

PRESS RELEASE

SAMRC software provides affordable access to ethical biobanking activities

9 June 2017 | Cape Town | The South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) has developed an open-source laboratory information management system (LIMS) software to give researchers affordable access to human biobanking activities.

“Commercial LIMS alternatives are currently available but do not cater to resource-limited settings where researchers cannot afford licensing fees,” says Professor Alan Christoffels, Director at the SAMRC’s Bioinformatics Research Unit based at the University of the Western Cape. “This new software is available for free download allowing more researchers across the globe to have access to an essential tool that will facilitate biospecimen management.”

Human Biobanking refers to the collection, processing and storage of biospecimens and the collection of associated demographic and clinical data for future use. Through the free software, called Baobab LIMS, researchers have the ability to define sample collection kits, track courier shipping of kits, freezer storage management and a payment system for biobank clients.

Although initiatives to develop harmonious national and regional biobanking governance frameworks have been established, this has not been the case for biobank IT infrastructure. Baobab LIMS will be an essential part of the governance framework underpinning the IT infrastructure used in human biobanking activities.

Baobab LIMS was funded by the European Union Horizon2020 programme with the aim of building IT infrastructure to bridge biobanking activities between Europe and Africa (www.b3africa.org).

The project, published in the Biobanking and Biopreservation Journal in April 2017, is a culmination of 5 years of work with multinational academic partners in South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, Austria, France and Sweden.



NOTE TO THE EDITOR:

- The Baobab LIMS forms part of the Biobank-in-a-Box suite of tools that will be released by the African-European consortium in 2017. Ongoing customization of Baobab LIMS includes addition of modules for handling pathology biospecimens. Users locally and as far a field as Ghana, Nigeria and Uganda are piloting the software as an alternative LIMS in their genetics laboratories.
- The Baobab LIMS is also of value to laboratories other than biobank laboratories. Any lab that processes biological material needs to electronically track their biospecimens internally to ensure integrity of the information in the laboratory. Baobab LIMS provides capacity to a small laboratory to scale the size of their genetics projects and increase throughput of samples.
- A demo site has been setup for potential users to test the software, before installing it, at <http://b3abiobank.sanbi.ac.za/demo> [login=admin; password=admin].
- The software is available for download at:
<http://christoffels.sanbi.ac.za/index.php/software/software-downloads>.

The ***Bioinformatics Capacity Development Research Unit*** was established and is located at the South African National Bioinformatics Institute (SANBI) at the University of the Western Cape. It aims to develop and support bioinformatics and genomics in South Africa. Bioinformatics has recently emerged as a discipline straddling the established fields of biology and computer science. It is integral to modern biological research, and as a specialist pursuit, offers substantial competitive opportunities to smaller and developing countries, without the requirement of prohibitive infrastructural investment. Bioinformatics worldwide focuses on a number of sites that provide high quality access to data and information. Such sites exist on all continents, with the exception of Africa and Antarctica.

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