



ARISE Onboarding Webinar - Building Responsible and Gender-Inclusive AI Leadership for Africa

ARISE KNOWLEDGE-SHARING WEBINAR SERIES #2

Event Report

Funder

The Andrew Carnegie Foundation

Principal Investigator

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Date:

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1. Executive Summary

The African Technology Policy Studies Network (ATPS) hosted the ARISE Onboarding Webinar on Zoom, convening the first cohort of ARISE grantees, ATPS leadership and staff, and national chapter coordinators from across Africa. The session opened at 3:30 PM East African Time and ran for approximately two hours. It was the first of a planned quarterly series of ARISE webinars, with the next session scheduled for September 2026.

The ARISE project - Advancing Responsible and Gender-Inclusive AI Capacity in Africa's Higher Education Ecosystem - is funded by the Andrew Carnegie Foundation and implemented by ATPS. It supports 10 PhD scholarships and 6 postdoctoral fellowships, awarded through a competitive, blind, three-reviewer process (34 shortlisted PhD applicants reviewed by 17 external reviewers with no conflicts of interest) to researchers based across several African countries, with Nigeria, South Africa and Kenya contributing the largest number of applicants.

The webinar served four main purposes: (1) to formally welcome and congratulate the 16 grantees; (2) to have each grantee introduce themselves and their research; (3) to orient grantees to the ARISE project's strategic rationale, five strategic pillars, and expectations around responsible and gender-inclusive AI; and (4) to brief grantees on award administration, financial reporting, and technical reporting requirements.

Key speakers were Prof. Nicholas Ozor (Executive Director, ATPS and ARISE Principal Investigator), Prof. Joel Nwakaire (Senior Research Officer, ATPS), Ms. Doreen Ongoro (Finance and Administration Officer, ATPS), and Dr. Azubuike Aniedu, who moderated. National chapter coordinators for Nigeria (Prof. Michael Madukwe) and Ethiopia (Mr. Wondwossen Belete) also addressed the grantees.

Grantees' research spans ATPS's thematic priority areas - agriculture, food and nutrition security; climate change, environment and energy; health; digital economy and ICT; and education and technology - and consistently applies AI to African development challenges, including low-resource language processing, disease outbreak modelling, gender bias in health data and AI systems, smart energy and water management, cybersecurity for solar grids, algorithmic fairness for women-led e-commerce SMEs, and AI-supported maternal and student wellbeing.

No urgent questions were raised during the open-floor session. The webinar closed with an invitation for grantees to route any questions to ATPS staff or national coordinators by email, and with a reminder that reporting timelines, budget rules, and community-of-practice engagement are central to remaining in good standing on the award.

2. Event Details

Event title	ARISE Onboarding Webinar — “Building Responsible and Gender-Inclusive AI Leadership for Africa”
Project	ARISE — Advancing Responsible and Gender-Inclusive AI Capacity in Africa's Higher Education Ecosystem

Implementing organization	African Technology Policy Studies Network (ATPS)
Funder	Andrew Carnegie Foundation
Principal Investigator	Prof. Nicholas Ozor, Executive Director, ATPS
Date	26 August 2026
Start time / time zone	3:30 PM, East Africa Time
Approximate duration	~1 hour 58 minutes
Platform	Zoom webinar/meeting
Series context	First of a planned quarterly ARISE webinar series; next webinar scheduled for September 2026
Moderator	Dr. Azubuike Aniedu

Recording link: [View recording \(YouTube, 116 mins\)](#)

3. Participants

The webinar was attended by the following categories of participants:

- ATPS leadership and staff: Prof. Nicholas Ozor (Executive Director / ARISE Principal Investigator), Prof. Joel Nwakaire (Senior Research Officer), Ms. Doreen Ongoro (Finance and Administration Officer), Mr. Alfred (Project Officer), Dr. Azubuike Aniedu (moderator).
- 16 ARISE grantees: 10 PhD scholars and 6 postdoctoral fellows (see Section 5 for the full attendance list).
- National chapter coordinators: Prof. Michael Madukwe (Nigeria) and Mr. Wondwossen Belete (Ethiopia) actively participated; the coordinator for Ghana (Dr. Fred Amu-Mensah) was noted as briefly present but did not speak;
- A representative of the Andrew Carnegie Foundation was invited but was reported to be on leave and did not attend.

