

Institut Mérieux Speech during the KAVI-ICR Young Investigator Award ceremony

27th January 2020, Nairobi, Kenya

Institut Mérieux is a holding company, headquartered in Lyon, France that currently employs more than 18,000 people around the world and is present in over 40 countries, with close to 3 billion euros in sales.

Since its inception in 1897, Institut Mérieux has been contributing its experience in biology to improve medicine and public health across the globe. To fight against infectious diseases and cancer, the Institute imagines and develops new approaches in the fields of diagnostics, immunotherapy, food safety, and nutrition. These preventive, diagnostic or therapeutic approaches are implemented by its three bio-industrial companies (bioMérieux, Transgene and Mérieux NutriSciences), working closely with its entities devoted to innovation, such as ABL Inc. and Mérieux Développement.

In line with its Pasteurian tradition, Institut Mérieux has also set up several actions that aim at fostering and accelerating scientific innovation and creating tomorrow's medicine such as :

- (i) Private equity investment into emerging biotech companies through its Mérieux Development fund
- (ii) Establishment of joint research units allowing long term collaborations with academic researchers and hospital community
- (iii) Funding of academic research project through a highly competitive call, the Mérieux Research Grants. Through this call, the Institut Mérieux has so far allocated more than 15 million euros to around 130 teams worldwide since 2009.

More recently the Institut Mérieux has launched a new program which aims at supporting emerging research, through allocation of awards to young investigators (either biologists or clinicians) having made significant achievements on particular strategic topics. To allocate these awards, which are worldwide, Institut Mérieux first identifies major scientific societies in prioritized countries who are willing to advertise the award and perform the preselection of potential laureates. The laureate is chosen among preselected candidates by an independent scientific advisor board, to ensure full transparency and objectivity of the selection process.

The topics that have been prioritized for the Young Investigator Awards in the coming years are all dealing with infectious diseases, like antimicrobial resistance, sepsis or global or tropical infectious diseases and microbiota nutrition and diseases. This for two main reasons :

- (i) All these issues raise major public health problems in both industrialized and emerging countries, and are currently the subject of major attention from the WHO, as well as many public and private agencies in the US and the European community,
- (ii) All these topics are clearly in line with the strategic priorities of Institut Mérieux and its entities. In particular bioMérieux have been committed for many years in the fight against AMR and improvement of antibiotic stewardship. BioMérieux has been present in Kenya for over 20 years through local partners and has supported the growth of innovative laboratory infrastructure across the country in microbiology, immunology & molecular biology.

Furthermore, BioMérieux has established partnerships with entities in healthcare in order to go beyond the lab to support various projects related to capacity building, medical education and scientific support in antimicrobial resistance, sepsis, emergency medicine solutions and syndromic testing. To strengthen its commitment to the country, BioMérieux established a local office in Nairobi in 2018. In Africa, BioMérieux also has offices in Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Algeria, Egypt and South Africa who together with local partners support the company's mission of being a leader in in vitro diagnostics driven by a pioneering spirit and unrelenting commitment to improve public health in Africa.

On behalf of Institut Mérieux, BioMérieux Kenya is pleased to present the joint **Institut Mérieux – KAVI-ICR Young Investigator Award** for 2020 to **Dr Loice ACHIENG OMBAJO**.

Loice is a Consultant Physician and infectious disease specialist who holds a Bachelor Of Medicine & Bachelor of Surgery Degree from the University of Nairobi, a Master of Science in Infectious Diseases from the University of London and a diploma in Tropical medicine and Hygiene from the London School of hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM). She is a senior lecturer at the department of Clinical Medicine and Therapeutics at the University of Nairobi and Head of the Infectious disease unit at the Kenyatta National Hospital. As a member of several antimicrobial stewardship committees at the national and international levels, Loice has been involved in the implementation of policies to improve the use of antimicrobials and the development of several guidelines in this respect. She is also the University of Nairobi technical lead for the Fleming Fund, an international program which aims at strengthening the capacity for AMR surveillance and antimicrobial stewardship. Her research interests on antimicrobial resistance surveillance in *Candida Auris* could lead to development of guidelines for the prevention and the management of various infections in Kenya, in particular those mediated by *C. Auris*.

All these activities have been recognized by several honors and awards, and led to publications in several excellent international journals as first or co-author

On behalf of Institut Merieux, Biomerieux Kenya congratulates Dr Loice ACHIENG OMBAJO for her previous achievements, the quality of her projects and this award!