

African Leishmaniases Consortium call for Fellowships

Rationale Background

Africa still suffers from the scourge of Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTD) including Leishmaniases. Leishmaniases, a complex group of diseases, including cutaneous (CL), mucocutaneous (MCL) and visceral (VL) leishmaniases, affect the poorest of the poor in most countries in North, East and West Africa, with more than 30,000 annual cases. Visceral Leishmaniasis (VL) outbreaks in the past decades claimed the lives of more than 100,000 Africans. The epidemiology of the diseases is complex, involving many vectors and reservoir hosts responsible for transmission and spatio-temporal spread. The female sandfly vectors transmit the parasites through bites for their blood meal. The parasites are maintained in specific animal reservoirs including rodents, canids and other mammals including humans. In general, there is scarce data on the disease due to weak health systems, a result of lack of resources, expertise, and awareness.

The specific context in each country adds to the complexity of the epidemiology and control of leishmaniases in Africa. In humans, at least 20 species of the parasites from 3 subgenera cause Leishmaniases. In Africa, the species of the *Leishmania* subgenus include *L. donovani* and *L. infantum* causing Visceral Leishmaniasis (VL, Kala Azar), a fatal disease if left untreated. In 30-50% of cases, *L. donovani* VL is complicated upon cure by Post Kala Azar Dermal Leishmaniasis (PKDL), which could be more difficult to treat than VL itself. *L. tropica*, *L. major*, *L. aethiopica*, *L. infantum*, *L. donovani* cause a group of different diseases grouped under the term of cutaneous leishmaniasis (CL) despite the different clinical presentations and disease severity. *L. aethiopica* is also a cause of the debilitating mucocutaneous leishmaniasis (MCL) and diffuse cutaneous (DCL) leishmaniases. A new species recently discovered in West Africa from the new subgenus *mundinia* is associated with CL. CL and MCL leave lifelong disfiguring scars and mutilations, causing stigma and psychological impact in patients. Complications of DCL are life threatening. Levels of asymptomatic infections can be variable. The prevalence of the different clinical manifestations also varies from one geographical area to another due to various levels of endemicity of these species. The zoonotic *L. major* is encountered in North, West and East Africa. *L. tropica*, which transmission is thought to be mostly zoonotic, is endemic in North and East Africa. *L. aethiopica* is mainly described in Ethiopia. The zoonotic *L. infantum* is endemic in North Africa, and countries in West Africa report its occurrence and sporadic outbreaks. The presence in East Africa was unconfirmed by molecular data, which assigned the visceralizing parasites to *L. donovani*. Likewise, the earlier taxonomic status of *L. archibaldi*, causing VL and CL, described in East Africa, was revised and the parasites are now assigned to *L. donovani*. Transmission of *L. donovani* is anthroponotic and PKDL is thought to be a reservoir form of the disease during interepidemic periods. However, involvement of animal reservoirs is hypothesized.

The African Leishmaniases Consortium

The African Leishmaniases Consortium (ALC) is a pioneering initiative dedicated to addressing the pressing public health challenges posed by leishmaniasis across the African continent. Comprised of a dynamic network of research leaders, healthcare professionals, and institutions, the ALC aims to advance scientific knowledge, enhance disease management, and foster collaborative efforts to translating innovations towards novel strategies and policy options to combat leishmaniases. By leveraging cutting-edge research, innovative technologies, community-based interventions, and use of evidence for policy options imperatives, the ALC

strives to reduce the burden of leishmaniasis and improve the quality of life for affected populations. The ALC's commitment to excellence and collaboration underscores its role as an important platform in the global fight against infectious diseases.

ALC Fellowships:

ALC is thrilled to announce the launch of fellowship program, offering unparalleled opportunities for individuals passionate about advancing research in the field and efforts towards control and elimination of leishmaniasis in Africa.

The ALC will offer **2 rounds** of calls for PhD and Postdoctoral fellowships and at least **1 round** for early/mid-career researchers fellowships, each tailored to address and benefit from targeted activities of the 7 Research Project Priority Networks, and dedicated to foster efforts on priorities for control and elimination in the field of leishmaniasis. These fellowships aim to foster advanced research, capacity building, mentorship and collaboration among emerging scientists and seasoned researchers. Each round of the ALC Call will focus on distinct research and elimination priority areas, ensuring a comprehensive approach to tackling the multifaceted challenges of control and elimination of leishmaniasis in Africa.

Fellowship categories:

The ALC fellowship program encompasses research and policy priority areas tailored to support the academic and professional development of talented individuals at different stages of their careers.

Each fellowship category provides unique benefits, including quality supervision, access to a mentorship program, research funding, and professional development opportunities, aimed at nurturing the next generation of leaders to contribute to the control and elimination of leishmaniasis in Africa.

1. **PhD Fellowships:** Designed for aspiring scholars willing to pursue doctoral studies in fields relevant to ALC objectives on leishmaniasis. Click [\[here\]](#) to learn more about eligibility criteria, application process, and benefits ([Link](#)).
2. **Postdoctoral Fellowships:** Tailored for early-career research capacity building for candidates who have recently been awarded a doctoral degree and are ready to gain further competencies for independent research projects. ([Link](#)).
3. **Early-Career Research Fellowships:** Geared towards promising established investigators in their early or mid-career having a track record of academic excellence and a commitment to advancing knowledge in the field and efforts on control and elimination of leishmaniasis in Africa through a career turn. ([Link](#))

To explore specific fellowship details and application guidelines, please click on the respective links provided above.

Important Dates

Fellowships category	Opening date	Closing date
PhD Fellowships	August 2024 October 2024	September 2024 December 2024
Postdoctoral Fellowships	August 2024 October 2024	September 2024 December 2024
Researcher Fellowships	January 2025	Mars 2025