



ASBCB Newsletter

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One year success story of RSG-Africa

It is with a deep sense of pride and honor that we write this speech...indeed how time flies! It seems like yesterday when we were all gathered at the first international conference on the Bioinformatics of African Pathogens and Disease Vectors held in Nairobi from 28th May to 2nd June 2007. This conference was a major landmark for the success story of the International Society for Computational Biology- Student Council-Regional Student Group (ISCB-SC-RSG) where RSG-Africa was formally inaugurated by Prof Winston Hide and the Governing Council of ASBCB.

Is it amazing that a society that began with about 50 students has grown to have membership of close to 400. Indeed RSG-Africa has come a long way and is still forging ahead to spread the knowledge and use of computational biology and bioinformatics to the rest of the continent. The potential for RSG Africa is tremendous and the sky is the limit. We are greatly indebted to our faculty and international advisors, our mentors and the members who have made RSG Africa a success story. Lets us keep on working together to take our society to even greater heights in the coming years.

We give to God all the glory!

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Short Biography: Segun received his BSc and MSc in Computer Science in Nigeria; He was awarded a postgraduate Degree in Applied Bioinformatics from the University of Cologne on a one year scholarship awarded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research in Germany.

He is an advanced PhD student, a lecturer and Research Fellow at Covenant University Ota Ogun State, Nigeria.



Secretary General

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Short Biography: Sheila received her BSc and MSc in Biomedical science and Biotechnology respectively in Kenya. She is currently pursuing her PhD at the Animal genetics center, Viterbo state university in Italy and ILRI. Her main research interests include the molecular evolution and phylogenomics of candidate genes for genetic resistance of infectious and tropical diseases.



East Africa Representative

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Short Biography: Mtakai received his BSc. Biochemistry and Chemistry in Kenya. He is currently a Commonwealth scholar pursuing MSc. Bioinformatics via distance learning at Manchester University.



His main research interests are genome annotation and comparative genomics, computational protein structure modeling and drug design, development of Bioinformatics applications and databases and the *In silico* identification of candidate antigenic peptides for antibody based pathogen diagnosis.

West Africa Representative

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Short Biography: Fatogoma received his MSc in Biochemistry and PhD in plant physiology in Ivory Coast. He is currently a lecturer and researcher at the Laboratoire de Physiologie Végétale UFR Biosciences Abidjan.

His interests are virology, Immunology and Molecular evolution to study Plant and Viral

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Central Africa Representative

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Short Biography: Stanley received both his BSc and MSc degree in Biochemistry in Cameroon.

He is currently a PhD student and his research interests are

Application of Biochemical, bioinformatics, immunochemical and molecular biology techniques

to tropical diseases: the case of Malaria and Onchocerciasis.



North Africa Representative

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Short Biography: Souiai is currently undertaking his PhD in Bioinformatics and his major interest is Characterization of the largest common interactome network among human tissues. He is also working on the evolution of Human interactomes through various pathogenic infections. He is a consultant at the University of Aix-Marseilles offering courses in operating Systems.



South Africa Representative

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Short Biography: Kavisha received her BSc degree in Biotechnology in South Africa and is currently pursuing her MSc in bioinformatics at SANBI. Her main research interests include the development of computational analytic tools for studying HIV and Cancer that will better their biological understanding and possible therapies.



Webmaster

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Short Biography: Kenneth obtained his BSc degree in computer science in Kenya. He is currently pursuing his MSc in bioinformatics in South Africa. His main research interests include the analysis of co-evolution of functionally linked gene pairs in Mycobacteria





Mentors

Winston Hide - SANBI UWC He is the faculty sponsor for RSG Africa to ISCB

Olivier Gascuel - CNRS-LIRMM France, he is the International advisor to RSG Africa

Daniel Masiga- ICIPE Kenya,

Etienne deVilliers – ILRI-BECA Kenya

Trushah Shah- CIMMYT Mexico

Beatrice Kilel - Virginia Bioinformatics Institute, USA

Ezekiel Adebisi- Covenant University, Nigeria

Raphael Isopheki- Jackson State University, Jackson Mississippi USA

Doumbia Seydou - Malaria Research and Training Center, University of Bamako, Mali

Fidelis Cho-Ngwa - University of Buea, Cameroon

Alia Benkhala - Institut Pasteur, Tunis

Jaco deRidder - University of Pretoria, South Africa

Nicola Mulder - University of Cape Town

Membership


RSG Africa currently has a membership close to 400, members are still being recruited from South, Central and North Africa and this figure will increase in the near future. Members are drawn from various institutions like the universities, research institutes, government and private sectors from the North, South, East, West and Central Africa.

