



ARUA
African Research
Universities Alliance

ARUA QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

ARUA QUARTERLY

Insights. Updates. Impact.

ISSUE 1 (QUARTER 1)
(January – March 2026)



DR. ADETOUN AKITOYE (CHERES)

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ARUA
African Research
Universities Alliance

**EARLY CAREER RESEARCHER
FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM**

Building
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VISION

To strengthen African universities through effective capacity building that comes from working together with a view to increasing significantly their research output.



MISSION

To make African researchers and institutions globally competitive while contributing to the generation of knowledge for socio-economic transformation in Africa.

THE ARUA SECRETARIAT



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MESSAGE FROM THE ARUA SECRETARY-GENERAL

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the inaugural issue of the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) Quarterly Newsletter. This publication is born out of a clear and timely need to create a consistent, accessible, and authoritative platform through which ARUA can amplify the visibility of African research excellence, deepen collaboration, and share knowledge that shapes Africa's development trajectory and global scholarship.

ARUA was established to strengthen research capacity across Africa by fostering world-class research, training the next generation of scholars, and promoting collaboration among leading African universities and their global partners. As our network continues to grow in scale, scope, and impact, so does the need for a shared space to tell our stories, showcase our achievements, and connect our diverse research communities. This newsletter responds directly to that need.

The ARUA Quarterly Newsletter will highlight cutting-edge research emerging from our member universities, feature the work of our thematic Centres of Excellence, and share updates on collaborative initiatives, policy engagements, and partnerships. It will also provide visibility to early-career researchers, doctoral training programmes, and cross-institutional projects that exemplify the power of collective effort within Africa's research ecosystem.

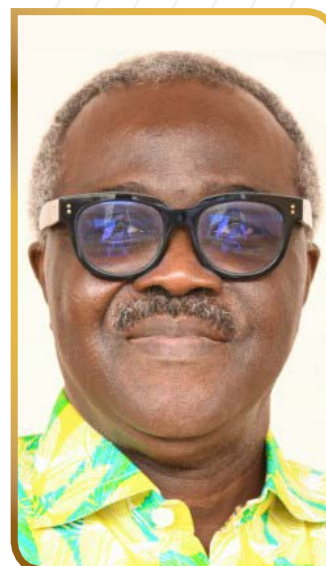
Importantly, this newsletter is a free and open platform. I warmly invite ARUA member universities, research centres, partners, and individual researchers to actively leverage it to share news, insights, opportunities, and success stories. By doing so, you not only increase the visibility of your work but also contribute to a stronger, more connected African research community.

As we launch this inaugural issue, I encourage you to read, share, and engage with the content, and consider the newsletter as your platform. Together, let us use it to strengthen collaboration, inspire excellence, and advance ARUA's mission of positioning African research universities as key drivers of knowledge, innovation, and societal transformation.

Thank you for being part of this journey with ARUA.

Professor John Gyapong

Secretary-General, ARUA



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As our network expands in scale, scope, and impact, the need for a shared space to tell our stories, highlight achievements, and connect diverse research communities cannot be over emphasized

EDITORIAL

This inaugural issue of *ARUA Quarterly* brings together four interconnected strands of work that demonstrate how ARUA is building research capacity, generating evidence, and translating knowledge into impact across the continent.

The feature story showcases the ARUA Early Career Researchers Fellowship Programme as a flagship capacity-strengthening initiative. The fellowship provides early-career researchers with six months of protected time for research, mentorship, and skills enhancement within ARUA's Centres of Excellence and Clusters of Research Excellence. With an ambitious goal of supporting 150 fellows over four years—70% women—the programme has successfully launched its first cohort and convened a regional workshop that built competencies in proposal development, research translation, intellectual property, publishing, and career planning. It underscores how the programme is nurturing a new generation of research leaders aligned with Agenda 2063.

In Section 2, we showcase ARUA's Capacity and Skills Development Initiatives. The U21 Mid-Career Researcher Programme focuses on leadership development, global networking, and strategic career advancement for mid-career academics. The Europe-Africa Fellowship on Translational Research for Priority Diseases strengthens Africa-Europe collaboration on Mpox and Lassa fever, deepening translational research skills, regulatory engagement, and contributions to health sovereignty. Together, these initiatives demonstrate ARUA's commitment to excellence, collaboration, and impactful leadership across career stages.

Section 3 highlights ARUA in the marketplace—disseminating research at conferences, engaging in policy dialogues, and forging strategic partnerships. From early-career researchers presenting at international conferences to ARUA's participation in Africa's vaccine sovereignty agenda through ACHIEVE Africa, and exploratory partnerships with the DAAD and the Inter- and Transdisciplinary Alliance, this section demonstrates ARUA's active role in translating research into influence and building alliances that matter.

Section 4 illustrates how ARUA's vision is operationalised through its 13 Centres of Excellence and 22 Clusters of Research Excellence, with a spotlight on the Centre of Excellence in Sustainable Food Systems (ARUA-SFS). It highlights ARUA-SFS's hub-and-spoke partnerships, integrated impact areas, and flagship collaborations—FSNet-Africa, CaBFoodS-Africa, and CoRE-SFS. The profile of Dr. Ruth Lorivi Moirana, one of the ARUA Early Career Researchers hosted at the centre, demonstrates how these structures create opportunities for emerging scholars and deliver solutions for sustainable food systems.

On the ARUA Noticeboard, we bring to your attention upcoming opportunities and events that offer pathways for further engagement across the ARUA network.

We invite you to engage with this inaugural issue for insights, inspiration, and opportunities—and to join us in shaping future editions by sharing your own stories, achievements, and ideas from across the ARUA network.

Professor Jane Ambuko

Director of Training and Research, ARUA



“
This issue showcases how strategic investments in African research talent and partnerships are delivering measurable impact—strengthening talent, advancing solutions, and shaping the continent's future”

SECTION 1: FEATURE STORY

In partnership with



ARUA EARLY CAREER RESEARCHERS FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME

“Strengthening the next generation of African research leaders through dedicated time, mentorship, and continental networks.”



In each application cycle, ECRs select the CoE or CoRE that best aligns with their research focus. CoE Directors and CoRE Leads then assign suitable mentors who guide the fellows’ activities over the six-month period.

