form communities of practice across thematic research areas.

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