Official Activities

a. Workshops

In collaboration with our mentors, various workshops have been a success with others planned for the future. These are described below in more details;

1. Ensembl workshop held on 17th and 19th October 2007 sponsored by ILRI and Wellcome trust Genome Center. RSG East Africa played a major role in spreading the information to all members.
2. One day workshop in Java programming and Unix/Linux Basics held on 14th November 2007 sponsored by ILRI; RSG East Africa advertised the opportunity to all members.
3. Introductory course in Bioinformatics that was held on 5 to 15th of May 2008 sponsored by ILRI and the Swedish University, 4 full travel scholarships were made available to students from East and Central Africa who belong to RSG Africa.



4. A one day training workshop in Bioruby/Bioperl was held on 22nd May 2008 at ILRI Kenya sponsored by Dr Etienne deVilliers (ILRI). The course facilitator was George Githinji and this is the first workshop that is the brainchild of RSG Africa. All the course materials can be found online at <http://hpc.ilri.cgiar.org/BioRuby/Welcome.html>

5. Plans are underway to organize more Bioinformatics workshops i.e.

- In Collaboration with Dr. Okoror – A Bioinformatics workshop is planned for Abuja, Nigeria, West Africa
- In Collaboration with Dr. Adebisi – A Bioinformatics workshop is planned for Covenant University, Ota, Nigeria, West Africa
- In collaboration with Dr. deVilliers, a series of monthly Bioinformatics training workshops are planned to be held at (ILRI), Nairobi Kenya East Africa
- Other workshops in collaboration with the mentors are planned targeting members in North, Central and South Africa.

b. Registration of students to ISCB

Upto date, 50 students have been registered to ISCB, 30 from East Africa and 20 from West Africa. Plans are underway to renew these ISCB memberships and also have new members registered especially from South, Central and North Africa.

c. Opportunities

RSG Africa has made an effort to disseminate information to all its members and this includes opportunities such as; higher learning, workshops and conferences especially those in Bioinformatics and computational biology.

d. Discussions

The members' mailing list has been quite useful as a discussion forum for members who have issues related to their work and wish to share with colleagues. Also, this has been a good forum to post the latest papers and cutting-edge technologies in bioinformatics and computational biology.

e. Grants/Awards/Scholarships

Travel Fellowships NYC meeting in New York

Four members got scholarships to attend ISMB 2008 to be held in Toronto Canada and the NYC student meeting in New York. They are Kimbung Stanley Mbandi (Cameroun) Segun Fatumo (Nigeria) and Mtaikai Ngara (Kenya) who got a full scholarship while Frederick Kamanu (Kenya) got partial scholarships.

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Through the opportunity of RSG-Africa announcements via mailing list, One student (Marion Adebisi) from Covenant university, Ota, Nigeria received the only Africa scholarship to write a research proposal with Dr Rainer Koenig at the university of Heidelberg, Germany.

ISMB 2008

Chinwe Ekenna received a travel fellowship of \$1300 to attend the ISMB 2008 conference in Toronto, Canada

Dr Lawrence Okoror from Nigeria received an award to attend the 14th International Bioinformatics workshop on virus evolution and molecular epidemiology, South Africa.

4. By-Elections

RSG Africa did a by-election to replace the secretary general Lillian Wambua who resigned in May 2007 and she was replaced by Sheila Ommeh through a democratic online voting.

New representatives for East, Central and South Africa were also elected into the executive.

Mtakai Ngara is now the representative for East Africa, Stanley Mbandi for Central Africa while Kavisha Ramdayal for South Africa.

5. New constitution

In its efforts to define its mission and role, RSG Africa has come up with a draft constitution which hopefully in future should steer the activities of the society. Valuable inputs and comments are welcome before the final draft is circulated.

6. Future plans

RSG-Africa has grown and plans are underway to expand it into 5 RSGs effective from May 2009. The society has become formidable with members from all regions getting involved. The five RSGs should benefit even more members at the grassroots level. RSG Africa will still remain to cater for the interests of members in the continent while working closely with the African Society of Bioinformatics and computational biology (ASBCB).

The proposed RSGs are: 1. RSG-East Africa, 2. RSG-West Africa, 3. RSG-North Africa, 4. RSG-South Africa, and 5 RSG-Central Africa

Challenges

Despite the great success story for RSG Africa, the society is still faced with major challenges:

- Unable to have a comprehensive mailing list for all its members and this is even a greater challenge trying to integrate the Anglophone and Francophone speaking members into one mailing group.
- There has been a low response of members from South and North Africa but with the latest aggressive campaigns, this trend will change in the near future.
- Only a small number (50) of RSG Africa members have also been registered into ISCBSC this is due to the 10 dollar fee charged and also problems in sending payment for the registration.

There is need to approach funding bodies that will finance some of RSG Africa's proposed activities such as the yearly workshops and a biennial conference.

Final Words

RSG-Africa is open to new ideas from our Mentors, students, SC members. Such ideas and encouragement should be mailed to rsg-africa@iscb.org

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