

What binds every person alive today, from Nairobi to New York, is the common understanding that Africa is our ancestral home. We are all Scatterlings of Africa...

What is Scatterlings?

Scatterlings of Africa is PAST's science education, research and public outreach initiative that celebrates Africa's status as humankind's ancestral home – a powerfully transformative idea that instils dignity in Africa as a treasure trove of human heritage.

The unique aim of Scatterlings of Africa is to establish a sustainable platform for the development of a world-class origin sciences research capacity in Africa, one in which African scientists play the lead role.

Background

Africa is the birthplace of humankind, the continent on which all of our ancestors originated – and which preserves a rich fossil record, documenting the origins of humans and myriad other life forms.

Although our fossil heritage is as priceless a resource as the gold, platinum and diamonds hidden within Africa's rock, it remains under-resourced and under-exploited in Africa. Research is typically carried out by foreign-based teams, and local science education and outreach efforts, if they exist, are uncoordinated and often ineffective. Many African-based researchers lack access to even basic professional resources, especially adequate local funding for their own projects.

Origin science institutions are under-funded and in most places under-developed. In short, the geographic advantage provided by Africa's remarkable fossil, natural and ancient cultural heritage has yielded but a fraction of its potentially tremendous and lasting benefits to Africa's scientists, students, communities and economies.

Much of PAST's prior work has been focused on South African origin sciences. Scatterlings of Africa is an ambitious effort to expand the organisation's mission across Africa while retaining its traditional core focus on the origin sciences capacity of South Africa. Borrowed from the hit song by Grammy nominated South African singer, songwriter and anthropologist Johnny Clegg, the name Scatterlings of Africa is a metaphor not only for PAST's expanded mission, but also for the rich heritage all modern human populations can trace to Africa.

The aim of Scatterlings of Africa is to establish a sustainable platform for the development of a world-class origin sciences research capacity in Africa, one in which African scientists and technicians play lead roles. With effective education as its main thrust, Scatterlings of Africa will nurture the next generation of scientists from school to senior levels by creating a credible and reliable network and support base for the multitude of geographically dispersed research entities whose education and public outreach activities in Africa are uncoordinated and under-developed. In this way, origin sciences education will be grounded in a framework of world-class research projects, including those at the iconic human origins sites in the Sterkfontein Valley, South Africa; the Afar Rift, Ethiopia; the Lake Turkana Basin, Kenya; and the Olduvai-Serengeti area, Tanzania.

The Scatterlings of Africa project will develop in phases, the first of which will launch in 2011. The project will focus on maintaining existing programmes and developing new ones in South Africa, and expanding some of these to Tanzania, Kenya, and Ethiopia, which boast a rich human fossil heritage like that found in South Africa. Subsequent phases of the project will focus on other regions of the continent based on knowledge gained from exploratory efforts made during the first phase.

As Africa's origin sciences hub, PAST will pursue each area of its operational mission by bringing together government, business, the scientific community and civil society in order to achieve the following objectives:

- To ignite an interest in Africa's ancestral heritage at primary and secondary school levels by exposing educators and learners to general principles of scientific enquiry as they relate to humankind's fundamental need to understand its roots and modern diversity.
- To grow the capacity for African university students, professional scientists and origin sciences technicians to manage and develop African origin sciences in collaboration with international colleagues and institutions.
- To promote to the African and global communities the philosophical and practical relevance of developing the origin sciences.
- To assist in the transformation of African society as it seeks to take a leadership role in a rapidly developing global world.

Scatterlings of Africa Programmes

- 1. Walking Tall School Projects** – including the acclaimed Walking Tall Educational Theatre Project, a new Walking Tall Origin Sciences Camp for Advanced Learners and a Walking Tall Origin Sciences Career Guidance programme.
- 2. Degree Support for University Students working in origin sciences** – including bursaries for postgraduate students at Honours, Masters and Doctoral levels, post-Doctoral fellowships, and funds facilitating the participation of African students in origin sciences field schools.
- 3. Technical Training and Capacity Support** – programmes that provide support, and build a positive environment for technical assistants working in origin sciences on fossil survey and excavation, and the preparation, casting and curation of fossil collections.
- 4. Young African Scientist Development** – a programme to retain recent Masters and Doctoral degree recipients in origin sciences careers in Africa.
- 5. Research Project Support** – to provide funding for cutting-edge museum, laboratory or field research in the origin sciences conducted by senior scientists based at African institutions.
- 6. Origin Sciences Publications and Conferences** – to support the publishing of research results in the African origin sciences by providing partial funding for Africa-based scientific journal publication costs and for the hosting and attendance of conferences of African origin sciences professional associations.
- 7. Public Understanding and Engagement** – promoting the philosophical and practical relevance of developing the origin sciences in Africa and around the world. This will include a series of public lectures, and performances of **ReVerse**, an evocative theatre production for adult audiences that reflects on humankind's shared identity. **ReVerse** will also form the basis of new diversity – themed workshops for corporate and communities.

