

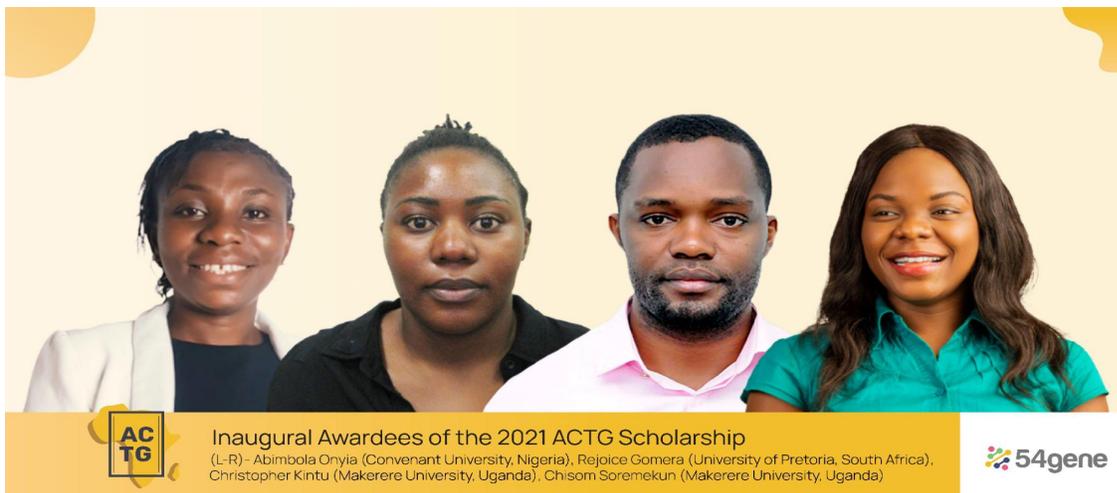
54gene's African Centre for Translational Genetics Awards \$64,000 Scholarship to Further Genomics Research

Health tech company's non-profit initiative empowers next generation of genomics scientists through fully-funded grants

Lagos, Nigeria: 21 February, 2022. [54gene](#), the health technology company advancing African genomics research for improved global health outcomes, has announced the awarding of \$64,000 in scholarships to four PhD candidates in Nigeria, Uganda and South Africa. Through the [African Centre for Translational Genetics \(ACTG\)](#), a non-profit initiative launched by 54gene in February 2020, the grants awarded will be used to further develop translational genomics research capacity across Africa, and will cover all expenses of the recipients during their postgraduate study.

The ACTG's mission is to invest in the continent's health ecosystem by empowering the next generation of African genomics scientists through the provision of scholarships, grants, fellowships, internships and training programmes. The PhD scholarship awards were the primary focus for the ACTG in 2021. Following a three month pan-African call for applications and a rigorous selection process, four successful recipients were handpicked from a total of 46 applications and were awarded grants to advance their genomics research studies in the areas of cardiometabolic diseases, cancers, neurological diseases and sickle cell disorders. The four candidates that have now been awarded the PhD scholarships are studying at different institutions spread across Africa - two are based at Makerere University, Uganda, one at University of Pretoria, South Africa and the last awardee is based at Covenant University in Nigeria.

- Rejoice Gomera - University of Pretoria, South Africa
- Christopher Kintu - Makerere University, Uganda
- Abimbola Onyia - Covenant University, Nigeria
- Chisom Soremekun - Makerere University, Uganda



54gene, through the ACTG in 2020, launched the NCD-GHS Consortium composed of Nigerian geneticists in partnership with the [Nigerian Institute of Medical Research \(NIMR\)](#) and the [National Biotechnology Development Agency's Center for Genomics Research and Innovation \(NABDA-CGRI\)](#). Preliminary findings from the Consortium's landmark study into non-communicable and cardio-metabolic diseases were shared at the American Society of Human Genetics Conference in October, 2021. The study found seven distinct clusters among the 50 under-studied ethnolinguistic groups in Nigeria with some groups showing evidence of shared genomic regions with northern African and European groups. In comparison to European populations, the study also replicated previous research showing lower levels of Neanderthal genome sharing in Nigerian groups.

Speaking on the scholarships, **Dr. Abasi Ene-Obong**, CEO of 54gene, said, "Developing the next generation of genomic scientists is critical in ensuring that the knowledge, resources and insights derived from homegrown research benefits not only Africans but the global population. Access to funding as well as to our international team of genetic and bio-medical specialists is a unique opportunity for these talented African researchers who, like us, want to unlock the boundless potential offered by the human genomic diversity of African populations. The funding and available resources will put them at par with their counterparts in developed countries and make them more confident in leading future research studies."

With over \$45 million in investment raised by the company since its launch, the PhD candidates will receive up to \$4,000 annually for four years, to cover tuition fees and living expenses. Recipients will have the opportunity to work alongside leading researchers at 54gene and its partner institutions (NIMR and CGRI), who are experts in genomic data science, bioinformatics and molecular genetics. Recipients will also be given access to state-of-the-art genomic technologies and the opportunity to co-publish novel findings in collaboration with these leading scientists.

Aminu Yakubu, VP Research Governance and Ethics at 54gene and ACTG representative said, "There is incredible African talent in the genomics space, but opportunities to undertake research and conduct desired tests is limited due to inadequate infrastructure. Supporting and powering pan-African genomics research, especially for non-communicable diseases, has been a key impact marker for 54gene since the company launched in 2019. This is why we are thrilled to offer these outstanding researchers the opportunity to carry out ground-breaking research that will contribute to future health outcomes and benefit the field of genomics research on the continent and also globally."

Prof. Babatunde Salako, Chairman NCD-GHS Steering Committee and Director-General, Nigerian Institute of Medical Research (NIMR), said, "Despite the global health crisis of the past two years, genomic science has not ceased to be important, nor have our scientists allowed their thirst for ground-breaking research to become extinguished. It has been a great pleasure to serve the committee by reviewing the 46 applicants, who are some of the brightest minds on the continent. This initiative is also a massive win for Africa as we deepen our efforts to become leaders in genomic research."



As 54gene expands its operations and partnerships in the coming years, the ACTG looks forward to equally expanding the coverage of its empowerment activities to reach more research scientists in academia and research institutes. Through these efforts, the ACTG is building on the giant precedent work undertaken by organizations like the Human Hereditary and Health in Africa (H3Africa) Consortium, and the African Academy of Sciences among others.