



Food Systems Research Network for Africa (FSNet–Africa)

Call for Mentor Expression of Interest

The Food Systems Research Network for Africa (FSNet–Africa) is pleased to announce a call for expressions of interest to participate as a mentor in the FSNet–Africa Fellowship Programme. Mentors will support early career researchers in a two–year research fellowship (July 2021 to June 2023) to conduct impact focused interdisciplinary research related to African food systems.

There are three formal components to the fellowships: science, leadership development and mentorship. Each fellow will be assigned at least two mentors – one each from an African university and the UK. These research–triads will be carefully matched to ensure that the triad is an interdisciplinary team, enabling the fellows to receive the support they need to develop and implement quality interdisciplinary research projects. The mentorship component will create opportunities for fellows and mentors to build meaningful relationships with researchers outside of their own organisation and from diverse geographic areas that can lead to longer term collaborations.

This Call for Expression of Interest is extended to mid–career and senior researchers at FSNet–Africa partner institutions (see Section 1 for list of partners) working in any food system related field (see Section 4) who are interested in joining the fellowship programme as a mentor.

APPLICATIONS OPEN:	1 February 2021
APPLICATIONS CLOSE:	1 March 2021 at midnight South African Standard Time
NOTIFICATIONS TO SELECTED MENTORS:	31 May 2021

1. About FSNet–Africa

FSNet–Africa is a collaborative initiative between the University of Pretoria (UP), the University of Leeds (UK), and the Food, Agriculture, and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN). It is a research excellence project funded by the Global Challenges Research Fund through the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) – United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI) partnership.

The overarching goal of FSNet–Africa is to strengthen food systems research and the translation of evidence into interventions using systems analytical research designed and implemented in partnership with a diverse set of food systems stakeholders. FSNet–Africa has six key objectives:

1. Collaboratively create context–relevant, solution–focused, high–quality, interdisciplinary research related to African food systems focusing on countries aligned to the partners’ current GCRF and ARUA projects in Ghana, Kenya, South Africa (SA), Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia (the six focus countries).
2. Create structured opportunities for up to 30 Early Career Research Fellows (ECRF) who obtained their PhD within the last 10 years (majority female) in the focus countries to conduct impact–focused



interdisciplinary research, build lasting research networks and develop their skills to design and implement gender-sensitive research with non-academic stakeholders.

3. Set up carefully matched, formal mentorship relationships between ECRF and established scientists in the UK and Africa to form interdisciplinary research-triads to create long-term collaborations.
4. Leverage existing networks to fully engage diverse food system stakeholders in the research process – as a mechanism to ensure context-relevance, facilitate impact and enhance scalability.
5. Establish a network for long-term collaborations that functions beyond the grant period by realising new opportunities for research, training, and policy advocacy collaborations.
6. Contribute to the strengthening of institutional networks, research capacity and policy impact at ARUA universities and less-research intensive universities in the six focus countries.

Our approach to achieving these objectives is primarily through creating two-year long structured research fellowships for ECRF at our ten partner institutions: University of Ghana and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) (Ghana), University of Zambia (Zambia), University of Dar es Salaam and Sokoine University of Agriculture (Tanzania), Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR) and Malawi University of Science and Technology (MUST) (Malawi), University of Nairobi (Kenya), University of Pretoria and University of the Western Cape (South Africa).

A more detailed description of FSNet–Africa can be found [here](#).

2. About our fellowships

The FSNet–Africa fellowship is a structured two-year programme, **starting in July 2021 and ending in June 2023**. Two Early Career Research Fellows will be selected from each academic partner institution through a competitive call process.

Each fellow will be carefully matched with two mentors – one from the UK and one from an African institution. These collaborations will be called research triads. Through the matching of fellows and mentors, interdisciplinary research teams who will work together on a research project related to the African food system will be created. Triads will also be linked to researchers at UP to help strengthen their research networks.

The research triads will be supported by FSNet–Africa over the two-year fellowship to design, implement and communicate their research. Through FANRPAN's network of [in-country nodes](#), where relevant, triads will be linked to stakeholders in the food system who can support the design and implementation of their research.

Fellows will remain in their home institutions for the fellowship, but spend time with mentors and food systems stakeholders at fellowship events. FSNet–Africa will cover the costs of mentor participation in all fellowship events. This includes accommodation at all events, meals and/or meal stipends at all events, and economy class flight tickets to participate in all events. FSNet–Africa does not cover salary costs for fellows or mentors. Fellows and mentors need to be EITHER permanent staff at the partner institution or have a contract in place until at least December 2023.

