

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Research Fellow: Skills and Institutional Capacity

African Institute for Sustainable Energy and Systems Analysis (AISESA)

About AISESA

The African Institute for Sustainable Energy and Systems Analysis (AISESA) is a pan-African institute that brings together researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to generate knowledge, strengthen capacity, and support decision-making on Africa's energy, climate, and development priorities. Grounded in the belief that Africa's energy transformations must be African-led and aligned with the continent's development goals, AISESA works to strengthen connections between research, policy, finance, and implementation.

AISESA operates through five interconnected clusters covering clean energy pathways, implementation, policy and governance, finance and technology, and institutional capacity. Together, these clusters advance integrated research and engagement on themes such as powering livelihoods, inclusive industrialisation, and urban transformation.

About Cluster 5

Cluster 5 is dedicated to strengthening the institutional and human capacities needed to drive Africa's sustainable energy transition. The cluster takes a systemic approach to capacity, recognising that skills alone are insufficient without strong institutions, effective governance, adequate finance, and robust policy frameworks. Rather than focusing narrowly on skills and training, Cluster 5 works to link the various domains of capacity, including policy, finance, governance, technology, and environmental integrity across individuals, institutions, and countries, while making existing capacities visible, connecting people and institutions across the continent, and fostering learning from both successes and failures. Its overarching goal is to shift the conversation from perpetual capacity building to strategic capacity mobilisation, ensuring that African knowledge, institutions, and expertise are recognised, connected, and deployed in service of the continent's development priorities.

About the role

AISESA is seeking a Research Fellow to contribute to Cluster 5: Institutions, Skills and Capacity. The Fellowship will combine independent and collaborative research on African knowledge systems, institutional capability and capacity strengthening with a cross-cluster role in generating learning from AISESA's work. The Fellow will examine how institutions develop, retain and use knowledge in energy and development decision-making. The Fellow will contribute to AISESA's wider research agenda through high-quality scholarly and policy-relevant outputs, while also supporting the Institute to identify shared learning across its thematic and country-level work.

A further component of the Fellowship will be an exploratory assessment of a possible African Observatory of Capacity for Sustainable Energy and Development. This work will assess the strategic value, user needs, institutional arrangements, partnership options, and resource requirements for such an initiative.

The Fellow will work closely with AISESA's existing Cluster 5 Research Fellow, contributing complementary expertise and perspectives as part of a collaborative research effort. The two positions are designed to focus on different aspects of the larger workplan within the cluster. While each post-doc has its own domain of focus, they will be working together and with others in and beyond the cluster to advance AISESA's work.

Key Responsibilities

1. Research on Knowledge Systems, Institutional Capability and Capacity Strengthening

- Conduct original research on knowledge ecosystems, institutional capability, organisational learning, and capacity-building approaches in African energy and development contexts.
- Analyse the institutional, political, organisational, and relational conditions that enable or constrain learning, collaboration, evidence use, and sustained capability development.
- Develop comparative, country-level, or thematic analyses of institutional capability and capacity strengthening relevant to AISESA's research areas.
- Produce peer-reviewed publications, working papers, policy briefs, and other analytical outputs that advance AISESA's intellectual contribution on institutions, skills, and capacity.

2. Cross-Cluster Knowledge Ecosystem Integration and Institutional Learning

- Contribute to the mapping and analysis of research, policy, implementation, and practice actors relevant to AISESA's thematic and country engagements.
- Help identify where knowledge systems are fragmented and where capability, coordination, or evidence gaps constrain progress on particular energy and development challenges.
- Contribute to the design and facilitation of co-creation processes, dialogues, and peer-learning engagements that connect research, policy and practice perspectives.
- Develop and test practical approaches, templates, and reflection processes that support cumulative learning across thematic areas, country engagements, and clusters.
- Provide analytical, methodological, and facilitative support that helps clusters work across and generate cumulative learning. However, the Fellow will not manage or coordinate delivery of other clusters' work.

3. Exploratory Work on an African Observatory of Capacity

- Conduct a landscape assessment of existing observatories, repositories, platforms, institutional mapping initiatives, and capacity-building knowledge systems relevant to sustainable energy and development in Africa.
- Examine the needs, potential users, gaps, and possible value proposition of an African Observatory of Capacity for Sustainable Energy and Development.
- Engage relevant African institutions, universities, research centres, networks, policymakers, practitioners, and partners to identify opportunities for complementarity, collaboration, and shared ownership.
- Develop options for possible institutional models and prepare a feasibility and strategic options paper to inform decisions.
- Where appropriate, contribute to the development of an external concept note or funding proposal, subject to decision on whether to proceed.

Profile and Qualifications

The ideal candidate will have:

- A PhD completed in a relevant field, such as development studies, organisational studies, innovation studies, knowledge management or a related discipline.
- Demonstrated research expertise on one or more of the following: institutional development, organisational learning, knowledge systems, capacity strengthening, innovation systems, or energy and development in African contexts.

- Strong understanding of how knowledge, evidence, expertise, and institutional capability shape decision-making and implementation in development contexts.
- Experience facilitating stakeholder engagement, collaborative research, workshops, dialogues, peer-learning processes, or multi-institutional partnerships.
- Strong project planning and management skills, and the ability to organise and advance multiple research, engagement, and institutional learning activities; and coordinate contributions across partners without assuming responsibility for managing other clusters' delivery.
- Strong analytical, writing, and synthesis skills, with the ability to produce high-quality academic, policy, and strategic outputs.
- Ability to work independently while contributing constructively across disciplinary, institutional, and geographic boundaries.

Desirable Experience

The following would be an advantage:

- Experience with institutional mapping, knowledge platforms, repositories, observatories, communities of practice, or collaborative information systems.
- Familiarity with capacity-building initiatives, institutional strengthening, monitoring, evaluation and learning, or network coordination.
- Experience working with African universities, research institutions, public agencies, civil society organisations, practitioner networks, or regional bodies.
- Experience contributing to partnership development, consortium building, grant writing, or resource mobilisation for research or institutional initiatives.
- Familiarity with energy, climate, infrastructure, or development policy in African contexts.

Terms of Appointment

- Full-time consultancy contract
- Fellowship duration of [two years]
- Remote working arrangement
- Opportunities for travel may arise through country engagement activities, collaborative research, conferences, workshops, and policy dialogues.

How to Apply

Interested candidates should submit the following documents as a single PDF:

- A cover letter (maximum two pages) outlining their interest in the fellowship and how their experience aligns with AISESA's work.
- A detailed CV (maximum four pages).
- A list of relevant publications, analytical outputs, or knowledge and capacity development work.

Applications should be sent to: recruitment_aisesa@akademiya2063.org

Subject line: Skills and Institutional Capacity Fellow – Cluster 5

Application deadline: July 9, 2026