ARUA ECR Fellowship at a glance

- Duration – 6 months
- Period – 2025 to 2029
- 150 fellows (70% women) – 4 cohorts
- 13 CoEs, 21 CoREs
- Funders – Mastercard Foundation and Carnegie Corporation in New York

Background and Purpose

The ARUA Early-Career Research Fellowship Programme is a capacity-strengthening initiative that seeks to enhance the capabilities of early-career researchers (ECRs) at African universities. The fellowship enables ECRs to spend six months away from routine teaching responsibilities so they can focus on collaborative research, skills enhancement, and scholarly productivity. During the fellowship period, fellows work under the mentorship of highly experienced and distinguished researchers at ARUA’s thirteen (13) Centres of Excellence (CoEs) (<https://arua.org/centres-of-excellence/>) and twenty-one (22) Clusters of Research Excellence (CoREs) (<https://arua.org/africa-europe-core/>).[^] The overarching goal is to strengthen the capacity of Africa’s next generation of research leaders to produce high-impact, policy-relevant, and innovation-driven research aligned with continental development priorities as envisioned under the African Union’s Agenda 2063. The fellowship is aligned with ARUA’s vision of enhancing the global competitiveness of African researchers and institutions while contributing to knowledge generation that drives socio-economic transformation in Africa.

The programme is supported by the Mastercard Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY). It builds on the experience gained from an earlier ARUA ECR fellowship programme that was supported by CCNY. New funding from the Mastercard Foundation has enabled the expansion of the ARUA ECR Fellowship to support 150 fellows over four years (2025–2029). Each year, a total of 35–40 fellows under 35 years of age (70% women) will be competitively recruited, mainly from ARUA member universities. This programme supports the Mastercard Foundation’s Young Africa Works Strategy (<https://mastercardfdn.org/en/the-young-africa-works-strategy/>), whose goal is to create dignified and fulfilling employment for 30 million young people, particularly women, by 2030.

Progress in Recruitment and Placement

The ongoing Mastercard Foundation ECR Fellowship Programme, launched in 2025, attracted more than 200 applicants from across Africa. A total of 40 ECRs were selected to undertake their fellowship activities at ARUA Centres of Excellence. The first cohort comprises 32 ECRs (25 female and 11 male) supported by the Mastercard Foundation and 4 ECRs (1 female and 3 male) supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. These fellows have been paired with suitable mentors at CoEs hosted by ARUA member universities.

The call for applications (<https://arua.org/early-career-research-fellowships/>) for the second cohort, which opened on 15 December 2025, provided two application deadlines. The deadline for the first batch of the second cohort was 22 January 2026, and successful candidates are expected to begin their fellowship from 1 April 2026 to 30 September 2026. The deadline for the second batch of the second cohort is 15 July 2026, and successful candidates will undertake their fellowship from 1 October 2026 to 31 March 2027.

On 16 January 2026, the ARUA Secretariat organized an information webinar (<https://arua.org/arua-hosts-maiden-information-webinar-for-early-career-researchers-in-africa/>) to guide potential applicants on the application process and to provide tips on preparing and submitting strong applications. Selection and placement of the first batch of ECRs in the various CoEs and CoREs is ongoing, and the call remains open for the second batch of cohort two (2026/2027).



Strong early-career support is one of the most strategic investments we can make in Africa’s research ecosystem

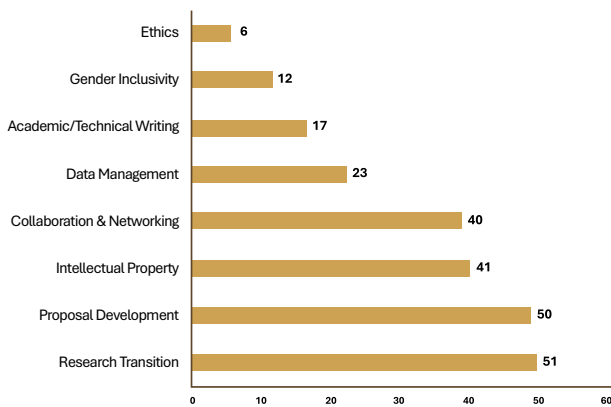
Prof. John Gyapong, ARUA Secretary General

Ongoing mentorship and capacity-strengthening activities

ARUA Early Career Researchers Regional Workshop

The ARUA Early Career Researchers (ECR) Regional Workshop was held from 28–30 January 2026 at the University of Ghana. The workshop is one of the key capacity-strengthening and networking activities organized for ARUA ECRs. It brought together 34 ECRs (2025/2026 cohort) drawn from all ARUA Centres of Excellence across the continent.

Under the theme **“Mentorship and Capacity Strengthening for High Impact Research and Career Growth,”** the workshop created a platform for mentorship, peer learning, collaboration, and network-building to support career development. Over three days, the ECRs engaged in participatory practical sessions that covered a range of topics designed to equip them with both technical and strategic competencies essential for career advancement. The topics were identified and prioritized through a Training Needs Assessment (TNA) survey conducted among ECRs in December 2025. According to the TNA results, proposal development, research translation, intellectual property and research commercialization, publishing and academic writing, networking, and partnership building were the highest priorities for the ECRs.



Top training priorities identified by ECRs

The regional workshop agenda (<https://arua.org/arua-convenes-inaugural-regional-workshop-to-strengthen-capacity-of-early-career-researchers/>) was built around these priority topics, along with additional areas of interest reflected in the ECRs’ general comments. A practical, learner-centred approach was made possible by a diverse team of facilitators, including selected ARUA Centre of Excellence Directors and accomplished researchers from Ghana’s research ecosystem.

A moderated high-level panel discussion titled **“Scaling the Heights in Academia and Research – Lessons for Early Career Researchers”** provided practical insights from accomplished scholars on navigating academic leadership, research excellence, and resilience.



The moderated panel discussion featuring highly accomplished researchers from Ghana.

Strengthening collaboration and research leadership

Given the importance of research funding for ECRs’ career advancement, research proposal development was at the core of the workshop. The ECRs were divided into multidisciplinary teams and assigned to senior researchers (Centre Directors) who guided them in developing concept notes aligned with active calls for research proposals. This practical exercise resulted in five multidisciplinary concept notes addressing pressing socio-economic challenges aligned with continental priorities under Agenda 2063. The teamwork approach helped initiate interdisciplinary collaboration across institutions, which is expected to continue beyond the workshop.

Lateral and vertical linkages among ARUA researchers were strengthened by connecting ECRs and mentors across CoEs. These linkages and networks are expected to mature into long-term research partnerships, joint publications, and competitive grant applications.



One of the Multi-disciplinary teams at work during the practical session on proposal development

Beyond proposal development, another practical session guided each ECR to develop an individual research purpose statement and map their career advancement pathway. Fellows were supported to identify what is required to progress from one career stage to the next and to consider

strategies for different pathways, including purely academic careers, academic and research leadership roles within universities, and careers outside academia.

ECRs who developed compelling and well-thought-out career advancement maps received certificates of recognition during the closing session.

