**Calls for Concept Proposals for the Structural Transformation of African Agriculture and Rural Spaces (STAARS) project.**

**Background**

The Partnership for Economic Policy (PEP) is calling for concept proposals for the Structural Transformation of African Agriculture and Rural Spaces (STAARS) fellowship, supported by the International Center for International Development (IDRC) of Canada. The STAARS project is a collaboration with Cornell University, the African Development Bank, the African Economic Research Consortium, and the World Bank. PEP has established a collaboration agreement with Cornell University to provide technical mentorship and support for selected early-career African researchers.

The STAARS project, as conceptualized and developed by these initial members of the consortium, builds on the World Bank “Myths and Facts in African Agriculture” project to pursue in-depth, 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. In recognition of PEP’s role in promoting high quality research and capacity building, PEP received an initial seed grant from IDRC to build a set of activities under the STAARS initiative. Cornell University is identified as the technical lead and global center of excellence in building and strengthening the initiative in collaboration with PEP. Other invited collaborators also continue to contribute to the development of the full initiative with funding support from AfDB and other sources.

Through this competitive call for proposals PEP aims to provide competitive grants for travel and training for bright early career African researchers, in collaboration with Cornell University and in close coordination with AfDB, AERC and World Bank. Selected 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 sub-Saharan Africa. PEP will support the publication of resulting research findings in high quality journals and as working papers. In addition, PEP will facilitate fellows’ participation in scientific and policy conferences.

**Scope of Research and Geographic Focus**

Prospective STAARS fellows are invited to develop proposals in the following thematic areas.

1. Employment and income sources, key determinants of household income diversification within the agricultural sector and interlinked non-farm sectors in rural areas in sub-Saharan Africa.
2. Employment intensity, patterns of labor productivity and family labor time allocation (men, women, and children) across farm and non-farm activities in rural areas and how these affect competitiveness of agricultural employment in sub-Saharan Africa.
3. Seasonal labor market imperfections and rigidities, including wages, that affect employment in rural areas, the key determinants of out-migration of labor from rural areas, with special emphasis on youth, and opportunities for productive employment in the farm and non-farm sector in sub-Saharan Africa.
4. Promising policy interventions to foster decent employment, income diversification and poverty reduction in sub-Saharan Africa.
5. Financial inclusion for small-scale producers and women, and resilience of livelihoods against shocks in sub-Saharan Africa.
6. Rural factor market performance for agricultural transformation in sub-Saharan Africa.

STAARS fellows’ rigorous policy analysis should use existing panel data, such as the Living Standards Measurement Study - Integrated Surveys on Agriculture (LSMS-ISA) or similar datasets. LSMS-ISA panel datasets are available for a number of countries in Africa including Nigeria, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Malawi and Uganda.

**Eligibility**

The call is open for early career African researchers, either late stage Ph.D. students or those who have completed their Ph.D. in 2011 or later. Researchers must be based and working in Africa, with priority given to proposals relating to the research themes indicated above. Qualified female researchers are particularly encouraged to apply. While a Ph.D. is not mandatory, STAARS encourages fresh Ph.D. graduates who can benefit from a mentorship and additional training to become solid researchers. Fellows are expected to complete the proposed project by publishing findings in a PEP working paper and submitting to a peer-reviewed journal by December 31, 2016.

The selected applicants will receive a small grant (US$ 5000) and additional funds to cover travel and participation in a mentorship program at Cornell University and present research results (if accepted) in selected scientific and policy conferences.

**Application Process**

The STAARS fellows project application process for this call is managed by the Partnership for Economic Policy (PEP) in collaboration with Cornell University. Applicants are required to prepare a maximum 2500 word (5 page) concept proposal, which motivates the selected research issues and objectives, outlines data sources, proposed methodology and contains a convincing plan for completing the project by publishing findings before December 31, 2016. All proposals shall be prepared in English. All concept proposals will be peer reviewed by experts from PEP and Cornell University.

**The deadline to submit a concept proposal is April 30, 2016.** Applicants should submit their completed proposal via email to [staars@cornell.edu](mailto:staars@cornell.edu).

**Not covered under this call**

The proposed research and capacity development is expected to be undertaken as part of an ongoing effort and STAARS will not cover the full time allocation to this research. The call will not also require any budget and will not cover costs for any new data collection. Researchers are expected to be familiar with existing panel data and having a strong working knowledge of Stata and interest in econometric analysis of large panel data.

**Template for preparation of concept proposal**

* Name and affiliation of the applicant
* Targeted country (countries)
* Title of the proposed research
* Introduction and motivation that includes clear statement of research objectives and hypotheses.
* Description of data sources
* Proposed methodology
* If applicable, summarize any preliminary results.
* Proposed timeline for the research.
* Bibliographic references (not included in the 2500 words)
* CV of the applicant (not included in the 2500 words)