4. Proceedings

4.1 Opening and Welcome Remarks — Prof. Nicholas Ozor

The moderator opened the session, stated the full ARISE project title and webinar theme, and confirmed the project's funding by the Andrew Carnegie Foundation and implementation by ATPS. He then invited Prof. Nicholas Ozor, ATPS Executive Director and ARISE Principal Investigator, to deliver welcome remarks.

Prof. Ozor welcomed and congratulated the grantees on completing a long and rigorous selection process, and formally thanked the Andrew Carnegie Foundation for funding the project. He situated ARISE within Africa's broader development challenges - agriculture and food systems, health, climate change and environment, and energy - and framed the project as building not only research capacity but innovation capacity in AI across the continent.

He set clear expectations for grantees: dedicate time, energy and resources to the funded projects; deliver more than expected; submit timely reports; and understand that ATPS will caution, warn, or in extreme cases cancel non-performing or non-compliant projects, in order to protect the reputation of African grantees with international donors. He closed by pledging ATPS's ongoing support throughout the grant period.

4.2 Grantee Introductions

Each grantee was given approximately three minutes to introduce themselves, their host institution, thematic area, research title, objectives, activities completed to date, and next steps. Introductions proceeded in the order: PhD scholars first, followed by postdoctoral fellows. A summary of what was captured is provided below; full detail on each grantee's research is available in the source transcripts.

4.2.1 PhD Scholars

Grantee	Institution / Country	Thematic area	Research focus (summary)
Moumini Kabore	Nazi Boni University, Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso	Digital economy & ICT	Transfer learning / NLP for low-resource African languages (four languages).
Carlin Foka Takamgno	Stellenbosch University, South Africa (from Cameroon)	Health	AI models for spatial epidemiology of arboviruses (dengue, Zika, Chikungunya) — suitability mapping, spread dynamics, and cross-disease transferability.
Judith Orban	Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University, Makurdi, Nigeria	Health / Digital economy & ICT	Gender representation and bias in electronic health record (EHR) data and its effect on fairness and accuracy of AI-driven clinical prediction models.
Simon Zziwa	Mountains of the Moon University, Uganda	Agriculture, food & nutrition security	AI/ML models integrating genomic, phenotypic and environmental data to predict and

Grantee	Institution / Country	Thematic area	Research focus (summary)
			manage Striga hermonthica resistance in maize.
Mary Ofuru Kama	Ebonyi State University, Nigeria	Climate change, environment & health	Predictive ML framework linking climate variables to sickle cell disease crises, including a planned gender dimension via university-based survey data.
Chisom Ogbuanya	Africa Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Energy & Power Development, Univ. of Nigeria Nsukka	Climate change, environment & energy	AI-enabled smart-home optimisation for sustainable energy and water resource management (LSTM prediction, DRL control policies).
Mugoya Shariff	Busitema University, Uganda	Energy, education & technology	Interpretable, scalable deep-learning cybersecurity framework for solar-integrated (PV) smart grids in Uganda.
Lebogang Tisane	University of Johannesburg, South Africa	Digital economy & ICT	Rawlsian ethical-AI framework to reduce algorithmic bias and promote fairness for women-led SMEs on e-commerce platforms.
Richard G. Wairagu	Technical University of Kenya	Health	Retrieval-augmented large language model (RAG-LLM) framework for oncology clinical decision support in resource-constrained health systems.
Noah Herbert Paul	Chinhoyi University of Technology, Zimbabwe	Health	AI-Driven Digital Twin Framework for the Design and Optimization of Vaccine Biomanufacturing Facilities: A Case Study of a Foot and Mouth Disease Vaccine Plant in Zimbabwe.

