



## Call for Applications

### PhD Scholarships and Postdoctoral Fellowships in Artificial Intelligence (AI) Fields

January 2025, Nairobi, Kenya

#### Background

The African Technology Policy Studies Network (ATPS) is a transdisciplinary network of researchers, policymakers, private sector actors, and civil society actors that promotes the generation, dissemination, use, and mastery of science, technology, and innovation (STI) for African development, environmental sustainability, and global inclusion. With over 5,000 network members and 3,000 stakeholders across more than 51 countries on 5 continents, ATPS has established partnerships worldwide. Founded in the 1980s, ATPS became an autonomous international organisation in 2000 with diplomatic status in Kenya, focusing on transdisciplinary STI themes for African development.

ATPS operates through strategic plans developed with its stakeholders every five years. The current [ATPS Phase IX Strategic Plan \(2023-2028\)](#) addresses the changing needs and aspirations of ATPS stakeholders, aligning its strategic priorities and programmes with continental and global development agendas and priorities within the constantly evolving science and innovation landscape. This Strategic Plan aligns with the African Union's Agenda 2063, which identifies STI as a critical driver for achieving the continent's development goals as well as the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations.

The ATPS Thematic Priority Areas include: Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Security; Climate Change and Environment; Energy; Health; Creative Industries & Entrepreneurship; Education and Technology; and Digital Economy and ICT. ATPS Programmatic Priority Areas focus on: STI policy research, policymaking, and advocacy; Training, sensitisation, and capacity building; Youth and gender empowerment; Knowledge brokerage, management, and commercialisation; and Intra-Africa and global collaboration and partnerships.

The project, titled *Advancing Responsible and Gender-Inclusive Artificial Intelligence Capacity in Africa's Higher Education Ecosystem (ARISE)*, aligns with the Education and Technology Thematic Priority Area and spans all the Programmatic Priority Areas of Intervention. ARISE is funded by the **Carnegie Corporation of New York**, USA, for 36 months, from October 1, 2025, to September 2028.

The overall goal of the ARISE project is to "advance responsible and gender-inclusive AI capacity in Africa's higher education ecosystem", with special emphasis on supporting doctoral and postdoctoral programs, to build a critical mass of AI capacity that will enable Africa's transformation in all sectors of the economy. The specific objectives include to:

1. Enable informed and targeted interventions by conducting situational analyses and mapping of AI resources and institutions within the higher education ecosystem in Africa to identify statuses, surface gains, identity gaps, and capacity needs.

2. Build a strong Community of Practice (CoP) and skilled workforce in AI by supporting 16 fellowships: ten (10) PhD fellowships and six (6) postdoctoral fellowships over three years.
3. Advance knowledge sharing, exchange, and dissemination of research findings and innovations by organizing a series of sensitization, customized hands-on training, and mentorship programs on AI for development in Africa.
4. Mainstream AI into academic programmes by supporting the development and revision of a contextualized AI curricula that meets the needs of Africa in selected higher education institutions.
5. Sustain the adoption of AI across sectors by contributing to the development of AI policies and strategies at Africa's national, regional, and continental levels.

Africa's higher education ecosystem (HEE) holds enormous potential as the engine for generating the capacity and infrastructure needed for knowledge-driven, innovation-led, sustainable development in the region. With a young population of over 400 million people aged 15 to 35, Africa boasts the youngest population in the world. This offers a unique opportunity to harness this potential for economic growth and innovation, provided that people are well educated and equipped with the right skills (UNESCO, 2024). To achieve the right education and skills aligned with the industry and labour market demands, Africa's HEE must embrace the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and specifically, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) to be able to effectively address the pressing societal challenges confronting the region including food and nutrition insecurity, unemployment, skills mismatch, energy poverty, environmental degradation, climate change, inequality, and health related issues to mention just but a few. Artificial Intelligence (AI) which is the capacity of a machine to perform cognitive functions associated with human minds, such as perceiving, reasoning, learning, interacting with the environment, solving problems, and even exercising creativity (Manyika et al., 2017), stands out as one of the emerging technologies with a great potential to transform many sectors of African economies including the higher education ecosystem (Ozor et al., 2025).

The ARISE project sits within the Education and Technology Thematic Priority Area of the ATPS Phase IX Strategic Plan. Therefore, the program area will continue to run beyond the specific Carnegie Corporation-stipulated project. Donors such as the IDRC and Afreximbank have committed to supporting the ATPS's AI projects. Through some of its implemented projects, ATPS has built a CoP of AI researchers, policymakers, and practitioners across Africa. Over 100 experts in the AI field across 10 countries currently work with ATPS within Africa's higher education ecosystem.

The ARISE project concentrates on the 49 countries in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). This is primarily because the inequality in access to new technologies is significant in the region, highlighting the need to close the technology gap. Additionally, with limited policies and regulations, implementing AI in Africa has adopted a laissez-faire approach. According to Yeboah (2021), African countries continue to struggle with expanding their capacity relative to the size of the technology sector, the business environment, and the development of a skilled AI workforce. The scope of the proposed project will also cover other aspects of AI, such as drone technology, among others. As the largest STI network in Africa, ATPS will collaborate with other relevant African institutions to ensure the project's success.

