

Research Networks for Health Innovations in Sub-Saharan Africa (RHISSA)

Funding initiative of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF)

To strengthen health research in sub-Saharan African countries in two funding phases up to 100 million euros has been earmarked for the years 2016 to 2028 based on the Federal Government's Strategy for the Internationalization of Education, Science and Research and in connection with the implementation of the funding concept "Neglected and Poverty-Related Diseases". The funding initiative "Research Networks for Health Innovations in Sub-Saharan Africa" (RHISSA) supports African and German research institutions to better diagnose and treat selected cancer diseases, neglected and poverty-related diseases and promote the health of youth. The funding initiative contributes to the expansion of German-African research consortia based on existing structures (networks, partnerships, centers and universities). GIZ is supporting the African partners on behalf of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and for the first time it is acting as a project executing agency for the BMBF. The project requires close cooperation between the BMBF, the DLR Projektträger and GIZ.

The DLR Projektträger has many years of experience in project management for the BMBF. It coordinates the technical conception and technical implementation of the network projects. Furthermore, DLR Projektträger supports the German research institutions. Likewise, GIZ supports the African partners.

GIZ ensures the financial and contract management of the BMBF funding initiative in Africa and the application of German budgetary law, as well as the technical and financial monitoring of the partner institutions. To support the African partners in a successful participation in the networks

and in managing the funding properly, GIZ strengthens the corresponding capacities in a targeted manner. With the support of the country offices in the partner countries, GIZ also carries out on-site visits.

During the second funding phase which has been running since 2023, 36 research institutions in 13 African countries will be supported as grant recipients until 2028 (see figure). The respective research topics and regional focus areas have been largely determined by African partners. The six networks have the following focuses:

ADAPT investigates better management of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) through a One Health approach that considers the use of active substances and the development of AMR in humans, animals, and the environment. The project examines samples from food, wastewater, humans and animals, develops mobile tests for immediate diagnostics and investigates interactions between other infections and the development of AMR.

DASH improves the health of adolescents and young adults in sub-Saharan Africa. The focus is hereby on the following three health topics: Nutrition and physical activity, sexual and reproductive health, and mental health and violence. Health risks are identified through surveys, based on which local measures are developed and their effectiveness is assessed. This also includes nudging, which encourages adolescents and young adults to adopt healthier behavior without restricting their freedom of choice. In addition, a study is investigating how health information is understood and used to make healthy choices.

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NORA aims to reduce the mortality rate from breast and cervical cancer in sub-Saharan Africa. The network plans to develop evidence-based screening and treatment pathways and to improve national cancer registry data as a basis for national and regional cancer surveillance. The focus is on early detection programs and improved treatment options, including genetic and genomic testing to identify high-risk individuals and develop targeted therapies.

STAIRS closes knowledge gaps in the detection and treatment of sepsis. The transnational study is examining blood and urine samples from sepsis patients to identify pathogens and immune reactions as well as so-called markers. Medical markers are specific molecules or genes that are used to diagnose, monitor and predict diseases. An app to improve sepsis care is being evaluated regarding its acceptance among healthcare staff and its usability. Additionally, the effectiveness of a telemedicine tool for follow-up care that uses automated patient calls to remind patients of follow-up examinations and to transmit health information is being examined.

TAKeOFF investigates new approaches to combat lymphatic filariasis, a parasitic worm disease, and non-infectious podocniosis ("elephant disease"). Patient cohorts from the first phase will continue to be monitored to assess whether the introduced hygiene practices are continued beyond the studies. Additional treatment centers are set up on site. New treatment and containment methods for filariae are tested as part of clinical trials. Additionally, the influence of diabetes and high blood pressure on the course of the disease and wound healing is investigated. An improvement in diagnostics using artificial intelligence is also tested.

TB Sequel uses a cohort from the first phase of around 1,500 tuberculosis patients to investigate the long-term course and the health and socio-economic consequences of post-tuberculosis lung disease up to 10 years after diagnosis. The focus is on prevention and treatment. New approaches for prevention, early detection and better treatment are investigated, including a clinical study on the effectiveness of N-acetylcysteine. The new strategies are to be integrated into local healthcare systems.

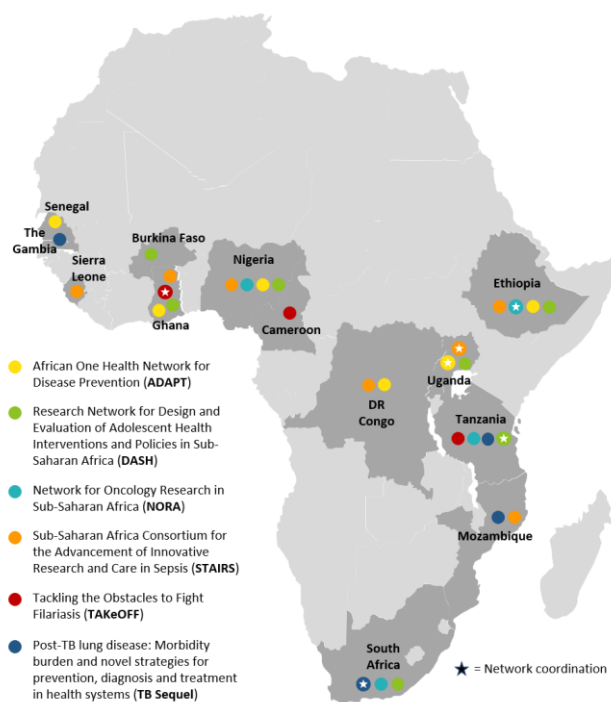


Figure 1: Locations of the African network partners

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Deutsche Gesellschaft für
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

Registered offices
Bonn and Eschborn, Germany

Potsdamer Platz 10
10785 Berlin, Germany
T +49 30 40 81 90-0
F +49 30 40 81 90-301
E giz-berlin@giz.de
I www.giz.de/en

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Author/Responsible/Editor, etc.:
Georgia Wimhoefer, Berlin

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GIZ, Bonn and Eschborn

On behalf of
Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF)
healthafrica@dlr.de
Bonn

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