

## Press release

### Rwanda Biomedical Center launches RBC – Mbaza: A chatbot that provides timely and accurate information on COVID-19 to Rwandan population

The Rwanda Biomedical Center (RBC) has launched the application RBC – Mbaza, a chatbot which provides all relevant information around COVID-19 in Rwanda. The application can be accessed via the USSD short code \*114#. Through the application, Rwandans can access daily statistics on number of cases and vaccinations, COVID-19 symptoms and prevention and all Covid-19 related information as well as guidance on how to proceed if someone has tested positive. Most importantly, the chatbot informs the population about the current restrictions put in place by the Government of Rwanda to curb the spread of COVID-19, such as curfews, business closures and travel restrictions.

***“Information is very key in the way we all handle this pandemic. The more we make it accessible the easier people make use of it to abide by preventive measures and follow other guidelines that the Government puts in place to fight this pandemic. With this chatbot, our aim is to provide accurate and timely information to the majority of Rwandans and Rwanda residents to help them take healthier decisions and curb the spread of Covid-19,”*** said Dr Sabin Nsanzimana, Director General of Rwanda Biomedical Centre.

The application is updated on a daily basis, which means that it provides a unique source of timely and accurate information, and thus also helps to address the spread of misinformation among the population. Being available from any mobile phone in Kinyarwanda, English and French, it targets the entire Rwandan population, including those without access to the internet where information is usually received from Twitter and the RBC website.

The application has been developed through a partnership between the Government of Rwanda and the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), represented by the GIZ Digital Transformation Center Rwanda. The project emerged from the #SmartDevelopmentHack, a hackathon organised by BMZ together with partners from the EU Commission, other EU member states, tech-companies and civil society. The hackathon called for innovative digital solutions to tackle the challenges caused by the coronavirus outbreak in low- and middle-income countries.

***“Digital solutions play a key role in fighting the spread of COVID-19. We are convinced that the partnership with the Government of Rwanda will play a key role in improving access to information around the pandemic in Rwanda, especially to those in remote areas and without access to the internet”,*** says Olaf Seidel, Head of the GIZ Digital Transformation Center.

The current USSD application is the first version of the chatbot. In the coming months, the application will evolve from a simple menu-based solution into a fully-fledged chatbot based on Artificial Intelligence. Users will be able to type individual questions related to COVID-19 instead of choosing from a pre-defined menu. Ultimately, RBC and its partners aim to provide a voice-based chatbot which Rwandans can call and engage with to get responses to their individual questions.

The chatbot is also proof of the vibrant and growing tech ecosystem in Rwanda. The technical development of the application is led by the Rwandan startup Digital Umuganda. By making AI-based language technology available in Kinyarwanda, the chatbot constitutes a major achievement for AI-based language technology in African languages.