“

The workshop helped me clarify my research purpose, build new collaborations, and see a concrete path for my career growth” – Dr. Cynthia Mwau



Dr. Cynthia Mwau explaining her research purpose and career advancement plan to the assessor/judge – Prof Sunday Adebisi

Emerging impact and next steps

The highlights and key messages from each session are captured in the workshop report. The workshop evaluation report, which shows high ratings for various aspects of the workshop, reflects its positive and significant impact on the ECRs.

The workshop marked an important milestone in ARUA’s commitment to nurturing the next generation of African research leaders capable of driving socio-economic transformation through impactful, policy-relevant, and innovation-oriented research.

“

You represent a new generation of African researchers who are committed not only to advancing knowledge but also to addressing complex challenges on the African continent. Through your attachments to the ARUA CoEs, you are already contributing to agenda-setting research that matters for our societies

Prof Nana Aba Appiah Amfo, the Vice Chancellor, University of Ghana, addressing the ECRs when she officially opened the workshop

SECTION 2: ARUA'S CAPACITY AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

ARUA continues to invest in initiatives that strengthen research capacity, enhance leadership, and deepen skills development across the continent's universities. Through strategic partnerships with global networks and development partners, these programmes create structured opportunities for African researchers to build competencies, expand international collaborations, and translate cutting-edge knowledge into impactful solutions. Together, they reinforce ARUA's commitment to nurturing a strong pipeline of research leaders who can drive Africa's socio-economic transformation. In this issue, we feature two capacity strengthening initiatives for ARUA member Universities

1. ARUA Researchers in the U21 Mid-Career Researcher Programme

Background and Objectives

In its continued efforts to strengthen research capacity, promote excellence, and nurture the next generation of academic leaders, the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) has partnered with Universitas 21 (U21) to support participation in the U21 Mid-Career Researcher (MCR) Programme. The U21 MCR Programme, titled **“Reset, Re-imagine, Reframe”**, is a four-week online leadership and development initiative designed for senior lecturers and associate professors working in increasingly complex, resource-constrained research environments. The programme recognises mid-career researchers as future institutional leaders who often have limited structured opportunities for leadership development, international networking, and strategic career planning.



Mid-career researchers are recognised as future institutional leaders, yet often lack structured leadership development opportunities

Through a blend of higher education and industry insights, and in partnership with Common Purpose, the programme equips participants with the mindset, skills, and confidence to lead creative, resilient, and collaborative research cultures. It focuses on strengthening leadership capacity, enhancing collaboration and influencing skills, building global networks, and supporting purposeful career development.

ARUA Nominees for the 2026 U21 MCR Cohort

For the 2026 cohort (20 February – 19 March 2026), U21 allocated four pilot slots to ARUA. These were awarded to nominees from three ARUA member universities, selected

through the Offices of the Deputy/Pro Vice-Chancellors. The beneficiaries of the pilot programme include:



Dr. Irene K.V. Amponsah,
(University of Cape Coast,
Ghana)



Dr. Elizabeth Babarinde,
(University of Nigeria)



Dr. Custodai Muacamule,
(Eduardo Mondlane
University, Mozambique)

Programme Delivery

Over the four-week period, participants commit approximately 2–5 hours per week, including 1 hour for a live session and 1–4 hours for individual work. Four key thematic focus areas are covered during the programme as presented below:

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
A Lens to View the World – Mindset for Success	A Deeper Dive into Collaboration and Innovation (Part 1)	Perspective Taking and Influencing Beyond a Remit A Deeper Dive into Collaboration and Innovation (Part 2)	Building Consensus and Risk Taking Action Planning for Future Development

Benefits of the Programme

Upon successful completion, fellows receive a digital micro-credential and join a global network of peers across the U21 community, opening pathways for future international collaboration and knowledge exchange. By investing in the leadership development of mid-career researchers, ARUA advances its strategic priorities of excellence, collaboration, and impactful research leadership, and strengthens Africa's contribution to global knowledge production and innovation.

2. Europe–Africa Fellowship Programme on Translational Research for Priority Diseases



Belgium
partner in development



Purpose and Strategic Context

This fellowship forms part of the Belgian Development Cooperation's objective to strengthen equitable South–South and South–North collaborations under the Team Europe Initiative on Manufacturing and Access to Vaccines,

Medicines, and Health Technologies. Implemented with technical support from the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) and funding from Enabel, this fellowship is aimed at the Clusters of Research Excellence formed by ARUA and The Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities and aims to reinforce Africa’s vaccine research ecosystem by embedding fellows in translational environments that bridge laboratory science, product development, and policy.

The fellowship engages participants in a comprehensive suite of research, training, and collaborative activities designed to deepen their expertise in translational research and innovation. Fellows have access to advanced research facilities at host institutions, participate in research groups, and attend specialised workshops on project design, product

development, and intellectual property management. They gain practical experience through active involvement in ongoing research on priority diseases (Lassa fever and Mpox), complemented by stakeholder engagement and exploration of pathways toward clinical trials.

Through structured mentorship and collaboration within the Clusters of Research Excellence, fellows strengthen both their scientific competencies and transferable skills while contributing meaningfully to Africa’s leadership in global health research and development. Altogether, the fellowship advances ARUA’s mission to foster collaborative, Africa-led research excellence, build graduate-level capacity, and translate cutting-edge health research into tangible solutions that drive the continent’s socio-economic transformation.

ARUA Member Universities’ Participation

Seven fellows have been selected from ARUA–Guild partner institutions in Malawi, Uganda, Nigeria, and Ghana:



Mirriam Ethel Nyenje (Malawi)



Wakisa Kipandula (Malawi)



Kabahita Jupiter Marina (Uganda)



Nicholas Bbosa (Uganda)



Mariam Kehinde Sulaiman (Nigeria)



Mustapha Umar Imam (Nigeria)



Irene Owusu Donkor (Ghana)

They will undertake flexible residencies ranging from two weeks to five months, to be completed by June 2026.

Training Locations and Activities

Fellows will divide their time between African universities (University of Ghana, University of Ibadan, Makerere University) and European partners, including universities in Bern, Radboud, Glasgow, and Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona. Their activities will span project design for translational research, refinement of vaccine or diagnostic candidates, mapping clinical trial pathways with regulators, and developing policy briefs and guidelines linked to Mpox and Lassa fever.