The planned fellowship events are listed below.



- **July 2021: An Orientation Workshop** for 10–days at the University of Pretoria’s Future Africa campus planned for July 2021. After the orientation, fellows spend time at their home institutions developing their research proposals.
- **December 2021/January 2022:** Fellows will participate in the four–week **Summer School at the University of Pretoria**. Fellows will be in residence at UP Future Africa for the four–week Summer School, while mentors will spend a week on site. They will receive training on, inter alia, proposal writing, data management, monitoring and evaluation and research ethics for interdisciplinary projects. Once their proposals are completed, and ethical clearance has been obtained, fellows begin the implementation of their research.
- **June 2022/July 2022:** Fellows will spend four weeks at the University of Leeds Summer School, where they will participate in training on aspects such as interdisciplinary research, policy advocacy, and academic leadership. Mentors will spend two weeks at the University of Leeds to give them an opportunity to work with their fellows, but also to network with academics at the University of Leeds.
- **December 2022: A seven–day Research Leadership and Communication for Impact Workshop** hosted at the UP Future Africa Campus will focus on research leadership and science–to–impact communication. Communication for impact will include training on science–policy communication and writing for non–scientific or popular scientific audiences. Fellows and mentors will attend.
- **June/July 2023:** After completing their research, fellows will be expected to share their work with a wide stakeholder audience at the **Stakeholder Engagement Dialogue** which will be a high–level event including participants from across sectors in the six focus countries. Mentors will attend with their fellows.
- **June/July 2023:** A five–day **Write–Shop** hosted at UP Future Africa Campus where through the support of academic writing and science communication professionals, fellows and their mentors will work together to translate their research into publishable products.

Fellows will be expected to develop their research project proposals and implement their research in the two–year fellowship period, building on the support received at the fellowship events in collaboration with their mentors. Research projects will focus on African food systems. Funding to implement their research projects will be provided by FSNet–Africa to the fellows’ home institution up to the value of £20 000.

Fellows, with relevant support from their mentors, will be expected to produce at minimum the following outputs before December 2023:

- one peer–reviewed publication
- one policy brief
- one science communication publication

3. Roles and responsibilities of mentors

Mentors are expected to commit to the two–year programme, participate in fellowship activities and provide the relevant support to fellows to complete the deliverables listed above.



Mentors are expected to support fellows in completing a research project related to African food systems and aligned to the FSNet–Africa research framework. They are also expected to contribute to academic publications and other scientific outputs during the project (including special edition journals, academic synthesis reports, blogs etc.), as well as the project monitoring and evaluation activities.

The specific roles and responsibilities of mentors are noted below.

1. Participation in Fellowship events. Mentors will be expected to participate in the fellowship events noted in Section 2.
2. Research support. Mentors will be expected to support fellows in the development of their research project proposals and offer fellows guidance in the two–year fellowship period to ensure the successful completion of the project. Mentors will also be expected to support fellows in obtaining ethical clearance for the research projects, developing a project data management plan, as well as a project monitoring and an evaluation plan.

Research support will include regular meetings among the research triads, as well as guidance and feedback on research processes and products.

3. Research outputs. Mentors will actively participate in and support the development of outputs required by the fellows. Mentors will be expected to contribute to, at minimum, the following outputs: one peer–reviewed publication where they feature as a co–author, one policy brief where they feature as a co–author, and one science communication publication where they feature as a co–author.
4. Networking. Mentors are expected to help their fellows build research networks through connecting them to opportunities for networking and collaboration within their broader professional network. Fellows and mentors are also expected to work towards longer term joint research collaborations.
5. Career development support. Although not a primary role, mentors will serve as a sounding board for fellows, providing professional guidance and support to help fellows plan for a future research career.
6. Participation in FSNet–Africa monitoring and evaluation. Mentors will be expected to participate in the FSNet–Africa project–level monitoring and evaluation activities.

4. Research focus

The research conducted under the fellowships will focus on African food systems. The transformation of Africa’s food systems plays several direct roles in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – achieving food security and alleviating malnutrition (SDG2), contributing to public health (SDG3), and providing opportunities to eliminate poverty (SDG1). The challenge is complicated by the interrelationship between agriculture and SDGs that relate to environmental sustainability (SDG13 – Climate Change; SDG 15 – Life on Land). As agriculture both contributes to, and is affected by, climate change, there is a pressing need for innovation in climate–smart agriculture that considers the environment an integral component within food systems.



