

Request for Proposals

Structural Transformation of African and Asian Agriculture and Rural Spaces (STAAARS+) Fellows program of the USAID Innovation Lab for Food Security Policy, Research, Capacity and Influence

Background

The STAAARS+ Fellows program, under the [USAID Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Food Security Policy Research, Capacity, and Influence \(PRCI\)](#), is a collaboration between Cornell University, Michigan State University (MSU), and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) to advance rigorous, policy-oriented food security research on topics of inclusive agricultural- and rural transformation, development of healthy food systems, and enhanced resilience at individual, household, national and regional levels in Africa and Asia. The objective is to build and reinforce an effective policy research culture within African and Asian policy research organizations that can help build and sustain research capacity beyond the life of PRCI and the STAAARS+ program. The first cohort of STAAARS+ teams was selected in 2020 and the selection period for the second cohort will begin July 1, 2021.

STAAARS+ teams are selected through a competitive process and paired with mentors at Cornell, IFPRI or MSU, with whom they will jointly author a paper on a topic of mutual interest that fits within the PRCI research priorities. STAAARS+ will support the development of research findings publishable in high quality, peer-reviewed journals; facilitate access to policy outreach networks and policy engagement materials; and support teams' participation in scientific and policy conferences.

Scope of Research and Geographic Focus

Prospective STAAARS+ teams are invited to develop proposals in the following thematic areas.

1. Inclusive agricultural and rural transformation to raise rural household incomes (including small farmers), and to create more decent jobs particularly for young women and men;
2. Development of healthy food systems, including regulatory issues and private sector engagement, in ways that address food safety and the triple burden of malnutrition; and
3. Enhanced resilience at individual, household, national and regional levels (to climate, conflict, and other sources of shocks) to achieve economic and environmental sustainability.

STAAARS+ teams' rigorous policy analysis should use existing, high quality data, such as the [Living Standards Measurement Study - Integrated Surveys on Agriculture \(LSMS-ISA\)](#), [Demographic and Health Surveys](#), or similar datasets. High quality data sets collected locally, by an applicant's institution or other research organizations in Africa or Asia, can be proposed and will be considered based on a case-by-case assessment of data quality. Mixed methods research projects are welcome. No funding is available for new data collection nor software purchase. Teams are welcome to approach researchers within the [USAID Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Food Security Policy Research, Capacity, and Influence \(PRCI\)](#) network for guidance on the suitability of a topic and research design for STAAARS+ support.

Program Structure

The STAAARS+ program spans 18 months from the release of the RFP to the delivery of final outputs by the STAAARS+ teams. Selected STAAARS+ teams are matched with one or two faculty or senior research

staff mentor(s) who share an interest in the proposed topic and is willing to be available extensively for the duration of the fellowship period. Mentorship and collaboration begin immediately with a series of launch workshops involving the fellows, mentors and STAAARS+ leadership occurring during the first six weeks of the fellowship period. A period of regular remote collaboration follows, with weekly or biweekly virtual meetings. During this period, training workshops are held at relevant points in the teams' research process. Approximately 9 months from the release of the RFP, the STAAARS+ teams spend 4-weeks visiting a US-based host institution (Cornell, MSU or IFPRI) at which the STAAARS+ team works intensively on the research project while participating in network-building and capacity development activities customized to their self-identified specific needs as a team. Capacity development activities may include, but are not limited to: coding and data management skills; reproducible research processes; technical writing; presentation skills; time management; grant writing; navigating peer review; and policy engagement planning.

Eligibility

This call is open for teams of 2-3 early career African or Asian researchers currently working for eligible policy research institutions based in sub-Saharan Africa or Asia. Team members must be actively engaged in research, as manifest in published work within the past four years, and hold an M.S. or Ph.D., or equivalent degree – with a strong preference for teams containing Ph.D.-holders – in agricultural economics, economics, geography, sociology, statistics, or a related field. Team members with PhDs should have completed their PhD no more than five years prior to the application deadline, although in exceptional cases a team of three could include one member whose PhD was awarded no more than ten years prior. Priority is given to proposals from PRCI-affiliated institutions¹, but teams from other research institutions based in sub-Saharan Africa or low- and middle-income countries of South Asia and Southeast Asia will be considered. Teams from government-affiliated universities or research institutions in Myanmar or Cambodia are ineligible. Qualified female researchers are particularly encouraged to apply and topics with an explicit gender dimension are of particular interest. For guidance, we recommend reviewing [training materials on integrating gender into policy research and outreach](#).

