

12 March 2025

## **RE: Financial stewardship and potential impact of funding landscape in South Africa and abroad.**

Dear Colleagues, Students, Associates and Board Members

We're reaching out with some important updates regarding the financial landscape that impacts research groups, centers, universities, and NGOs across South Africa. As we navigate through these shifting funding policies from international funders, we at CERI, including SACEMA, which is a TI centre of CERI, are committed to our mission of impactful research and capacity building that truly saves lives and enhances public health.

As we embark on budget planning for the financial year 2025/2026, starting in April 2025, our grants managers and accountants are diligently identifying strategic adjustments to ensure we build the long-term capacity necessary to support our research and capacity-building priorities during these uncertain times. A huge thank you to our management committee, grants managers, and accountants for their hard work on this crucial initiative. This week, we held several productive meetings with the DVC of Research and the Rectorate to lay out our plans.

I want to reassure you that CERI and SACEMA are currently in a solid financial position, boasting a healthy and diversified pool of funders, backed by an experienced grants management and scientific support unit that excels at securing competitive grants. To further enhance our capabilities, we are expanding our fundraising and grants management teams by bringing on board junior grants managers and seasoned fundraisers. We recognize that fundraising will become increasingly competitive, especially as other high-level scientific groups in South Africa, Africa and the northern hemisphere ramp up their grant applications.

To prepare for a variety of financial scenarios, we'll be implementing strategic adjustments and applying for new funding. It's essential that we limit significant new commitments that could increase our financial exposure and disrupt our plans. Therefore, CERI, including SACEMA, will temporarily pause non-essential spending, including social events and international travel that hasn't been organized yet. Rest assured, all previously planned and funded international travels, such as the GenPath Africa annual meeting in Antwerp, the Data Science International Partnership with Oxford and the University of Copenhagen, and the VEME workshop in Dakar, will proceed as scheduled.

We kindly ask our students, staff, and visitors to be mindful of unnecessary expenses as we adapt to the changing funding landscape and to connect with CERI and SACEMA leadership when discussing upcoming events and trips.

Additionally, we will implement a temporary freeze on future staff hiring and internally funded post-doctoral and PhD/MSc fellowships. However, ongoing hiring processes that already started will continue, and we encourage principal investigators and researchers with approved funding to focus on maintaining and extending existing positions rather than seeking new hires, as the funding landscape may shift in the near future. Regarding international funding from U.S. federal agencies, it's important to note that about 10-20% of our overall funding comes from this source. If there are freezes in grants, we may need to make some adjustments to accommodate these potential costs.

As some of our mentors wisely advise, crises can be a catalyst for improvement. This is a great opportunity for us to cultivate a robust fundraising culture at CERI and SACEMA. We've seen fantastic success recently, with many new principal investigators securing grants and fellowships from prestigious organizations like the Novo Nordisk Foundation, the Gates Foundation, and the Oppenheimer Foundation.

We aim to extend our fundraising initiatives to all levels within the organization, fostering a culture where everyone is empowered to seek funding opportunities. It's essential not to rely solely on a limited pool of funders or a few principal investigators, as priorities can shift. Instead, we want everyone in our organization to embrace fundraising as a responsibility.

For instance, we encourage potential Honours, MSc, and PhD students to apply for scholarships, and we motivate post-doctoral researchers and staff to pursue fellowships and grants. We also want everyone to seize opportunities for travel scholarships to conferences, making fundraising a routine practice. It's empowering to foster a culture where everyone can be a leader in their own right, contributing valuable resources to South Africa and Africa to combat epidemics and save lives.

Next weeks, we'll be hosting in-person discussions with all staff at the BMRI, Decanting Facility, and SACEMA building at STIAS to plan together. We're not alone in this journey; even the world's top and richest universities, like Harvard and Oxford, are undertaking financial stewardship initiatives.

We deeply appreciate your dedication and commitment as we work together to advance our mission. While uncertainties may touch every facet of academic institutions and global health medical research in South Africa and beyond, we're confident that we can tackle these challenges. We are even confident that our new investment in fundraising initiatives will allow us to expand in the near future and strive for academic excellence in service to both our nation and the world.

Sincerely

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