

Terms of Reference for Research Fellows_2026 Cohort

Position Title: Research Fellow

Location: Remote or Nairobi office without reallocation support

Application Deadline: June 30th, 2026.

Start Date: 20 July 2026

About PAL Network

The People's Action for Learning (PAL) Network is a south-south partnership of 17 member organizations working across Africa, Asia, and the Americas to support children's basic reading and numeracy skills. Member organizations conduct citizen-led assessments and action interventions aimed at improving foundational learning outcomes. The PAL Network accelerates and coordinates the shared work of its members toward achieving common goals and objectives and prides itself on being an organization that is for, created by, and led by the Global South.

About the Research Fellowship Program

The PAL Network Research Fellowship Programme is designed to support emerging and established researchers to generate innovative, policy-relevant, and equity-focused insights from large-scale foundational learning data across the Global South.

The 2026 Fellowship Cohort will focus specifically on analysis of PAL Network's 2025 International Common Assessment of Numeracy (ICAN) and International Common Assessment of Reading (ICAR) datasets, collected across 11 countries through nationally representative citizen-led household assessments.

Unlike school-based assessments, ICAN and ICAR are conducted at the household level and capture both in-school and out-of-school children, enabling deeper analysis of educational exclusion, learning inequities, and contextual drivers of learning outcomes.

The datasets include:

- Foundational literacy and numeracy assessment results;
- Household- and child-level demographic information;
- School participation and educational access indicators;
- Socio-economic and contextual variables;
- Geographic and population subgroup information;

The Fellowship aims to encourage researchers to conduct innovative secondary analyses that contribute to evidence-informed policy discussions on foundational learning, educational inequality, and inclusive education systems.

PAL Network particularly encourages proposals that:

- explore under-researched dimensions of learning inequality;
- use comparative cross-country approaches;
- connect learning outcomes with contextual and policy variables;
- integrate external datasets or policy indicators, where possible;

- examine structural drivers of learning disparities;
- generate actionable insights for policy and programming.

While PAL Network is already undertaking analyses related to gender, equity, and predictors of learning outcomes, fellows are encouraged to propose creative and complementary analytical directions that expand the use and interpretation of the datasets.

Selected fellows will receive technical guidance and mentorship from PAL Network researchers and may engage with PAL Network member organizations across participating countries. Fellows will become part of a collaborative research and peer-learning environment focused on strengthening the use of citizen-led assessment data for policy and practice.

PAL Network intends to support the dissemination and visibility of high-quality fellowship outputs through its research, advocacy, and communications platforms. Exceptional analyses may also contribute to conference presentations, policy engagement opportunities, working papers, or peer-reviewed publications developed in collaboration with PAL Network researchers and partners.

For more information about the program visit the page [here](https://palnetwork.org/research-fellowship-programme/).
<https://palnetwork.org/research-fellowship-programme/>

Duration

Fellowships will typically last between 3 to 5 months.

Responsibilities of the Fellows

Selected fellows will:

- Conduct original quantitative analyses using PAL Network's ICAN and ICAR datasets;
- Develop a focused research agenda aligned with their submitted proposal;
- Participate in methodological discussions and peer-learning sessions organized by PAL Network;
- Produce at least one high-quality analytical output, such as:
 - a working paper,
 - methodological note,
 - academic manuscript,
 - comparative analysis report,
- Present interim findings and final outputs to PAL Network and relevant stakeholders;
- Engage with PAL Network researchers and member organizations to ensure contextual relevance and policy usefulness of findings.

- Engage actively in mentorship, peer-learning, and knowledge-sharing activities organized by PAL Network throughout the fellowship period.

Research Proposal Requirement

Applicants are required to submit a concise research proposal (maximum 2 pages) outlining the analysis they intend to undertake during the fellowship period.

Applicants are expected to:

1. Access and familiarize themselves with PAL Network's ICAN/ICAR microdata hosted on the DataFirst platform, [here](https://www.datafirst.uct.ac.za/dataportal/index.php/catalog/1132):
<https://www.datafirst.uct.ac.za/dataportal/index.php/catalog/1132>
2. Review available documentation and codebooks;
3. Develop a feasible and policy-relevant analytical idea based on the datasets.

Applicants may propose:

- country-specific analyses;
- cross-country comparative studies;
- equity-focused analyses;
- methodological innovations;
- linkage of ICAN/ICAR data with external datasets or policy indicators;
- analyses connected to ongoing education reforms, programs, or development initiatives.

PAL Network encourages originality and analytical creativity.

Suggested Structure of the Proposal

Applicants should structure the proposal using the following headings:

1. Proposed Title
2. Research Question(s)
3. Rationale and Policy Relevance
4. Proposed Analytical Approach / Methodology
5. Variables or Dimensions of Interest
6. Potential Contribution to Foundational Learning Research or Policy
7. Proposed Outputs (e.g., paper, brief, dashboard, article)

The proposal should demonstrate:

- familiarity with the dataset;

- clarity of analytical direction;
- feasibility within a 3–5 month fellowship period;
- and potential relevance for policy or practice.

Eligibility Criteria

- Academic Background: Completed or in-progress master's or doctoral program in education measurement, data science, statistics, development studies, public policy, economics, or related fields. Undergraduate degrees with proven record of work experience will also be considered.
- Strong technical expertise in quantitative data analysis, with proficiency in Stata, R, or Python.
- Experience working with large-scale learning assessments or education datasets.
- Demonstrated ability to manage data systems and produce high-quality analysis and reporting.
- Excellent written communication skills and ability to present complex data in accessible formats.

Fellowship Support

Selected fellows will receive a fellowship stipend ranging between USD 4,000 and USD 6,000, depending on the scope, duration, and analytical complexity of the proposed work.

Application Process

To apply for the PAL Network Research Fellowship Program, applicants must complete the online application form available on the Research Fellowship page, [here](#). The application process requires the following:

- Online Application Form:
<https://palnetwork.org/research-fellowship-programme/fellowship-application/>
- Resume
- Proposal

Should you have questions, reach out to us at jobs@palnetwork.org or nkishani@palnetwork.org.