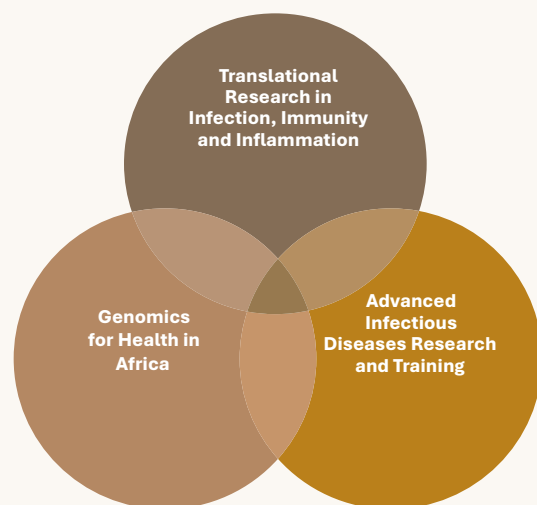
Training sites across Africa and Europe create a truly bi-continental translational ecosystem

Programme Structure and Support

The fellowship is channelled through three Africa–Europe Clusters of Research Excellence as depicted.

Other partners who are leading various components of the project include;

- Africa CDC – research governance and capacity mapping
- TEI MAV funds travel, stipends, and training,
- ARUA and The Guild - Coordination of nominations, hosting arrangements, and supervision to ensure a coherent programme across all institutions.



Outcomes and Impact

Each fellow is expected to produce a concise translational research dossier outlining core preclinical results, a high-level development roadmap, a regulatory landscape overview, and a short policy implications snapshot for their chosen Mpox or Lassa fever candidate. Collectively, the cohort will help build a pipeline of African translational researchers, strengthen Africa–Europe research networks,

and advance Africa’s ambition for health sovereignty and local vaccine manufacturing capacity.

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This Europe–Africa fellowship is building the skills and partnerships needed for Africa’s health sovereignty

Dr Emmanuel Abbey, MAV+ Project Coordinator from ARUA

SECTION 3: RESEARCH DISSEMINATION AND COMMUNICATION, PARTNERSHIPS/NETWORKING AND POLICY ENGAGEMENTS

1. Conferences and Webinars

As part of efforts to amplify the voices of African researchers, ARUA supports Early Career Researchers to participate in convenings where they can present their research findings and engage with diverse stakeholders within and beyond their fields.

In this quarter we feature three ARUA ECRs who were supported to present their research findings at various intra-Africa international conferences.



Dr. Precious Joan Wapukha (CoE for Urbanization and Habitable Cities, University of Lagos)

Paper title: 'Echoes of War, Roots of Peace: Historical Insights into Sudanese Forced Migration to Kenya'

Conference details: Migration and Climate in Africa Conference held in Senegal from 26th to 28th March 2026



Dr. Kundani Makakavhule (CoE Climate and Development, University of Ghana)

Paper title: 'How extractive industries are reshaping climate-related mobility and displacement in Africa'

Conference details: Migration and Climate in Africa Conference held in Senegal from 26th to 28th March 2026



Dr. Emmanuel Ameyaw (CoE for Unemployment and Skills Development, University of Lagos)

Paper 1 title: Productivity and Employment in Africa: Examining Differences Across Different Income Groups and Fiscal Dominance:

Paper 2 title: Investigating the Transmission of Monetary Policy Shocks to Ghana's Commercial Banks' Balance Sheet.

Conference details: 'Beyond Boundaries: Social Science Perspectives on Identity, Innovation, Inclusion, and Climate Resilience in the Digital Age' conference held in Ghana from 10th to 12th March 2026

Apart from the conferences, ARUA ECRs have also given seminar and webinar presentations to showcase their ongoing research activities. Some of the seminars presented by the ECRs in this quarter include:

- Dr. Steve Ngoy Kabemba – Urbanization and Habitable Cities / University of Lagos, Nigeria
Title: *Prospects for Reducing Carbon Emissions from Construction*
Date: 25 February 2026
Link: [file:///C:/Users/aruap/Downloads/Webinar%20Presentation%20Final%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/aruap/Downloads/Webinar%20Presentation%20Final%20(1).pdf)
- Dr. Herve Neghem Takam – Urbanization and Habitable Cities / University of Lagos, Nigeria
Title: *Industrialization and Shadow Economy in Africa: Effects and Transmission Channels*
Date: 10 March 2026
Link: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Industrialization-and-the-shadow-Transmission-channels-framework-Source-Author_fig1_399993888
- Dr. Adetoun Akitoye – Food Security / University of Pretoria, South Africa
Title: *Active Intelligent Food Packages Based on Valo-*

rized Agricultural Wastes – Cassava Peels and Water Hyacinth

Date: 11 February 2026

Link: <https://www.up.ac.za/centre-for-the-advancement-of-scholarship/news/seminar-report-active-in-telligent-food-packages-based-valorized-agricultural-wastes-cassava>

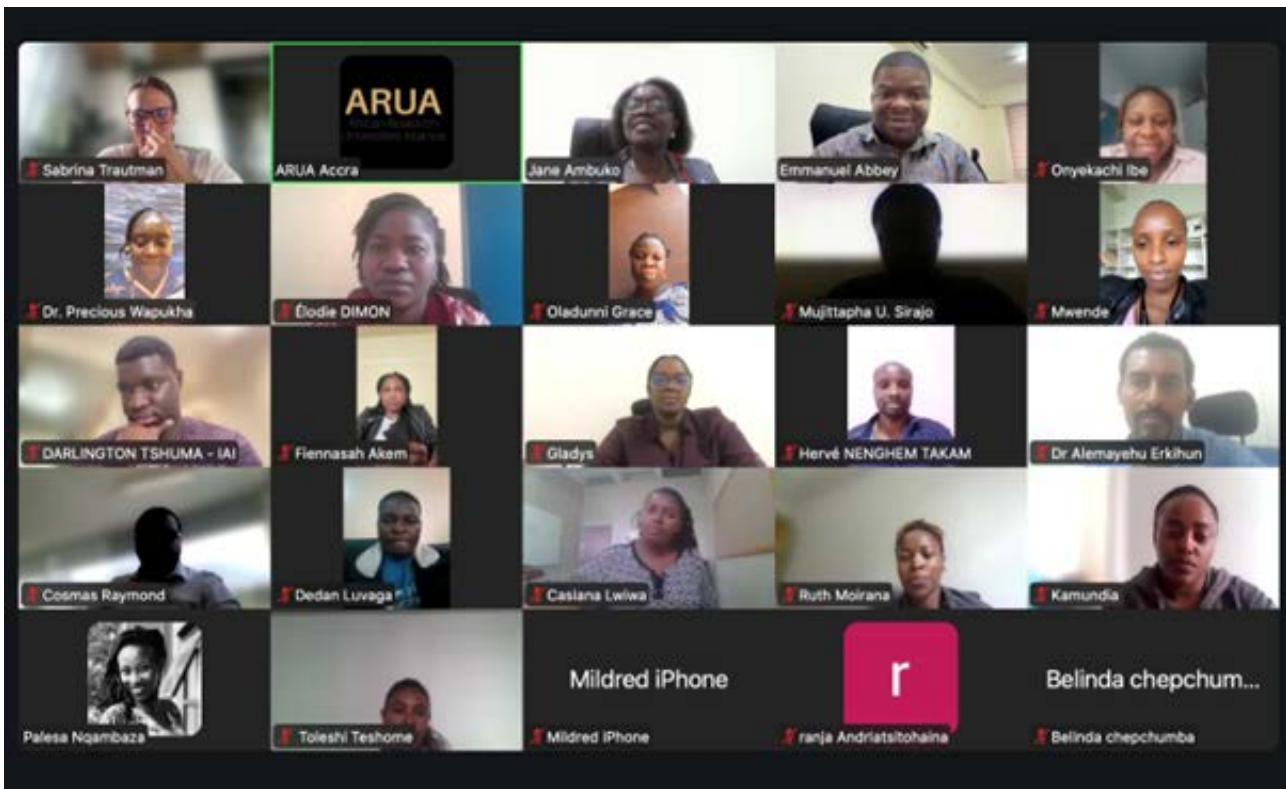
- Dr. Kgomotso Jackson Phillip Sebola-Samanyanga – Notions of Identity / Makerere University, Uganda
Title: *The Right to (S)place: From Inclusion to Belonging in African Urban Theory*
Date: 13 February 2026
Link: <https://www.researchgate.net/scientific-contributions/Kgomotso-Jackson-Phillip-Sebola-Samanyanga-2340496425>