However, access to nutritious, safe food and improved livelihoods does not solely depend on boosting agricultural productivity. The concerted and coordinated actions of the food industry (agriculture, production and processing, retail, food service sector and waste disposal) and consumers are crucial to promote sustainable consumption and production (SDG12) which focuses on reducing all forms of food losses throughout the entire supply chain (a critical outcome to achieve food security). The transformation of food systems also contributes to the achievement of gender equality (SDG5). Women comprise a large proportion of the agricultural labour force, and 80% of food eaten in Africa passes through the hands of women. Yet their contribution to food security is not fully realised and the ways they benefit from food systems activities remains unequal and under-researched. This connected circularity requires transformative food systems solutions.

Food systems encompass the activities and actors involved in all aspects of production, distribution, consumption, and disposal of food. A food systems research approach recognises the importance of interactions and relationships between activities/actors and thus the importance of interdisciplinary approaches for achieving transformative change.

There are significant challenges in implementing large-scale research on complex food systems in Africa that have hindered its prevalence. A critical challenge is the limited contextual and comprehensive conceptualisation of the African food system and how it compares to other systems globally. African food systems, while comprising many similar activities/actors to other models, also have activities, actors and conditions that are context specific. FSNet-Africa has taken initial steps to develop a regionally-focused conceptualisation of food systems (see comparative illustration below) to begin identifying pertinent/pressing research gaps and potential leverage points for transformative change, particularly in relation to the crucial current food system failures prevalent across Africa – efficiency, safety, reliability/resilience, inclusiveness, affordability, and nutrition.

Figure 1 : Food Systems Map (Source: Nourish Initiative)

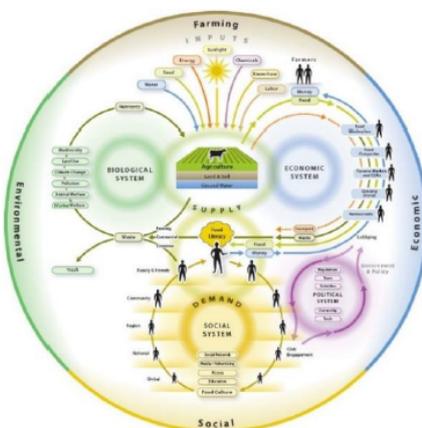
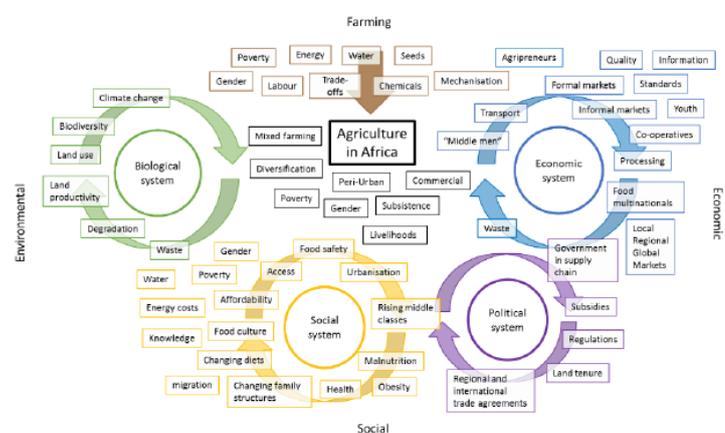


Figure 2 : African Food Systems





The conceptualisation recognises that gender and poverty are cross-cutting issues, influencing not only labour, inputs, and the types of farming systems (supply side), but also diets and food cultures (demand side). It recognises formal and informal supply chains through which food moves from farm to consumer and the different actors and regulations that govern those chains (and the interactions between them). It recognises key emerging actors within the food systems, such as “agripreneurs” setting up businesses in the agri-sector, and critical drivers of change (e.g. urbanisation and the growing African middle class).

Understanding African food systems and developing evidence-based interventions to address gaps and systems failures is fundamental to achieving four critical food systems outcomes – nutritious food (safe and high-quality); equitable inclusive systems (social aspects e.g. gender); sustainable environmental approaches and efficient systems (economic considerations e.g. poverty reduction).

