

PAN Africa START-PAGES-INQUA Workshop on African Paleoenvironments

NAIROBI, KENYA, 19-21 JULY 2004

After the successful workshop on High Latitude Paleoenvironments held in Moscow 2001, PAGES, START and INQUA helped to organize a workshop on African paleoenvironments in Nairobi, Kenya from 19-21 July 2004. The local organizing committee, the Pan-African START Secretariat, organized the event perfectly and provided a nice venue in the City Center of Nairobi.

One of the major goals was to facilitate a closer interaction between the African paleocommunity and an integration of African research into the international community. As shown by the different presentations, ranging from morphological – hydrological studies in Malawi to Isotope modeling in Ethiopian Lakes, from human impacts on East African lake ecosystems to paleo reconstructions from ocean sediments off Africa, this continent provides a huge and impressive amount of paleo information. After 10 years, the PAGES IDEAL Programme (Past Global Changes – International Decade on East African Lakes) is coming to synthesis. As reported by Prof.

Johnson, Lake Malawi provides a unique archive spanning back probably 1 million years. Those Lake sediments provide evidence of changing tropical atmospheric circulation south of the Equator. Similar results were presented by M. Umer and D. Legesse from the Ethiopian Lakes north of the equator. Changing atmospheric circulation influenced strongly the ecosystems in the past and has also had a recent impact on those densely populated East African regions (see Fig. 1). Under economic and societal pressure, the East African Lake ecosystems suffer especially due to intensified land and water use. Changing lake levels, enhanced pollution and overfishing have drastically affected these unique ecosystems. Future developments must have a strong and controlled management if these fantastic ecosystems are to exist in the future. Dramatic human impact and related effects on Lake Naivasha were presented as an example for the vulnerable region by G. Owati from the Kenyan Wildlife Service. West African presentations concentrated on the

human impact on coastal environments in Nigeria and changes in recent precipitation patterns.

After two days of presentations, a plenary discussion enabled participants to focus on educational and international collaborations. African research needs a stronger interaction with the international community, better communication and help gathering financial resources. The Senior Scientific Officer of the Pan-African START Secretariat, Dr. Daniel Olago, guided the participants in a discussion to focus future research direction, following the results that had emerged from the previous contributions. Education and future research in Africa must include a better integration of the local research institutes and also reach topics and scientists besides the “hot” research issues, in order to provide help for a broader integration of African scientists.

It is the aim of ongoing PAGES collaboration to involve African scientists in international research, to produce a special journal issue in order to hopefully reproduce the success of the Russian workshop example. The Nairobi conference showed how international funding and networking may be used to boost essential scientific development and was greatly appreciated by local scientists.

Further Information on African Paleoscience is available at the Pan African Start Secretariat (PASS):

Pan-African START Secretariat
University of Nairobi
Dept. of Geology, Nairobi
Kenya
pass@uonbi.ac.ke
<http://pass.uonbi.ac.ke>
<http://wdc.uonbi.ac.ke>

CHRISTOPH KULL
PAGES IPO, Bern, Switzerland
kull@pages.unibe.ch



Fig. 1: Climate Change also dramatically affects the African high altitude environments. View to the remaining Lewis Glacier on Mount Kenya in 2004. (Photo: Jérôme Chappellaz)