2. Writing for Visibility

Much of the research at African Universities remains in theses and journal articles that are only accessible and understood by the researchers and their peers or specialists. There is urgent need to reverse this narrative by equipping researchers with requisite skills to write for the non-academic audience and potential users/beneficiaries of their research. This calls for a shift from “**research done**” to “**research heard, seen and used.**” This was the rallying call at the science communication online workshop held on 19th March 2026. The workshop was organized by the ARUA Secretariat with support from the Mastercard Foundation and facilitated by a science communication expert Ms Sabrina Trautman (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/sabrina-trautman-3563a815/>).



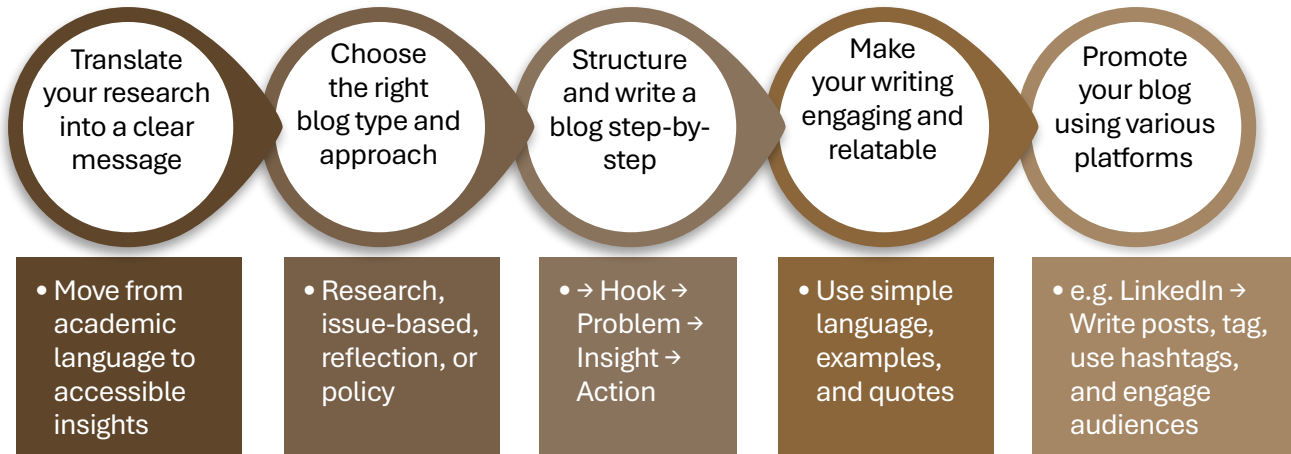
Dr. Precious Wapukha and Dr. Kundani Makakavhule at the 'Migration and Climate in Africa Conference' in Senegal



Participants at the “Blogging for Research Impact” online workshop

The purpose of the workshop was to equip ECRs with practical skills to effectively communicate their research and fellowship activities through high-quality, impactful blogs.

Researchers learnt the key steps to turning your research into accessible and engaging content as summarized below:



3. Networking, partnerships and policy engagements by ARUA

Positioning ARUA within Africa’s vaccine sovereignty agenda

ARUA Secretary-General, Professor John Gyapong, represented the Alliance at the launch of ACHIEVE Africa, Africa’s Research and Development Engine for Vaccine and Therapeutic Sovereignty. This African Union–aligned initiative, led by the International Vaccine Institute (IVI), seeks to advance vaccine and biological products self sufficiency on the continent. Held as a high-level side event on the margins of the 39th African Union Summit

from 14–15 February 2026 in Addis Ababa, the meeting presented ACHIEVE Africa as an African conceived, African led consortium of experts from 20 countries and 50 institutions, directly aligned with the Team Europe Initiative (TEI) on Manufacturing and Access to Vaccines, Medicines and Health Technologies (MAV+), and with the Africa CDC and African Union Path to Vision 2030.

Attended by the Presidents of Zambia and Ghana, the event highlighted the centrality of robust regulatory systems and coordinated capacity building for advancing Africa’s vaccine agenda. ARUA affirmed its readiness to contribute to the capacity strengthening components of ACHIEVE Africa, signalling the Alliance’s commitment to leveraging

its research universities to support African led vaccine development, regulation, and manufacturing efforts. The launch is expected to catalyse tangible commitments from African governments to integrate ACHIEVE Africa's objectives into national health and science and technology strategies, and to reinforce recognition of ACHIEVE Africa as the continent's central research and development platform, attracting further investment and collaboration.



Professor John Gyapong at the ACHIEVE side event in Addis Ababa

Partnership to Strengthen Inter- and Transdisciplinary Research

ARUA and the Inter- and Transdisciplinarity (ITD) Alliance are laying the groundwork for a strategic partnership to strengthen inter- and transdisciplinary research capacity across the ARUA network.

The two organisations recognise their shared commitment to tackling complex African development challenges—such as climate change, urbanisation, public health, energy access, and food security—through integrated, cross-disciplinary research approaches. Building on existing engagements with ARUA Centres of Excellence in Water, Urbanisation and Habitable Cities, and Energy, the partnership will explore joint training programmes and workshops on ITD methodologies, and the integration of these approaches into ongoing ARUA initiatives, including the Early Career Researchers Fellowship. A key idea emerging in initial discussions is the creation of an “Africa ITD Network” to connect ARUA CoEs with global ITD scholars, coordinate ITD activities on the continent, and facilitate collaborative research, training, and knowledge exchange.

