

African BioGenome Project Scientist secures US\$166,676 to Start the Nelson Mandela Genomes Initiative for Conservation

SOUTH AFRICA, November 13, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Professor Ntanganedzeni Olivia Mapholi of the University of South Africa (UNISA) and Co-Chair of the African BioGenome Project (AfricaBP) recently received R3 000 000/US\$166,676 over three years from University of South Africa (UNISA). In partnership with the Nelson Mandela Foundation and AfricaBP, this award will help launch the Nelson Mandela Genomes Initiative for Conservation of Nature, one of the programmes within AfricaBP, in honor of Nelson Mandela and his legacy of empowering the world's youth to address global challenges including nature conservation. In keeping with the overlying mission of AfricaBP, the Nelson Mandela Genomes Initiative for Conservation of Nature will work towards the following goals:

Sequence 25 indigenous genomes from South Africa, Kenya, Zambia, Tanzania, Nigeria and Congo DRC such as Nguni cattle, bitter Aloe, gum acacia, and thorn apple, for example, in collaboration with AfricaBP partners. The sequences will be high quality, biologically complete, well-annotated, and made publicly available.

Build capacities for local genome sequencing and bioinformatics in Africa to understand the genetic architecture of culturally and economically significant animals and plants. In addition, hosting virtual bioinformatics workshops across African countries.

Provide recommendations for the harmonization of Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) and socio-economic benefits at the African community level.

The Vertebrate Genomes Project and the Sanger Tree of Life will serve as partners for the Nelson Mandela Genomes Initiative, working with African scientists to share standards and other resources. If funds allow, Prof Mapholi wishes to promote the use of and development of mobile and integrated sequencing laboratories, such as the utility and development of lightweight bioinformatics and analytical systems.

"This grant will provide us the opportunity to sequence culturally, economically, and scientifically relevant African endemic species. We aim that knowledge derived from this work will provide the baseline data for the Nelson Mandela Genomes Initiative for Conservation of Nature", said Ntanganedzeni Mapholi, Professor, University of South Africa and Co-Chair of the AfricaBP.

"We are particularly grateful to the University of South Africa for this recent award which will

help kick-start the Nelson Mandela Genomes Initiative for Conservation of Nature", said ThankGod Ebenezer, Bioinformatician, European Bioinformatics Institute (EMBL-EBI), and Co-Chair of the AfricaBP.

"The funding support that AfricaBP has received from UNISA will launch the Nelson Mandela Genomes Initiative for Conservation of Nature. We cannot thank UNISA enough for believing in us! We assure UNISA, the AfricaBP community and the entire world, that AfricaBP will deliver on its promise," said Prof. Anne WT Muigai, Professor of Genetics, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology.

"This considerable financial investment and commitment by UNISA are indicative of the relevance of AfricaBP, its objectives and the collaborating institutions that are part of the proposed work. The outputs of this project will further position Africa to characterize and harness its unique biodiversity to address challenges related to food systems and sustainable management of animals, crops and microbial genetic resources," said Professor Appolinaire Djikeng, Director of the Centre for Tropical Livestock Genetics and Health, University of Edinburgh, and co-founder of AfricaBP.

Currently, the majority of species in Africa (up to 95%) have not had their genomes sequenced. This gap spurred the creation of the AfricaBP to bring together pan-African scientists around the world to generate, analyze and leverage genomics data for the characterisation and sustainable use of biodiversity to support agricultural development, and conservation on the African continent for African peoples.

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