

Welcome to the AI4PEP Bi-weekly News Brief.

This week we bring you some exciting updates from Team MENA: **Lebanon, Tunisia, Morocco, and Palestine & Jordan.**

This meeting discussed emerging opportunities for collaboration, open calls for publications, and specific milestones and challenges encountered by each team.

Welcome on Board!

- Congratulations to Dr. Emmanuel Musa who recently joined the AI4PEP Secretariat as the new Network Manager. Unveiling the Manager at the last bi-weekly meeting, Prof. Kong announced that he was a renowned Medical practitioner, and global health specialist with a well-rounded portfolio. Musa had reportedly served as a pandemic and epidemic preparedness and response specialist at the World Health Organization (WHO) in different parts of the Global South. He is committed to use his expertise, experience, and networks to advance the AI4PEP agenda.



Administrative Updates

- Prof. Kong acknowledged that it was time for the next batch of funding to be processed from York University's end. He committed to write an email within the next couple of days to communicate the requisition process and the requirements thereof. He mentioned that he anticipated the process to be smooth going forward because all the administrative issues had been handled during the first disbursement. The requirements for the second disbursements were as follows:

- 1. A **Narrative report**; detailing activities implemented, successes and challenges. Where applicable; partners were encouraged to share links to events and publications.
- 2. A **Financial Report**; detailing expenditures of the first tranche of funding.
- 3. **Receipts**.
- For further details about closing the first tranche of funding and requisitioning for the second, Sheriff would be in touch with the different teams, they were also encouraged to email the secretariat for support where necessary.



Finalization of Clearance Processes

- Prof. Kong cautioned the teams that it had been over 6 months since the clearance processes had been initiated, and it was imperative that it came to a conclusive stage. He mentioned that AI4PEP was required to adhere to reporting deadlines, and they may be forced to move to the next stage in coming weeks. He invited the different teams to offer their updates on whether they foresaw an imminent granting of clearance and legitimacy by their various governments or not, and if there was anything that the secretariat could do to expedite the process.



Pitch for Additional Funding to IDRC

- Prof. Kong announced that the IDRC had just secured additional funding up to the tune of CA \$70 Million for their AI4GH program, and they may make an open call or supplement existing grants. He took the time to encourage the MENA team to organize themselves and prepare for an opportunity to pitch their ideas to IDRC and make a case for additional funding. He mentioned that all the team needed to do was to write their broader strategic vision and articulate it via infographics, pointing out the various stakeholders and programs they would implement if there were to access extra funds to complement their seed grants. He referenced the AI4PEP-Africa cohort, pointing out that the team had already prepared for such a meeting and their infographic was in place, detailing their strategic vision.

Hana- INTERAC- Water Pathogens in Tunisia

- The team was happy to announce that they had finally received the first disbursement from York, around CA \$50 000.
- The team announced that they were exploring a new partnership with a new start -up called Geoseed; a mission driven startup powered by Biosia who are fighting infectious diseases by using AI and Genomics in Infectious Disease Prevention, and they identify organisms with the clinically validated metagenomics. Between December 15, 2023, and January 9, 2024, the team met with GeoSeed. Prof. Kong was able to join



these meetings with Geoseed. They were seeking to forge collaborations with partners across the world. Hana mentioned that they were at a brainstorming stage where they were seeking to define the kind of partnership they may want to explore- to benefit both parties. The conversations were leaning towards embarking on a joint pilot project, and jointly fundraising for it.

Lebanon- Dr. Antoine Saab

- The team reported that they had obtained the IRB Institutional Review Board clearance they required to begin data collection from the hospital.
- Antoine stated that they had already conducted two literature reviews to uncover the dynamics of pandemic pathogens (pathogens with the potential of resulting in pandemics). Their manuscript had been submitted to a journal and it was then under review.

AI4TB Project

- Morocco had just been informed by the External Affairs Ministry that everything was in order, and their clearance will be granted within the next two weeks.
- The team was happy to report that their team was growing, and they had recently recruited three new post docs to join and assist in programming: 2 post docs and 1 PhD candidate.
- The team reportedly met with another Moroccan Research Institute (Krinisten) whose focus was on nuclear energy and medical physics. The two organizations have team members who are part of both organizations, and their last meeting resulted in an official collaboration.
- The team was also reportedly working on a couple of papers as follows.
 - **1. TB Detection.**
 - **2. Drug Resistance**
 - **3. AI for TB**