

GDR Rift General Assembly (05/11/2024)

Online participants: ~24 connections

Participants present: J.-R. Boisserie, J.-B. Eczet, A. Ghio, M. Jolivet, J. Marteau, D. Pleurdeau, S. Prat, P. Sepulchre, C. Tiberi

Summary

The meeting focused on the results and future of the Rift Research Group (GDR), discussing its objectives, organisation and challenges. The participants discussed collaboration with Africa, as well as training and knowledge dissemination strategies. Finally, they discussed the preparation of the next GDR project, emphasising the importance of interdisciplinarity and the active participation of members.

Decisions and actions to be taken

- Scientific Committee: prepare the project for the renewal of the GDR before 10 December.
- Doris Barboni: proposes to take over as director of the GDR from January 2026.
- Scientific Committee: encourage new CNRS institutes to join the GDR.
- Scientific Committee: to present the GDR at a MITI meeting.
- Scientific Committee: discuss collaboration with the African Academy of Sciences and Africa For Science.
- Project: to consider the creation of a multilingual interdisciplinary journal on the Rift.
- Project: to set up a feedback system after field missions in the interdisciplinary journal.
- Project: to set up regular training and scientific webinars.
- Scientific Committee: consider the sustainability of training courses (creation of an interdisciplinary training module that can be validated by universities, in the field, etc.).
- Scientific Committee: improve the dissemination of information on calls for projects and funding opportunities.
- Scientific Committee: seek to recruit a project manager to manage the administrative and communication aspects of the GDR.
- B. Hazard: update the committee on the progress of a parallel African GDR project.

GDR Rift: overview and achievements

C. Tiberi presented an overview of the GDR Rift, an interdisciplinary research structure on the East African Rift, created in 2021 for a period of 5 years (ending 30 August 2025). She described the GDR's objectives, its funding, its main activities (website, podcasts, mobility grants) and its achievements, in particular the interdisciplinary book published in 2023 and the associated conference. C. Tiberi emphasised the importance of collaboration between French and African researchers in the running of the GDR, as well as the need for feedback from its members to improve its activities, such as webinars and podcasts.

The GDR's current scientific council (18 members) meets monthly to discuss grants, projects and future actions. Its minutes are available on request.

Several new proposals/ideas were mentioned: the possibility of a parallel African GDR directed by African rift institutes could be envisaged, the idea of a multilingual journal on interdisciplinary research in the Rift, the translation of the book 'Le Grand Rift Africain' (involvement of the CFEE). C. Tiberi stressed the need to define a project and the associated themes before the 10 December deadline for renewal of the GDR with the CNRS. It was suggested that a common theme could help the creation of a similar GDR structure in eastern Africa and could improve complementary.

GDR management and administrative support

C. Tiberi outlined the challenges associated with managing the GDR, in particular the need for administrative support for tasks such as organising podcasts and webinars and managing mobility.

The participants are considering opening up the GDR to other French institutes in order to broaden the disciplinary scope of the GDR and attract more support. Potential collaborations with IN2P3 were mentioned, particularly in connection with water and soil pollution, subsurface structure and the dating of events/objects. It was suggested that the GDR should be presented to MITI in order to reach out to more institutes (biology, engineering sciences, etc.).

International collaboration in the Rift

The meeting mentioned international collaborations and programmes to promote interdisciplinarity and internationality (research programmes, doctoral and postdoctoral fellowships). B. Hazard (dir. CNRS Nairobi Office) suggested collaborating with pan-African organisations such as the African Academy of Sciences and Africa for Science to strengthen the training of Masters students. B. Hazard also mentioned the possibility of obtaining a project engineer to help set up European projects with African institutes.

C. Tiberi explained the challenges associated with the official inclusion of foreign partners, and solutions for maintaining a balanced and lasting collaboration were discussed.

The use of the workshop zone model to develop interdisciplinary research in the Rift region was also discussed, with a programme on Turkana. Workshop zones are often managed on a constant volume basis, and the involvement of the GDR could be decisive in getting the project off the ground.

GDR Project Preparation Meeting

C. Tiberi reminded that the preparation of the next GDR project had to be finalised by 10 December. She mentioned that Doris Barboni would be taking over as head of the GDR and stressed the importance of having motivated committee members. The current committee encourages the participation of other institutes, in particular IN2P3. Its members also propose a flexible structure for the committee (depending on the workload of each member at any given time), while assigning specific tasks to its members. These tasks can be assigned for a variable duration. All proposals are welcome.

Training strategies

Participants also discussed training opportunities, including webinars and partnerships with institutions such as the ICTP, as well as funding to support these initiatives. The advantages of on-the-job training over webinars or MOOCs were discussed, highlighting the importance of face-to-face interaction and hands-on learning. Difficulties specific to each medium were

identified, which could be better managed: the creation of modules could be poorly perceived by existing training courses, and field training requires more substantial logistics and funding. The participants also plan to invite African colleagues for reciprocal exchanges and to encourage intra-African collaboration.

Interdisciplinary training

The discussion focused on the development of interdisciplinary training courses and the dissemination of information within the project. It was proposed to use tools and the field to encourage interdisciplinarity, and to organise webinars on common methods. Participants also discussed the importance of mission feedback and the need for a dedicated person to lead and manage the dissemination of information. Mission reports could be the subject of a dedicated section in the multilingual interdisciplinary Rift journal. It was agreed to organise small workshops in the coming year to address specific issues in preparation for the next five-year period.