4.2.2 Postdoctoral Fellows

Grantee	Institution / Country	Thematic area	Research focus (summary)
Ekle Francis Adoba	University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria	Health; Education and Technology	Not reached on the call.
Billy Ruyobeza	University of Cape Town, South Africa	Health	Framework for collecting high-quality, representative, gender-inclusive labelled health datasets for training AI/ML models in Sub-Saharan Africa; includes a cancer pre-screening tool prototype.
Ugwu Celestine Ikechukwu	University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria	Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Security;	Not reached on the call.
Anne Osio	Technical University of Kenya	Climate change & environment	IoT, AI and multi-temporal geospatial/earth-observation analysis to quantify and monitor waste dumping sites in Senegal, Kenya and South Africa.
Veronica Kariuki	United States International University – Africa	Health, education & technology	AI-enabled personalised care system integrating academic, mental-health and psychosocial support for pregnant students in African universities.

4.3 Project Overview and Strategic Direction — Prof. Joel Nwakaire, Senior Research Officer

Prof. Nwakaire situated ARISE within ATPS's prior work mainstreaming responsible AI in agriculture across Sub-Saharan Africa, and explained the rationale for extending this into the higher education sector. He cited context data presented during the session: Africa has over 400 million young people aged 15–35 (per UNESCO), a growing number of governments endorsing K–12 AI curricula, and an estimated need for over 5,000 additional doctoral-level AI/ML scholars over the next five years to support the African Union's Continental AI Strategy and Africa's Science, Technology and Innovation agenda (STISA 2030).

He described the barriers ARISE aims to address: limited AI skills and capacity, weak infrastructure for AI development and deployment, low awareness of responsible AI practices among developers and users, low investment, and limited availability of data for training AI systems. He stressed that the project's focus is specifically on advancing responsible and gender-inclusive AI, not AI capacity alone, and that

ATPS will support grantees through training and mentoring on responsible AI principles and inclusive design throughout the grant period.

He framed ARISE as shifting from a “deficit model” to an “agency model”: positioning Africa as an AI innovator and thought leader rather than a consumer of AI developed elsewhere, by investing directly in homegrown doctoral and postdoctoral talent.

Five strategic pillars of ARISE (as presented)

- Mapping AI resources, institutions, people and use-case contexts across Africa, with grantees contributing as field-level contributors (“foot soldiers”) to document what works and inform policy.
- Funding doctoral and postdoctoral fellowships (the core mechanism already delivered to this cohort).
- Driving knowledge sharing and mentorship, to help translate research output into local, on-the-ground impact rather than publications alone.
- Supporting curriculum development - reviewing and co-creating improvements to AI curricula in higher education institutions with grantees.
- Shaping AI policy and strategy - with an explicit expectation that grantees' research generates evidence to influence policy and practice in their home or host countries.

He noted ARISE aligns with all seven of ATPS's thematic priority areas (agriculture/food/nutrition; climate change; energy; health; creative industries; education and technology; digital economy and ICT) and its programmatic priorities (STI policy, training and capacity building, gender and youth empowerment, knowledge brokerage, and commercialisation).

Selection process and cohort statistics (as presented)

- Fellowship tracks: PhD (up to 3 years) and postdoctoral (2 years).
- Applications underwent initial screening for completeness and eligibility (e.g., verification of admission letters and supervisor confirmation), reducing the pool to 34 shortlisted PhD candidates plus a separate postdoctoral shortlist.
- Each proposal was reviewed by 3 independent, blinded external reviewers — one from the applicant's own region and two from other regions — across 17 external reviewers in total, over a 2-week review period, with no conflicts of interest reported.
- Final cohort: 16 grantees (10 PhD scholars, 6 postdoctoral fellows), with deliberate attention to gender balance in the final selection and with Nigeria, South Africa and Kenya contributing the highest numbers of applicants and grantees.

Looking ahead, Prof. Nwakaire outlined ATPS's commitments to sustained mentorship, joint work on AI curriculum development, and adherence to reporting milestones and templates (to be issued by the Project Officer based on grantees' submitted work plans). He asked grantees to reflect on whether their projects are explainable, environmentally sustainable, human-centred, gender-intentional in team composition and engagement, and inclusive of people with disabilities.

