

More scientists, researchers needed for interdisciplinary plant disease research network

The Connected Virus Network Launch Conference - held in Kampala Uganda early in May - drew dozens of world-class researchers from sub-Saharan Africa and the UK, confirming a growing network whose collaborations promises to yield solutions to devastating crop diseases. The conference was followed by a two-day training workshop aimed at early career researchers looking to develop skills including research grant proposal writing.



Some of the Connected Conference delegates (Image Supplied)

Delegates heard a number of research-focused presentations on issues including pest management, plant protection, and agricultural extension in Africa. There was a series of workshops during which delegates considered the project's future priorities for the pump-prime research funding which forms an integral part of the opportunities offered by Connected, as well as identifying training needs and opportunities for future inter-disciplinary work.

Day two of the conference was hosted at the National Crops Resources Research Institute (NaCRRI), and delegates enjoyed a tour of the laboratory facilities as well as some of the fields which are hosting much of the Institute's work on crops including cassava, sweet potato and maize.



NaCRRI labs during Connected Conference (Image Supplied)

A call for more scientists and researchers for a truly interdisciplinary project

Professor Neil Boonham from Newcastle University, UK and co-director of the Connected project, says the outcomes of the conference confirm the value and potential of the project and is urging more people to come forward to join the growing network.

“The Connected project is as yet just a few months old, but we are already seeing promising collaborations between highly-skilled and enthusiastic researchers to find solutions to plant disease in Sub-Saharan Africa.

“The project’s focus on encouraging early career researchers is already paying dividends, and it’s clear that one of the legacies of Connected will be a cohort of scientists who have begun to form collaborations, injecting real energy to develop solutions to tackling devastating vector-borne plant disease in the years ahead.



Dr Titus Alicai during the delegates' visit to The National Crops Resources Research Institute

“We are now looking to recruit still more scientists and researchers who share our passion to tackle food insecurity, and we are inviting anyone with an interest to join us at

“Importantly, we are not simply looking to recruit those working on issues directly related to plant disease, but also scientists and researchers working in other disciplines. For example, we need social scientists, economists, geographers and others as we work hard to make this a truly interdisciplinary project.”

The Connected network is funded by a £2m grant from the UK government’s Global Challenges Research Fund, which supports research on global issues that affect developing countries. It is led by Professor Gary Foster from the

University of Bristol's School of Biological Sciences jointly with Professor Neil Boonham from Newcastle University.

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