ARUA and DAAD Explore Research and Capacity Strengthening Partnership

The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the world's largest funding organisation for the international

exchange of students and researchers, is represented in West Africa by the DAAD Regional Office in Accra. As part of a working tour to Ghana, a delegation of 20 university rectors and vice rectors from German universities, led by DAAD Secretary General, Dr Kai Sicks, paid a visit to ARUA.



The DAAD General Secretary Prof. Dr Kai Sicks presenting a symbolic gift to Prof. Gyapong

The delegation visited ARUA on Monday, 23 March 2026, to learn more about the Alliance and to explore potential areas of collaboration between ARUA member universities and German universities. The ARUA Secretary-General, Prof. John Gyapong, gave a high-level presentation on ARUA, highlighting its vision, mission, membership, operational and governance structures, as well as ongoing research and capacity strengthening initiatives.



Prof. Gyapong making a high level presentation about ARUA

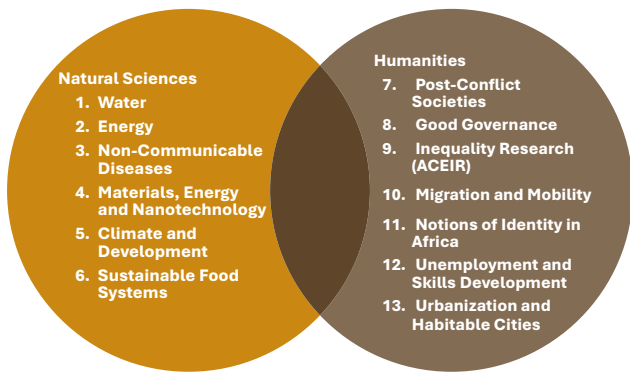
During the subsequent plenary discussions, members of the DAAD delegation proposed possible areas of collaboration at both university and consortium levels, envisaging an “alliance of alliances” between DAAD and ARUA. Dr Kai Sicks expressed optimism and confidence that there are many potential areas of collaboration between German universities and ARUA's research ecosystem, including its Centres of Excellence and Clusters of Research Excellence.

The visit has established a valuable connection between ARUA and DAAD that can be leveraged for future partnerships and collaborative initiatives.

SECTION 4: ARUA CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE

Operationalising ARUA’s vision and mission

The ARUA vision and mission are operationalised through the 13 ARUA Centres of Excellence (CoEs) <https://arua.org/centres-of-excellence/>. hosted by 23 ARUA member universities. The Centres operate under a hub-and-spoke model and each has well-defined thematic research focus areas aligned with ARUA’s research priorities. They serve as focal points where world-class researchers from member universities aggregate to undertake collaborative, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary research in priority thematic areas. The Centres also provide opportunities for graduate training and mentorship of early-career researchers. Currently, the 13 CoEs are organised into two broad categories—six in the natural sciences and seven in the humanities as shown below.



In 2023, ARUA, in partnership with the Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities, established twenty-two (22) Clusters of Research Excellence (CoREs) aligned with the priority themes of the AU–EU Innovation Agenda. The CoEs and CoREs work together to drive the research, capacity-strengthening, and policy engagement agenda of ARUA and The Guild.

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13 Centres of Excellence and 22 Clusters of Research Excellence form ARUA’s core engine for collaborative, Africa-led research

Spotlight: ARUA Centre of Excellence in Sustainable Food Systems (ARUA-SFS)

In this issue, we spotlight the ARUA Centre of Excellence in Sustainable Food Systems (ARUA-SFS). The Centre is led by the University of Pretoria (hub), where Prof. Frans Swanepoel serves as Centre Director, supported by Dr. Sussy Munialo.

The hub works in collaboration with two spokes: the University of Ghana, Legon (representing Western Africa) and the University of Nairobi (representing Eastern Africa).

Two historically disadvantaged South African universities—the University of the Western Cape and the University of Fort Hare—are associate members of ARUA-SFS.



Prof Frans Swanepoel
Center Director



Dr. Sussy Munialo
Center Manager

Beyond its university partners, the Centre collaborates with key institutions focused on different aspects of food systems, as shown below.

- Research**
 - South African Agricultural Research Council (ARC).
 - French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD).
- Policy**
 - Food and Natural Resources Policy Advocacy Network (FANRPAN).
 - Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy (BFAP).
- Gender**
 - African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD).
- Capacity building**
 - Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM).

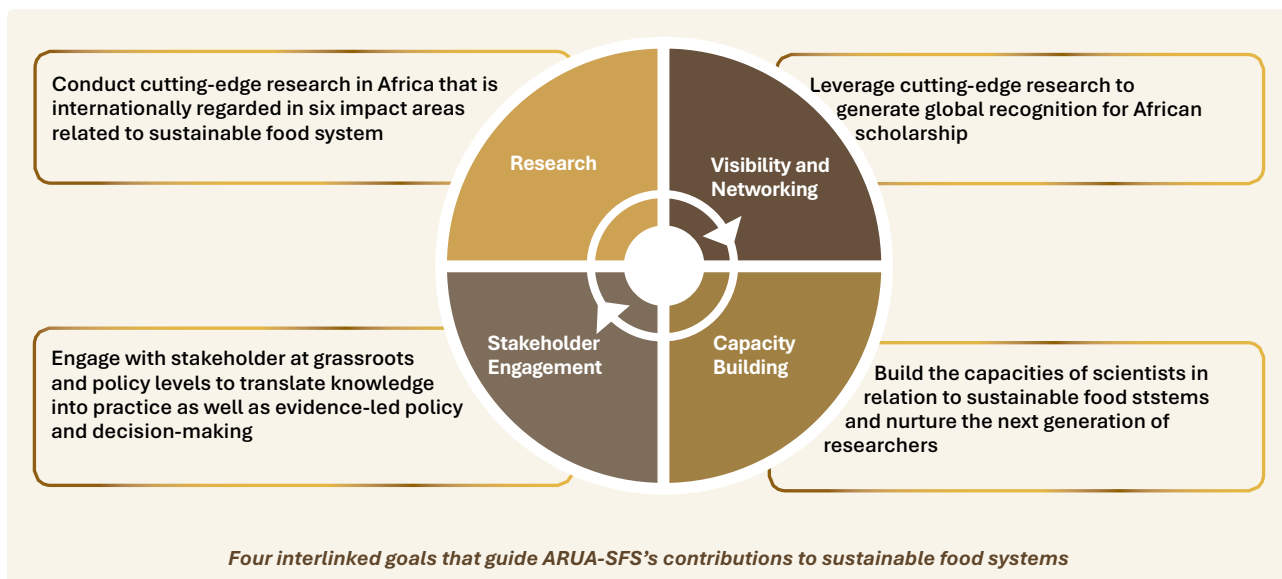
Working at the nexus of food, climate, livelihoods, and governance, ARUA-SFS is transforming Africa’s food systems through cutting-edge research, policy engagement, and strategic partnerships that advances the aspirations of Africa’s Agenda 2063 and contributes to multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Centre works in collaboration with other ARUA CoEs, reflecting strong complementarities and reinforcing a coordinated, interdisciplinary approach to Africa’s development challenges.