¹ These include all members of ReNAPRI – the Regional Network of Agricultural Policy Research Institutes – all centers selected under PRCI as Centers for Policy Leadership. Current members of ReNAPRI are Institut de Recherches Economiques et Sociales (IRES), Universite de Kinshasha, DRC; Institute for Statistical, Social, and Economic Research (ISSER), University of Ghana; Tegemeo Institute of Agricultural Policy and Development, Kenya; Lilongwe University of Agriculture & Natural Resources (LUANAR), Malawi; Research Center for Agriculture Policy and Agri-systems (CEPPAG), Eduardo Mondlane University, Mozambique; Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy (BFAP), University of Stellenbosch, South Africa; School of Agriculture Economics and Business Studies (SAEBS), Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA), Tanzania; Department of Agribusiness and Natural Resource Economics, Makerere University, Uganda; Indaba Agricultural Policy Research Institute (IAPRI), Zambia; and Department of Agricultural Economics & Extension, University of Zimbabwe. Centers for Policy Leadership are the Center for Petroleum, Energy Economics and Law and the Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development (CPEEL-DAERD), University of Ibadan, Nigeria; Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC), Uganda; and Bureau d'Analyses Macro-économiques (BAME) de l'Institut Sénégalais de Recherches Agricoles (ISRA-BAME), Senegal; Economic Research Institute for Industry and Trade (ERIIT), Laos; Institute for Integrated Development Studies (IIDS), Nepal; Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), Sri Lanka; Kasetsart University department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, Bangkok; Research and Information System For Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi).

Successful applicants' sending institutions are required to support STAAARS+ team members in their STAAARS+ work. Sending institutions must provide all STAAARS+ team members with adequate funded time to carry out their research during the remote program periods as well as during travel periods to conferences, workshops, and the mentor's institution in the United States (US).

All travel is contingent on safety with respect to public health risks at the time of travel. Team members must be fully released from other obligations for travel during the 4-week intensive collaboration visit and a 1-week policy conference during the fellowship period. Institutions will be given a budget to cover travel expenses for two team members to attend the 4-week intensive collaboration visit to Cornell, IFPRI or MSU. Travel support from the team members' local host institution must include facilitating and financing (with PRCI support) visa application, airfare, per diems and accommodation at the U.S. institution, as well as to the 1-week ReNAPRI policy conference held during the fellowship period. Teams will be required to submit a letter of support from their institution as part of their application.

Application Process

We will hold an informational webinar on July 20th at 7AM ET. Please register [here](#). Please send any questions in advance of the event to Jim Monahan (monaha42@msu.edu). For those unable to attend, the materials will be available [here](#) after the webinar has taken place.

The STAAARS+ fellowship application process is managed by Cornell University. A team of 2 or 3 researchers from one or more eligible policy research institution(s) submits one application. Applicants must prepare a concept proposal (maximum 2500 words), which motivates the selected research issue(s) and objectives, outlines data sources and proposed analytical methodology. The team must document it has access to the data proposed for analysis and is free to produce publishable research using those data. The proposal must also contain a feasible and detailed division of labor, explicitly outlining the roles and responsibilities of each team member and a timeline for completing a rigorous paper ready for submission to a peer-reviewed international journal, as well as policy engagement materials based on the research, within the 18-month fellowship period. All proposals must be submitted in English. All proposals will be peer reviewed by experts from Cornell, MSU and/or IFPRI. Finalists will be expected to demonstrate adequate competence within the team in statistical analysis software (Stata or R) prior to final selection, established via a structured assessment.

The deadline to submit a concept proposal is August 15, 2021 at 11:59 PM New York time. Applicants should submit their completed proposal via email to STAAARS_plus@cornell.edu. Accepted applicants will be notified no later than October 1, 2021 and are expected to begin remote collaboration with their mentor and be prepared to join launch activities immediately upon acceptance.

Proposal Template

1. Completed 2021 STAAARS+ Fellowship Applicant Biodata Information Form
2. Title page (not included in the 2500 word limit):
 - Title of the proposed research

- Targeted country (countries)
 - Host policy research institution(s)
3. Concept Proposal (2500 word limit):
 - Introduction and motivation that includes clear statement of research objectives, policy relevance, and testable hypotheses
 - Description of data source(s), documentation of access to the data for publishable research, and any prior experience working with the proposed data
 - Proposed empirical analysis methodology(ies)
 - If applicable, summarize any preliminary results
 - Proposed division of labor among team members
 - Proposed timeline
 4. Bibliographic references (not included in the 2500 word limit)
 5. CVs of each individual team member (not included in the 2500 word limit)
 6. Letter of support from each team member's home policy research institution(s), explicitly committing to provide team members with adequate paid time to undertake the research and to cover travel costs associated with the fellowship (see above).