## **A: CALL FOR PHD SCHOLARSHIPS IN AI-RELATED FIELDS**

### **Overview**

ATPS, through the ARISE project, invites applications for PhD scholarships in AI-related fields across key thematic sectors mentioned earlier under the [ATPS Phase IX Strategic Plan 2023-2028](#). These scholarships aim to support prospective scholars and fellows to identify suitable destinations for their AI studies, research, and development in Africa. The scholarships target higher education institutions actively engaged in AI research and development. Increased collaboration and partnerships (fostered among actors in research, academia, industry, and government) in AI teaching, research, and innovation development in Africa are prioritized. The scholarships

will support ten (10) PhD students already registered in AI studies in African Higher Education Institutions. They will also be supported in attending international AI conferences and workshops, as the case may be.

### **Eligibility Criteria**

- Applicants must be Africans or permanent residents in Africa with a strong commitment to contributing to Africa's development using AI tools and innovations.
- Must already be enrolled or accepted in a PhD program at an accredited African higher education institution.
- The research focus must be on responsible AI applications within one or more of ATPS's Thematic Priority Areas: Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Security; Climate Change and Environment; Energy; Health; Creative Industries & Entrepreneurship; Education and Technology; Digital Economy and ICT.
- Preference will be given to proposals that demonstrate gender-responsiveness, ethical AI principles, and societal values such as well-being, equity, and inclusion.
- Applicants must demonstrate how their research addresses the skewed skills gap in AI application, development and adoption across the continent.
- Strong academic record, with a minimum of a Master's degree, patents and/or publications in a relevant field.

### **Scholarship Benefits**

- Partial funding covering tuition, research expenses, living stipends, and travel for conferences/workshops.
- Mentorship from global AI experts and linkage with ATPS's AI networks.
- Opportunities for knowledge exchange, including engaging in the ICE platform for AI knowledge sharing.
- Support is for up to a maximum of 3 years, aligning with the project's implementation period.

### **Application Process**

- Submit a detailed research proposal (max. 8 pages) outlining the AI research goal and objectives, the research question, methodology, expected outcomes, impacts and alignment with ARISE objectives.
- Provide academic transcripts validated by the host institution, CV, two letters of recommendations (one academic and one professional), an admission letter for the PhD program, or proof of enrollment/acceptance in a PhD program.
- Applications must emphasize gender-inclusive approaches and responsible AI development principles.
- Deadline: **March 15, 2026**. Submit via the ATPS online portal: [Click to apply for PhD Scholarship](#) or copy and paste this link in your browser: <https://forms.gle/gK3459iSwpVG9oYu7>.
- Selection will be made through strict, transparent processes that ensure a responsible, gender-inclusive, and equitable process. The fellowship will be awarded based on merit, with careful consideration of diversity across Africa.

## **B: CALL FOR POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIPS IN AI-RELATED FIELDS**

### **Overview**

ATPS, through the ARISE project, invites applications for six (6) postdoctoral sponsored fellowships offered in African institutions undertaking research and development in AI-related fields. These fellowships aim to support postdoctoral researchers in deepening their AI research, with a focus on deploying AI skills and knowledge to address complex societal challenges in Africa, including food insecurity, climate change, health issues, and environmental impacts.

The fellowships will be provided to scholars in key sectors of African economies, including agriculture and food systems, climate change and environment, energy, health, education, and creative industries. Postdoctoral fellows will be supported to attend international AI conferences and workshops in Africa.

### Eligibility Criteria

- Applicants must be Africans or permanent residents in Africa with a strong commitment to contributing to Africa's development using AI tools and innovations.
- Must hold a PhD in an AI-related field, obtained within the last 5 years.
- The postdoctoral fellowship must be hosted in a recognized African institution actively involved in AI research and development.
- Research focus must align with responsible and gender-inclusive AI applications in one or more of ATPS's Thematic Priority Areas: Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Security; Climate Change and Environment; Energy; Health; Creative Industries & Entrepreneurship; Education and Technology; Digital Economy and ICT.
- Preference for proposals addressing responsible, ethical AI, gender equity, and societal impacts.
- Demonstrated publication record and potential for impactful research.
- Selected applicant(s) must be fully available throughout the entire contract period. Also must be willing to relocate to the host institution or country.

### Fellowship Benefits

- Funding for research expenses, stipend, and travel to conferences/workshops.
- Access to ATPS's networks for collaboration, mentorship from global AI mentors, and knowledge-sharing platforms like ICE.
- Opportunities for policy influence and industry partnerships.
- The fellowship will last for 2 years within the project's timeframe.

### Application Process

- Submit a detailed approved proposal (max. 8 pages) outlining the postdoctoral project, work plan, expected outputs, impacts, and alignment with ARISE objectives.
- Provide a PhD certificate, transcripts, CV, publication list, two letters of recommendations (one academic and one professional), and a letter of support from the host African institution.
- Submit a letter of acceptance from the host institution by the head of department /supervisor or CEO of the institution.
- Applications must highlight gender-responsiveness and ethical AI considerations.
- Deadline: **March 31, 2026**. Submit via the ATPS online portal: [Click to Apply for Postdoctoral Fellowship Scholarship](#) or copy and paste the following link in your browser: <https://forms.gle/1f9Tkd8NpFaLPw5R8>.
- Selection based on transparent processes ensuring responsibility, gender-inclusivity, and equity across Africa.

### General Information

All applications will be reviewed by a panel of experts from ATPS's network to ensure fairness and alignment with the project's goals. For further inquiries, contact the ARISE Project Coordinator at [info@atpsnet.org](mailto:info@atpsnet.org) with a copy to [executivedirector@atpsnet.org](mailto:executivedirector@atpsnet.org)

ATPS encourages applications from underrepresented groups, including women and scholars from low-resource regions, to foster inclusive AI development in Africa.

Visit <https://atpsnet.org/> for more details