ARUA-SFS Vision

“To harness partnerships in research and innovation to drive agricultural and food system transformation to ensure sustainable food security and nutrition in Africa.”

Goals of ARUA-SFS

The goals of ARUA-SFS fall into four broad categories, as illustrated in the accompanying figure.



Current Research Priorities and Impact Areas

ARUA-SFS seeks to catalyse positive changes in Africa's food systems so they can be transformed into sustainable, resilient systems that support livelihoods, provide nutritious and safe food, and protect the planet. Focusing on future food systems, ARUA-SFS intentionally leverages advances in digital technologies and data science to offer solutions to complex food system challenges. Its impact areas are summarised below.

a) Food, nutrition, and health



ARUA-SFS strengthens research and innovation to improve the availability, accessibility, and utilisation of safe, nutritious, and diverse foods. This impact area

has clear linkages to Agenda 2063 (Goal 3) and SDGs 2, 3, and 12. It also aligns with the work of the ARUA Centre of Excellence in Non-Communicable Diseases, highlighting critical connections between food systems, diets, and long-term health outcomes.

b) Jobs, poverty, and livelihoods



The Centre contributes to inclusive economic development by promoting food system innovations that create decent jobs and improve livelihoods, particularly

for smallholder farmers, women, and youth. This impact area links to Agenda 2063 Goal 1 and SDGs 1 and 8. It also connects strongly with the ARUA CoEs on Poverty and Inequality and on Unemployment and Skills Development, reinforcing a shared commitment to addressing the structural drivers of deprivation and exclusion in Africa.

c) Climate and environment ARUA-



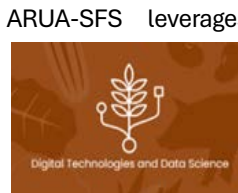
SFS addresses the climate and environmental dimensions of food systems by advancing research on climate-smart agriculture, agroecology, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable natural resource management. This impact area links to Agenda 2063 Goal 7 and SDGs 12, 13, and 15. It also aligns closely with the ARUA Centre of Excellence on Climate and Development, demonstrating a shared commitment to tackling climate-related challenges affecting food systems in Africa.

d) Policy for food systems transformation



The Centre plays a critical role in translating research into policy-relevant evidence to support food systems transformation. ARUA-SFS engages policymakers, regional bodies, and development partners to inform inclusive, evidence-based policies on agriculture, nutrition, climate, and food security. This impact area links to Agenda 2063 Goal 12 and SDGs 16 and 17. It also connects strongly with the ARUA Centre of Excellence in Good Governance, underscoring the importance of institutions, accountability, and inclusive decision-making.

e) Digital technologies and data science



ARUA-SFS leverages digital technologies and data science to enhance research, innovation, and decision-making across food systems. The Centre supports the use of digital tools for data collection, analysis, modelling,

and dissemination, including climate information services, digital extension platforms, and market information systems. This impact area links to Agenda 2063 Goal 2 and SDG 9. It also connects with the ARUA Centre of Excellence in Non-Communicable Diseases, which has incorporated data science as a cross-cutting research theme.

f) Inclusive food systems



Inclusivity is a cross-cutting impact area for ARUA-SFS. The Centre promotes gender equity, youth engagement, and the integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in research and innovation. This impact area links to Agenda 2063 Goal 11 and SDGs 5, 10, and 17. It aligns closely with the ARUA CoEs on Inequality and on Research, reflecting a shared focus on addressing structural disparities in food systems.

Key Achievements of ARUA-SFS

The Centre has made significant progress towards achieving its vision and mission. Key achievements are summarised below.

a) Establishing Pan-African Research Networks and International Collaborations

ARUA-SFS has built a strong network of African and international universities, research institutions, industry players, and local communities working on sustainable food systems. These partnerships have resulted in collaborative research projects and facilitated knowledge exchange across the continent and beyond. Examples of

flagship collaborative project where the center has led or contributed significantly include:

- **Food Systems Research Network for Africa (FSNet-Africa)**

FSNet-Africa sought to design and implement food systems research in partnership with stakeholders to identify solutions that can drive sustainable change in African food systems. Project outputs are available at fsnetafrica.com/our-resources.

- **Capacity Building in Food Security for Africa (CaBFoodS-Africa)**

The CaBFoodS-Africa project aimed to collaboratively build the capacities required across research and policy to tackle the complex challenge of nutrition and food security in Africa. Project outputs are documented in the [CaBFoodS-Africa booklet](#).

- **Africa–Europe Cluster of Research Excellence in Sustainable Food Systems (CoRE-SFS)**

CoRE-SFS is a global research cluster linking African universities under ARUA and European universities under The Guild, together with other key food systems partners. The initiative seeks to connect researchers around the world through various collaborative initiatives research, capacity strengthening, policy engagements and dissemination/ stakeholder forums such as webinars. Below is a listing of the current CoRE-SFS partners:

African partners	European partners	Other Key Partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of Ghana • University of Nairobi • Makerere University • University of Johannesburg • University of the Western Cape • University of Mpumalanga • University of KwaZulu-Natal • Mohammed VI Polytechnic University 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of Bologna • University of Warwick • University of Leeds • Ghent University • University of Göttingen • University of Hohenheim • University of Ljubljana • University of Montpellier 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Research Foundation • Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN) • Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) Agricultural Research Council (ARC)



Flagship collaborations such as FSNet-Africa, CaBFoodS-Africa and CoRE-SFS position ARUA-SFS at the centre of global food systems discourse

b) Knowledge Generation, Dissemination, and Policy Engagement

Through collaborative projects and related initiatives, ARUA-SFS continues to generate knowledge products including peer-reviewed publications, policy briefs, and blogs. These products are disseminated to stakeholders in academia, government, industry, civil society, and communities through various communication channels and platforms.

The Centre actively engages policymakers and other stakeholders through policy dialogues, conferences, and expert panels, with many resulting policy briefs and blogs which are available at aruasfs.com/resources. Recent work is also documented in the [New Research Agenda](#).

