Background informations

Meaning of Dermatopathology
Light microscopy studies of skin biopsy together with the clinical evaluation are the most important steps in dermatological diagnosis. The availability of dermatopathology services significantly varies across the world. In developing countries there is limited or no access at all to specialists such as dermatologists, dermatopathologists or laboratory services. In Sub-Saharan Africa, trained and/or board certified dermatopathologists are extremely rare (in 2010 < 14% of countries). Unfortunately a precise dermatological diagnosis supported by a skin biopsy is still very rare in the whole African continent, affecting the health of several thousands of patients.

Regional Dermatology Training Centre (RDTC), Moshi, Tanzania
In 1992, an international taskforce decided to build the RDTC, supported by the WHO, Internationals Society of Dermatology (ISD), Tanzania State, other societies. The RDTC has become an academic pan-African reference centre for management of skin diseases and dermatological training. The RDTC takes care annually of more than 13'000 patients and >500 skin biopsies are yearly performed. Important other duties of the RDTC are: a) education of dermatology specialists; b) education of medical students at the local University; c) organization of a yearly dermatological CME conference with high international resonance.

Our Project
Despite these mentioned excellent features, specialists visiting African Dermatology Clinics for example the RDTC – as H. Beltraminelli did in 2009 during a 6-month voluntary work - immediately realize the absolute need of dermatopathology services in Africa. Therefore since 2009 a group of motivated experts with limited funding are running a project to develop the dermatopathology in Africa, starting from the prominent reference centre, namely the RDTC. The main goal is to train dermatopathology expertise to several motivated and talented African specialists (dermatologists or pathologists) in Europe during at least 1 year (4-6 time 3 months spread within 2-3 years) and finally to prepare them to participate to the International Board Examination in Dermatopathology (IBED) in Frankfurt, Germany. These experts will then spread their knowledge to other African colleagues, which ensures the sustainability of the project.

The fact that this proposal is focused on a medical issue in developing countries with several and dramatic medical, economical, and social needs is in line with the "United Nations Sustainable Development Goals - 17 Goals to transform the World" (http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/). Looking at these 17 goals, our project has a particular direct impact on Goal Nr.3: Good health and well-being – Goal Nr.4: Quality education – Goal Nr.5: Gender equality – Goal Nr.10: Reduced inequalities – Goal Nr.17: Partnership for the goals. Our work has also an indirect impact on Goal Nr.1: No poverty – Goal Nr.8: Decent work and economic growth - Goal Nr.16: Peace, justice, and strong institutions.

Objectives achieved and partners involved 2009-2017
Despite limited personnel and financial resources, we already achieved some important goals:

- Since 2009 we supported several scholarships/fellowships for totally 10 motivated African pathologists/dermatologists willing to learn dermatopathology in Europe.
  Partners: Prof. J. Schneider, Cape Town; Prof. L. Cerroni, Graz; Prof. M. Möhrle and Dr. G. Metzler, Tübingen; Prof. L. Borrowdori, Dr. R. Blum, Dr. L. Feldmeyer, Dr. H. Nievergelt, Bern.

Fig. 1: 3. African Dermatopathology Conference (ADPC) Moshi, Tanzania 2017
Thanks to this project we have currently 4 board-certified (IBED) dermatopathologists in Africa. Two are preparing the IBED in 2017.

Since 2009 yearly organisation of several dermatopathology courses for the 15 residents in dermatology at the RDTC. Participation of several European and some African specialists.

Since 2015 yearly organization of an “African Dermatopathology Conference” (ADPC) at the RDTC. It is a two-days free conference offered to African dermatologists/pathologists with interest in dermatopathology. In 2017 there were >40 participants (40% pathologists and 60% dermatologists) from >10 African countries. The 4. ADPC is scheduled on January 8-9.2018.

In 2016 foundation of the “African Dermatopathology Society” (ADPS). President M. Diallo, Senegal, Vice-President D. Zuriel, Kenya, Secretary A. Ehiaghe, Nigeria, Treasurer S. Kiprono, Kenya. One member of them is already officially member of the ICDP (International Committee of Dermatopathology). H. Beltramelli and M. Starink are helping as counselors.

