

BRIDGING WORLDS

KBF'S EYES AND EARS IN AFRICA

How do you identify the most promising projects to support across the African continent? That's the challenge KBF has set out to meet by creating a new role – the Africa liaison officer.

More than 60% of the King Baudouin Foundation's activity outside Europe is concentrated on Africa. Hundreds of projects on the continent are currently being supported by some 100 philanthropic Funds,

notably in four priority countries – Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Senegal and Benin.

Healthcare, training and education, entrepreneurship and the environment are areas of particular interest. But identifying the right projects, capable of having an impact, especially in areas where travel can be risky, and then of maintaining follow-up connections and support, is far from simple for KBF staff working out of Brussels. That's where the liaison officers come in.

The idea draws on the experience of KBF Africa Prize laureate Deogratias Niyonkuru. A community leader in Burundi and founder of ADISCO, which helps train and support young entrepreneurs and farmers, he first encountered the Foundation as a grantee 15 years ago. Going on to become an advisor to KBF, Niyonkuru has helped shape a new kind of role based on proximity, trust and understanding.

Support in the field

Today, fellow liaison officers are the Foundation's trusted partners on the ground.



Five liaison officers are now in post (L to R): Emile Uwezowamungu (Burundi), Papa Mayacine Diop (Senegal), Véronique Poverello Kasongo (DRC, Lubumbashi), Junior Kalonji (DRC, Kinshasa), Aristophane Soukossi (Benin)

Their first job is to identify new partners. That means assessing the quality of the projects that apply for KBF support, or, in areas where applicants are scarce, liaison officers aim to identify projects that could meet needs.

Selection criteria are broad and varied: a project's relevance to the community it aims to strengthen; gender dynamics; innovation; the potential for collaboration with other organisations or donors; long-term autonomy; sustainability of impact; and potential to replicate success.

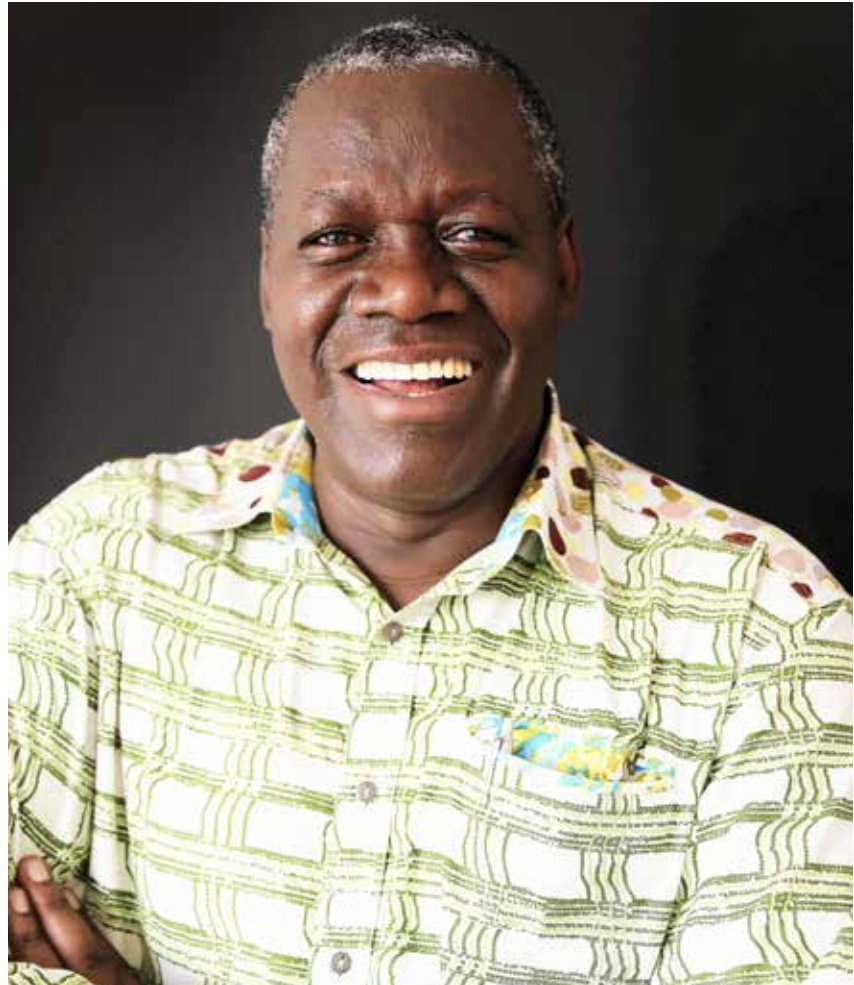
Yet it is often something less tangible that makes the difference between a project securing a grant or not – notably the personality of its leader. Have they been involved in the project for a long time, for example? Or is it the new opportunity for financial support that is motivating them?