Webinars and Seminars

ARUA-SFS organises regular webinars which provide a platform for knowledge exchange among policymakers,

researchers, practitioners, early-career researchers, and communities. Notable of these is the CoRE-SFS monthly webinar series which delivered nine webinars in 2025 covering various thematic topics under

- Sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture
- Indigenous crops and Traditional Knowledge Systems
- Food safety, nutrition, and public health
- Innovation, data, and technology in food systems
- Collaboration, equity, and capacity building for food systems transformation

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Our webinars and seminars ensure that evidence from research in food systems reaches decision-makers, practitioners, and communities across Africa and Europe

This webinar series attracted a total attendance of 1,286 diverse stakeholders from Africa and Europe. The webinar recordings are available at aruasfs.com/project/core-sfs.

To support the capacity and professional development of ARUA ECRs, the Centre has so far organised two tailor-made seminars under the following topics:

- “Voices of the Future: Early Career Researchers Advancing Science for Sustainable Food Systems” (held on the sidelines of the Science Forum for South Africa)
- “Adapting Your Research within the Food Systems Framework”

These seminars have given ECRs opportunities to showcase their work to fellow researchers and a wider community of food systems stakeholders.

c) Capacity building and mentorship of early-career researchers

A major achievement of ARUA-SFS is its contribution to developing the next generation of African scientists, including PhD students, postdoctoral fellows, and early-career researchers (ECRs). This is pursued through various capacity-building programmes and structured mentorship sessions. Monthly mentorship sessions, led by Centre Director Prof. Frans Swanepoel, provide guidance to ECRs on impactful food systems research, building collaborative networks, navigating academic career pathways, and maintaining work-life balance. These mentorship activities are embedded within broader capacity-building programmes hosted by the Centre. Past capacity building programs hosted by ARUA-SFS include: , including: The Feed, Protect, Care Global Collaborative PhD platform, The FSNet-Africa programme and The Peer-learning for Emerging Researchers’ Knowledge and Advancement (PERKA) project.

The ARUA Early Career Researchers Programme

In this issue we spotlight the ARUA Early Career Researchers fellowship which is funded by Mastercard Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Under the fellowship, six ARUA ECRs from Tanzania, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Benin, and Ghana are currently hosted by ARUA-SFS, bringing diverse regional perspectives on African food systems.

The names, country and research topics of the six ARUA-ECRs (cohort 1) who are currently hosted by ARUA-SFS are shown below:



Dr Ruth Moirana (Tanzania)

Research topic: Interactive Behaviour between Fluoride and essential plant elements

Profile link:



Dr Adetoun Akitoye (Nigeria)

Research topic: Development of Smart, Green Packaging Materials and Sensors for Extended Food Shelf-life Using Water Hyacinth and Cassava Wastes

Profile link



Dr. Fawziyah Oyefunke (Nigeria)

Research Topic: Hydrate-Based Carbon Capture and Water Purification Using Renewable Energy for Sustainable Water-Agriculture Solutions in Africa.

Profile link:



Dr Qhelile Ntombikayise Bhebhe (Zimbabwe)

Research Topic: Enhancing Food and Nutrition Security through the Integration of Traditional Foods in Southern Africa

Profile link



Dr Elodie Dimon (Benin)

Research Topic: Promoting snail production and processing to alleviate protein malnutrition in Africa

Profile link:



Dr Fransisca Acheampong Adoma (Ghana)

Research Topic: AI for Safer Motherhood - A Wearable-Based Solution to Predict and Prevent Preterm Birth in Ghana's Ashanti Region

Profile link:

Spotlight on Dr Ruth Lorivi Moirana (one of the ECRs hosted at the ARUA-SFS)

Dr Ruth Lorivi Moirana is a lecturer at the Nelson Mandela African Institution of Science and Technology (NM-AIST), Tanzania, and an Early Career Research Fellow at the ARUA Centre of Excellence in Sustainable Food Systems (ARUA-SFS). Her research focuses on developing innovative materials for removing contaminants from soil and water, improving soil health, irrigation quality, and environmental sustainability within food systems. Since starting as an assistant lecturer in 2019, she completed her PhD in 2023 and was promoted to lecturer. Her excellence has earned her multiple accolades, including NM-AIST Business Plan Competition First Runner-Up (2022), MEWES Top PhD Student in Research and Innovation (2023), and a 2024 L'Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science Young Talent Postdoctoral Award.

Mentorship at ARUA-SFS

- Dr. Moirana is one of six ECRs hosted at ARUA-SFS at the University of Pretoria in South Africa. She is mentored by a team of distinguished researchers from various ARUA universities, including:
- Prof. Frans Swanepoel – Centre Director and a distinguished scientific leader recognised nationally and internationally.
- Dr. David Nsibo – Lecturer in the Department of Plant and Soil Science, University of Pretoria.
- Prof. Richard Onwonga – Professor of Soil Science, Department of Land Resource Management and Agricultural Technology, University of Nairobi

- Dr. Sussy Munialo – ARUA-SFS Senior Postdoctoral Fellow specialising in sustainable food systems and Indigenous crops.

Career achievements supported by the ECR fellowship

- A research article titled *“The Interactive Behaviour of Soil Fluoride with Essential Plant Nutrients in Fertilizer.”*
- A policy brief titled *“Fluoride–Fertilizer Interactions: An Overlooked Threat to Sustainable Food Systems.”*
- Active engagement with the scientific community – attended three conferences and five workshops.
- At the ARUA ECR workshop, she contributed to a multidisciplinary team that developed a concept note on *“Implications of Fluorosis on Mental Health and Well-Being of Communities in Tanzania.”* These activities demonstrate strong integration of research, policy, and capacity-building efforts.



Dr. Moirana standing next to her career advancement map during the ECR Workshop

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My fellowship at ARUA-SFS has allowed me to link laboratory research with real-world food systems challenges and policy debates. – Dr. Moirana

ARUA NOTICEBOARD

- **Opportunities**

- ARUA ECR Fellowship Call (<https://arua.org/early-career-research-fellowships/>)

- **Upcoming Events**

- Second Africa–Europe Core Conference (<https://www.gla.ac.uk/events/conferences/guild-arua-conference/>)
- WUN Global Mental Health Symposium 2026 (<https://wun.ac.uk/article/events/call-for-abstracts-global-mental-health-symposium/>)
- ARUA's Public Lecture



ARUA MEMBER UNIVERSITIES



UNIVERSITY OF GHANA



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST



KNUST
KWAME NKRUMAH UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA



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University
Mohammed VI
Polytechnic



MAKERERE UNIVERSITY



OBAFEMI AWOLOWO
UNIVERSITY