Scientific activity of the project: totally 5 posters, 3 publications (see literature), several lectures.

Other important partners
EADV – European Academy of Dermatology and Venereology
2014-2016 Grant to support the African Dermatopathology Development Project.
Co-work within the “EADV taskforce tropical dermatology group” with focus on the African Dermatopathology.

IFD – International Foundation for Dermatology
In 2009 the IFD supported the project with a Dermalink Grant. The most important strategic decisions of this project have been discussed with Prof. R. Hay and Dr. C. Fuller. During last 10 years both have been very important supporters of the development of the RDTC as a Dermatology Centre of excellence in Sub-Saharan Africa.

ISD – International Society of Dermatology
Support of the Project within the “Mentorship Program” of the ISD, and support of the “3. African Dermatopathology Conference” (ADPC).

ISDP – International Society of Dermatopathology
Several African fellows received some conference grants for their participation to the Summer Academy of Dermatopathology in Graz, Austria. Collaboration with Prof. L. Cerroni, Graz, Austria. An intensive collaboration with the executive committee of the ISDP is planned.

RTDC: one of most important sub-Saharan African dermatology clinics – Dr. D. Mavura, Director, Prof. J. Masenga, and , Prof. H. Grossmann, Past Directors
All strategically decisions how to develop dermatopathology at the RDTC have been discussed with the directors of the RDTC.

The Dermatopathology unit at the RDTC is running well and more autonomous than to many hard-working experts, especially Dr. J. Cuevas, Spain.

Sustainability of the project
Several African fellows of this project are currently developing the fields of dermatology, pathology and dermatopathology in their respective Hospitals. Most of them are lecturer at the local Universities. Some of them are preparing a dermatology-resident-education program which are the first in their respective countries.
Some of the trained African specialists are now regularly going to the RDTC doing dermatopathology teaching and assuring dermatopathology slide-reading backup.
The “African Dermatopathology Society” is led exclusively by African specialists.

Future goals
The idea is to go on with the project in a similar way until 2020, main goals:

- To further increase the number of African dermatopathologists founding their dermatopathology training in Europe with the goal to pass the IBED. We are planning to support 4-6 selected highly motivated African fellows during next 3-4 years.

- Carry on the yearly organisation of the African Dermatopathology Conference (ADPC).

- To continue the support of dermatopathological activities at the RDTC.

- To support the new-born African Dermatopathology Society (ADPS).

- To help African Dermatopathologists networking among them and with other colleagues in other countries, especially through the ISDP, ISD, EADV, and other important societies.
Final comments

I use this opportunity to sensitize the readers of Dermatologia Helvetica about our current needs:
• we are currently looking for a sponsor to continue the activities of the program.
• we welcome all colleagues willing to personally help within this project, especially we are looking for dermatopathologists willing to host an African fellow during 3 month in his/her laboratory.

What I learned working at this project:
• Patience: The time to move things forward runs very slow, but at the same time it is running away very fast.
• Diligence: It is important to have a vision, to plan, but then also to be flexible to deal with the regular appearing unforeseen.
• Persistence: There always are few ways to do the things well, but numerous to fail.
• Openness: To learn from failure.
• Humility: We are a very small part of a very large system.
• Serendipity.

Acknowledgements

• I take this opportunity to say THANKS to everybody working directly or indirectly at this project, every step forward, even a small one, is of great importance.
• A particular thanks goes to Prof. L. Borradori, my chief who is supporting this project with enthusiasm.
• Thanks to the fellows for their insatiable hunger to learn, keeping me awake with a lot of questions, giving me several important feedbacks how to improve the development of the project.
• Thanks to the fellows for their always warm smile.

Some literature

3. Beltraminelli H. Focus on dermatopathology in developing countries. Article in a large document focusing on Community dermatology, distributed as CD at the last World Conference of Dermatology in Seoul, South Corea 2011.