"The commitment of project leaders, their passion for the work they want to do, is the most important factor," says Niyonkuru. "It's certainly one of the best signs that this is their initiative and that they will carry it forward with determination."

Liaison officers deliver their recommendations to KBF, who submit them to the relevant decision-making committee.

Supporting the projects once a grant programme is under way can be even more important, given the KBF focus on long-term relationships with its beneficiaries. "That's the part of the job I enjoy the most," Niyonkuru continues. "You meet people who are dynamic and whom you can help to make stronger."

This support is provided on the ground, close to the communities concerned. Depending on the experience of the people involved, support might mean one visit a year – or four. Liaison officers help plan



and set objectives, monitor progress, and adjust plans where needed to keep them in line with the needs of beneficiaries.

Light touch verification

Finally, the third function is around verification of grantees' activities and impact – a stage that includes gathering evidence from the local population and which KBF aims to ensure does not become an undue accounting and reporting burden on the grantees. "You need to look beyond the figures and take into account factors such as improved quality of life," adds Deogratias Niyonkuru.

In DR Congo, Véronique Poverello Kasongo, the liaison officer in the southern city of Lubumbashi, says: "The King Baudouin Foundation isn't like most funders. Here, we avoid extensive reporting duties, which is what many partner organisations

with more of an institutional focus require – sometimes at the cost of an excessive burden for small local associations."

Project support from KBF is also a long-term process, avoiding arbitrary cut-off dates, but rather encouraging grantees to become autonomous gradually, as the relationship develops. "Working over the medium or long term changes the whole picture," says Deogratias Niyonkuru. "The partners remain motivated and, if they encounter new challenges, they have the energy to meet them."

Read the full interview with Deogratias Niyonkuru

<https://kbs-frb.be/en/experience-led-role-liaison-officer-africa>

AFRICAN FUTURES

Over the coming months, dozens of organisations across the continent will be making their case to be awarded the KBF Africa Prize for 2025-26.

The winner, to be announced early next year, will have stood out among a record field of candidates.

Last year's laureate tells us what it all means.

Lydia Charles Moyo, the association you founded in Tanzania, Her Initiative, won the 2023-24 KBF Africa Prize for your work with young women, notably in helping them build economic independence. What effect have the accolade, the 200,000-euro grant and the new opportunities had on your project?

The prize has really launched us globally. That was so huge. We got to meet funders and explain our cause to stakeholders in the US and Europe. We got interviewed and

featured by global media, African media and local media. Every place that we go, they know about us and they'll say, oh, you're the KBF Africa Prize winner! That has enhanced our credibility, and our network has expanded – abroad, but also locally.

Our funding has gone way up. That's helped us expand our work and our team. We've also been able to work on our long-term strategy and our systems are stronger – so we've diversified our funding and we're also more able to attract more partners. One of the biggest new relationships is with the Tanzanian government. We got all this international recognition and they had no idea who we were! They were so proud of us. Now we've partnered with two ministries, dealing with women and young people, and hope to strengthen relationships between the government and young women leaders.

You've been critical in the past of some funders placing too many conditions on grants to young people. The KBF Africa Prize aside, have things got easier?

With all the cuts to international aid,

for grassroots leaders, young people, women and girls, I think the situation is actually getting worse. But for us, we're continuing and we hope eventually to establish a fund to support youth organisations in east Africa, because they're doing incredible work.

The KBF Africa Prize gives you access to a range of support including the alumni network of past winners – and you're part of the jury to select future laureates. What's that been like?

I've connected with other laureates on a personal level. We have calls, I reach out, ask 'How do you do this?' People like Gerald [Abila of BarefootLaw in Uganda] have great advice, because they've been there, done that. Joining the jury has been incredible. I remember in one session I was saying to myself, like 'How did I win this?' I mean, it's pretty hard... There are so many people doing incredible work, it's very hard to pick just one. We should find ways to get more of them funding!

