



Cornell University

Call for Research Proposals for the Structural Transformation of African Agriculture and Rural Spaces (STAARS) Fellows program

Application deadline: January 31, 2021

Background

The Structural Transformation of African Agriculture and Rural Spaces (STAARS) fellowship program, a multi-institution collaboration managed by Cornell University with support from the CGIAR Research Program on Policies, Institutions, and Markets (PIM), announces its annual call for research proposals. Early-career African researchers selected as STAARS Fellows in 2021 advance rigorous, policy-oriented research on the causal determinants of productivity and income growth, asset accumulation, rural employment and risk management in African agriculture and rural spaces.

The Fellowship covers travel and training expenses. STAARS Fellows will be paired with mentors at Cornell University with whom they will jointly author a paper on a topic of mutual interest relating to structural transformation in Africa south of the Sahara. The program aims for publication of resulting research findings in high quality journals and as working papers. In addition, PIM and Cornell will facilitate Fellows' participation in scientific and policy conferences.

The STAARS Fellowship began in 2016 and to date has supported 25 Fellows from diverse backgrounds. [Learn about past Fellows here.](#)

Scope of Research and Geographic Focus

Prospective STAARS Fellows are invited to develop proposals in the following thematic areas:

1. Dynamics of agriculture inputs use, technological change, and productivity growth in Africa south of the Sahara.
2. Rural factor market performance, labor exits and productivity in Africa south of the Sahara.

3. Food security, nutrition and health linkages in Africa south of the Sahara.
4. Poverty dynamics and resilience against shocks in Africa south of the Sahara.

STAARS Fellows' rigorous policy analysis should use existing data, such as the Living Standards Measurement Study – Integrated Surveys on Agriculture (LSMS–ISA), Demographic and Health Surveys or similar high-quality datasets from Africa south of the Sahara.

Eligibility

The call is open for early career African researchers, either Ph.D. students in their final year prior to degree completion or those who completed their Ph.D. no earlier than 2016. Priority is given to researchers who are African nationals based and working in – or soon returning to – Africa, with proposals relating to the research themes indicated above. Qualified female researchers are particularly encouraged to apply. STAARS welcomes applications from fresh Ph.D. graduates who can benefit from mentorship and additional training to become internationally respected and recognized researchers. Fellows are expected to complete the proposed project by submitting findings as a complete working paper by December 15, 2021 and proceeding to submit the paper to a peer-reviewed journal and conferences in early 2022.

Researchers are expected to be familiar with existing data sets and have a strong working knowledge of appropriate software, typically Stata and/or R, and an interest in econometric analysis of high-quality data sets. Knowledge of Stata and/or R will be assessed at the finalist stage.

Funding

The selected applicants will receive funds to cover travel and participation in a three-week mentorship program at Cornell University. Due to the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, travel may not be possible in 2021. The 2021 program will begin online and we will evaluate the feasibility of travel in mid-2021.

The proposed research and capacity development activities are expected to be undertaken as part of an ongoing effort by the scholar. No salary support is available; STAARS will not cover the scholar's time allocated to this research. A letter of support from the candidate's supervisor is required. The program cannot support costs for any new data collection.

Application Process

The STAARS Fellowship application process is managed by Cornell University, in collaboration with PIM. Applicants must prepare a maximum 2500-word research proposal, which motivates the selected research issues and objectives, outlines data sources and proposed methodology, and contains a convincing plan for completing the project by December 15, 2021. Projects that propose

to use data that are not publicly available must provide documentation that they have access to those data. All proposals shall be prepared in English. All proposals will be peer-reviewed by experts from Cornell University and/or PIM.

The deadline to submit a research proposal is January 31, 2021. Applicants should submit their completed proposals via email to staars@cornell.edu. Accepted applicants will be notified by early March 2021 and are expected to begin remote collaboration with their mentor immediately upon acceptance.

Research Proposal Template

1. Completed 2021 STAARS Fellowship Applicant Information Form
2. Research Proposal (2500 words max.):
 - Title of the proposed research
 - Targeted country(-ies)
 - Introduction and motivation that includes clear statement of research objectives and hypotheses
 - Description of data source(s) and any prior experience working with the proposed data
 - Proposed methodology
 - If applicable, summary of any preliminary results
 - Proposed timeline for the research

In addition to the Research Proposal (not included in the 2500 words):

3. Bibliographic references
4. CV of the applicant
5. If proposing to use data that are not publicly available, a letter or other documentation from the data steward(s) indicating that the applicant will have access to the data to use in the proposed project
6. Photocopy of the passport biodata page and, if applicable, any current US visa

Shortlisted applicants will be asked to provide the following:

1. Letter of support from applicant's supervisor, clearly indicating that the applicant will be granted time to work on this project, if selected
2. Stata/R assessment