Mentors who meet the eligibility criteria below with research experience related to any aspect of the food system are invited to submit an expression of interest.

5. Eligibility criteria

Mentors must meet the following criteria to apply for the fellowship:

1. Research focus and/or research interests aligned broadly to one or more aspect of African food systems.
2. Must be EITHER a permanent employee of a participating institution OR must have an employment contract at a participating institution in place until AT LEAST December 2023.
3. Hold a PhD with at least ten years post-PhD experience or hold title of full professor.
4. Previous experience as a mentor is ideal. Interested mentors without previous mentorship experience may apply and provide details about their approach to PhD or postdoctoral fellowship supervision.

6. How to submit your expression of interest

STEP 1: Prepare your expression of interest

Complete the expression of interest form provided in Appendix B. [Click here](#) for a Word version. You will also need to provide an updated CV (maximum 6 pages).

STEP 2: Obtain in principle approval from your line manager

You need to get endorsement from your line manager to indicate that, should you be appointed as a mentor, you will be supported to participate fully in the programme. The endorsement should come from a person in your reporting line at the Director, Head of Department or Dean level.

STEP 3: Submit your expression of interest ONLINE by no later than midnight South African Standard Time on 1 March 2021.



Once you have completed your expression of interest form, and have all the relevant attachments ready, you can submit your application online.

In addition to your expression of interest form, you will need the following attachments:

- Endorsement from your line head
- Updated CV (maximum 6 pages)

Expressions of interest can be submitted at <https://universityofpretoria.glasscubes.com/form/2afc15ed-882b-4ba1-90f7-2cd5286d8f97>

7. Selection process

Online expressions of interest to be a mentor are submitted directly to FSNet-Africa, who do an initial screening to ensure eligibility of potential mentors.

Participating institutions may endorse a total of SIX fellow applications for shortlisting, of which at least THREE must be female applicants. If fewer than six applications are endorsed, at least 50% of the applications should be female.

Once applications for fellows have been endorsed by the institution, an initial matching of fellows and mentors will be done by FSNet-Africa. This will be done in a manner that ensures a fellow is matched to mentors who have similar research interests, but who come from diverse disciplinary backgrounds to ensure the research triads are multidisciplinary teams.

Shortlisted fellow applications will undergo external peer-review. Recommendations from the peer-review process will be sent to the FSNet-Africa Selection Panel. The Selection Panel will consider the application forms, as well as the reviewer feedback and identify a maximum of THREE candidates per institution to participate in the interview phase. Interviews will take place between 10 and 21 May 2021 and will be conducted online by the Selection Panel.

After the interviews, a final matching between fellows and mentors will be done. The final selection of research triads will be announced by 31 May 2021.