4.4 Award Administration and Financial Reporting Briefing — Ms. Doreen Ongoro, Finance and Administration Officer

Ms. Ongoro took grantees through the terms of their signed award letters and the financial and technical reporting obligations attached to the grant.

Award structure and disbursement

- Funds are released to the bank details provided by each grantee; the first tranche has been disbursed and acknowledged by all grantees.
- Subsequent tranches are released only after technical reports have been submitted, reviewed and approved by the relevant ATPS project officers.
- For PhD scholars: school fees are paid directly to the host university; research expenses and living stipends are paid directly to the scholar; travel requires prior written approval.
- For postdoctoral fellows: living stipend, research expenses and travel budget lines were shared via individualised budget templates, to be completed and returned to ATPS.

Non-negotiable terms and compliance requirements

- Budget categories may not be reallocated without ATPS's prior written approval; budget templates and percentage allocations are customised per grantee and must not be altered unilaterally.
- Grantees must give ATPS at least three months' advance notice to request a project extension.
- Late reporting, breach of award terms, provision of false information, or loss of academic/host status can result in immediate contract termination.
- Any change of host institution or supervisor must be notified to ATPS at least 14 days in advance for approval.
- Procurement above US\$1,000 requires at least three comparative quotations; single-sourcing is discouraged.
- Over-expenditure on any budget line is not reimbursed, and funds may not be moved between budget lines (e.g., from research to living stipend) without prior written approval.

Reporting requirements

- Financial reports must be supported by proof of payment (invoices, receipts), evidence of benefit, bank evidence, and travel documentation (itineraries, boarding passes) where applicable.
- Technical reports must include activities and outputs delivered and challenges encountered, and must be endorsed by the grantee's supervisor or host institution.
- Reporting templates for both financial and technical reports (including a simplified template for monthly stipend reporting) will be issued by ATPS ahead of each reporting period.
- Postdoctoral fellows relocating internationally should share travel itineraries and preferred departure airport with ATPS in advance so travel can be arranged.

4.5 The ARISE Community of Practice — Prof. Nicholas Ozor

Prof. Ozor described how being part of ARISE connects grantees to a wider community of practice that ATPS has built since 2021 through its work on responsible AI in agriculture and food systems across Africa, including as the lead partner on IDRC's AI for Agriculture (AI4D) program, which also spans Latin America and Asia and is co-funded by the UK's FCDO.

He noted that grantees will be introduced to broader networks and potential mentors, and that further ARISE webinars will cover topics such as responsible AI and gender, equity and diversity and inclusion (GEDI) in AI. He confirmed that national chapter coordinators, present in each country where ATPS operates, are grantees' first point of contact for support and oversight, given ATPS's more than 40 years of operating history.

4.6 Remarks from National Chapter Coordinators

Prof. Ozor invited present national chapter coordinators to address the grantees directly.

- Prof. Michael Madukwe (National Chapter Coordinator, Nigeria) congratulated the cohort and urged grantees to strictly observe the terms of their contracts (“we are playing in the international arena — we should keep the rules, there are no excuses”), and offered to be a direct point of contact for Nigerian grantees on compliance and delivery.
- Mr. Wondwossen Belete (National Chapter Coordinator, Ethiopia) congratulated the awardees, noted that no Ethiopian applicants reached the final selection this round, and was encouraged by Prof. Ozor to intensify outreach ahead of future calls.
- Coordinators for Ghana and Burkina Faso were not present on the call to give remarks.

5. Question and Answer Session

The moderator opened a five-minute floor for questions. No participants raised urgent questions live on the call. Grantees were advised to route any further questions by email to ATPS coordinators or the Executive Director. A planned session on publishing, intellectual property, and acknowledgement guidelines was deferred — to be shared by email or scheduled into a future webinar.

6. Closing Remarks

Dr. Aniedu thanked all grantees, national chapter coordinators, ATPS's Executive Director, Senior Research Officer, Finance and Administration Officer, Project Officer, and staff for participating, confirmed that this was the first of a quarterly ARISE webinar series, and announced that the next webinar is planned for September 2026.