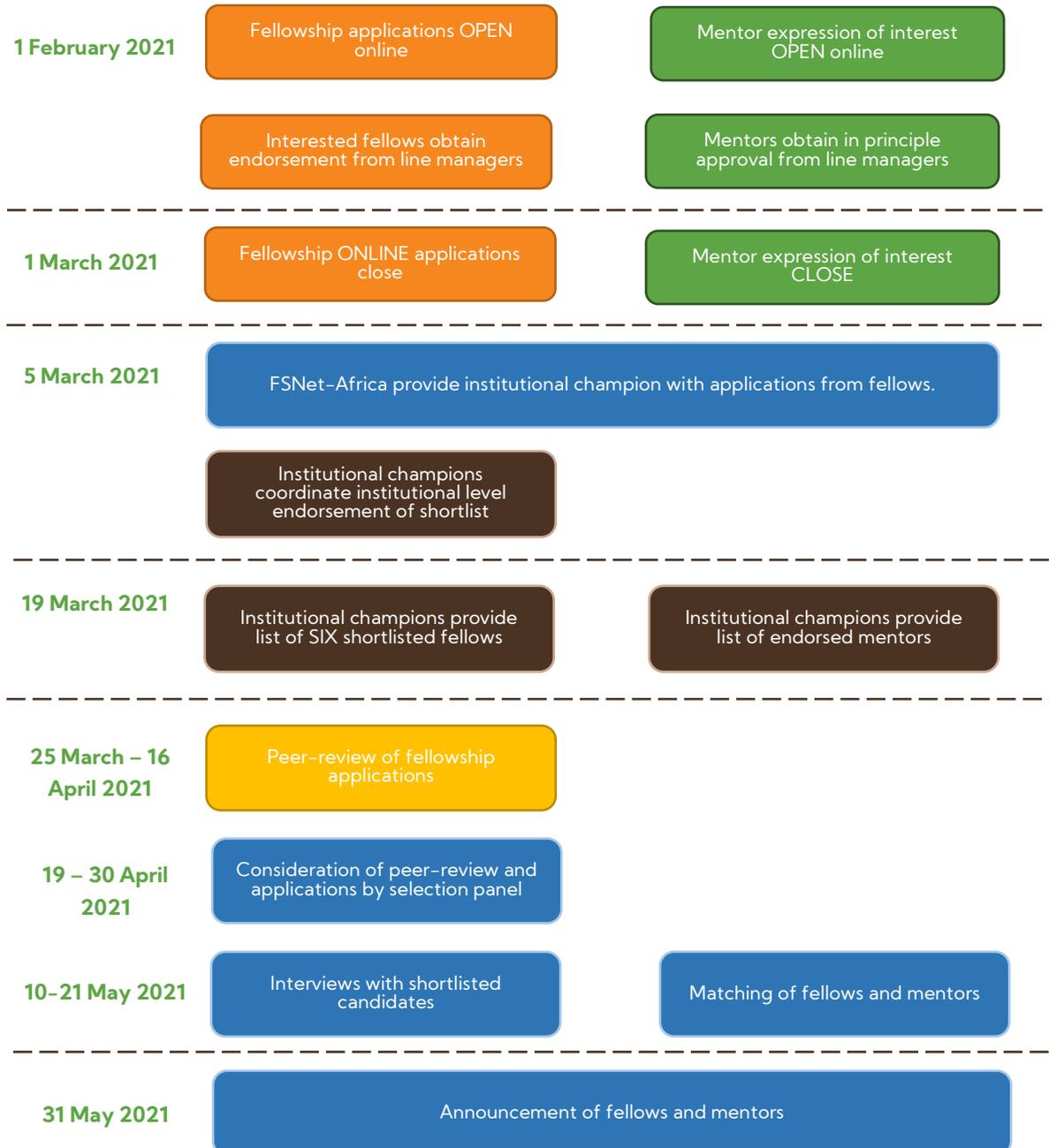
A visual summary of the selection process and timeline is available in Appendix A.

8. Contact information

For more information on the Expression of Interest process, please contact the FSNet-Africa Network and Research Manager, Dr Elizabeth Mkandawire via email at fsnetafrika@up.ac.za.



Appendix A: Summary of process and timelines





Appendix B

Note: the form below provides details of what is contained in the FSNet-Africa mentor expression of interest form. You can access a word version of this document [here](#).

Once you have a draft ready, including all attachments, you must submit your expression of interest online at <https://universityofpretoria.glasscubes.com/form/6e98acd0-6d0f-4502-b135-2eb1a202ee70>

About you

1. Your full name and surname
2. Your email address
3. Your institution
4. Indicate your gender.

Male

Female

Other

Prefer not to say

5. Select the option most applicable to you

I am permanently employed at my institution

I am employed on contract until at least December 2023

About your research interests and experience

6. In 250 words or less, describe your current research or research interests.
7. Have you previously worked on an inter-, trans- or multidisciplinary research project?
 Yes
 No
8. If you have worked in this modality before, give a brief description of the project and how inter-, trans-, or multidisciplinary elements were integrated. If you have not worked in this modality before, tell us about why you are interested in doing so (maximum 250 words).



Your mentorship experience and philosophy

9. Describe your previous mentorship experience. If you do not have previous mentorship experience, describe your experience in supervising PhD candidates and/or postdoctoral research fellows (maximum 250 words).
10. In 500 words or less, describe why you are interested in being a FSNet-Africa mentor, and what your mentorship philosophy is.
11. Were you requested by an applicant to submit an expression of interest?
- Yes
- No
12. If yes, please provide the applicant's full name
13. When you submit your expression of interest online, you will be asked to upload your CV (a maximum of 6 pages). Please ensure that you have this documentation ready before starting to submit your application online.
14. When you submit your expression of interest online, you will be asked to upload a letter of endorsement from your line manager. Please ensure that you have this documentation ready before starting to submit your application online.
15. Before you submit your application, kindly confirm below that you agree to the conditions of the fellowship as stated in the call document and that you agree to commit to and participate fully in the fellowship events.
- I agree
- I do not agree