

Please note the application process has been simplified as of November 18th.

Concept note: Accountable Adaptation Fellowship

Background

The [Accountable Adaptation](#) Initiative is launching a mini-grants programme. The programme is open to early to mid-career researchers from the Global South either based at African Universities and/or researchers working on topics focusing on adaptation in Africa. The programme is being run by the Africa Research and Impact Network (ARIN) and University College London (UCL). We are offering up to eight small grants for research into novel accountability mechanisms relating to climate change adaptation in Africa. The maximum grant size available is GBP 4,500.

Researchers will design and implement projects with overall responsibility for the research and grant management with the support of an academic mentor. ARIN and UCL will provide ongoing support, opportunities for networking and an in-person workshop to develop a publication. The projects will explore specific examples of improving accountability for adaptation in Africa.

Adaptation and accountability

Accountability refers to people or organisations being held responsible for their decisions, actions and their performance. Conventional accountability methods for climate adaptation such as results frameworks and indicators often meet the needs of international funders rather than national governments or local people wanting to check how their climate adaptation investments are being spent and how effective these are. There is a growing demand for more accountability in adaptation as well as a push towards a locally-led agenda, but building alternative models of accountability has been challenging. This mini-grant programme aims to trial and document different ways of thinking about accountability in adaptation.

Proposals

We are seeking proposals that document and analyse existing practices of accountability and those that trial and scope new ideas. Applicants are invited to formulate their own research design and case studies and should use the following for guidance.

Research projects could focus on:

- **Local actors:** How are local communities able to hold their government or international funders to account on adaptation progress? This could be through such as digital apps or tools, citizen science, use of scorecards, citizen's hearings or grievance mechanisms, websites tracking national adaptation progress or satisfaction ratings of different communities.
- **National actors:** How are national actors able to hold different government departments, international funders or other stakeholders to account? Projects could look at the role of parliamentarians, civil society or regional alliances, feedback to the multilateral funds or development partners, media strategies, satisfaction ratings on different projects, or sharing information through different tools for adaptation tracking.

Examples of projects could be:

- Working with a local partner or NGO using an innovative local mechanism in their adaptation work. Conducting interviews and/or focus groups to explore how the tool supports particular dimensions of accountability.
- Developing and testing your own tool or approach for tracking adaptation progress and reflecting on the process and outcomes. For example, developing a web-based platform or app to collect or showcase information and conducting user research as to how it might improve accountability
- Drawing on tools and mechanisms in other sectors like health or education to develop and test a tool on adaptation action and conduct action research on the process.
- Conducting a scoping study using documents and semi-structured interviews to find out what tools or information different stakeholders would find useful to improve accountability on adaptation in your national or local context.
- Designing a study that explores key issues in current accountability systems in adaptation such as aggregating results at the national level, inclusion in adaptation planning and reporting systems, data gaps and epistemic justice based on what data is collected, where and why.

We consider the dimensions in the table below to be important parts of accountability. Proposals should explain how the research will draw on one or more of these dimensions and how this will advance thinking around accountability in adaptation. Where possible please indicate the research literatures you will draw on in your study.

Figure 1: Dimensions of accountability (based on [Fisher, Green and Barnes, 2024](#))

Key dimensions for those seeking to hold others to account	Guiding notes
Capability and agency to engage	<i>People need a certain amount of resource and time to engage. Mechanisms here could be looking at how people can be supported to hold others to account for adaptation progress at the local or national level.</i>
Relevant information available and shared	<i>People need information on what has been funded, the climate risks, future scenarios. Projects here could look at how information has helped people take action or hold others to account. What formats have been useful? What information do audiences want or need? What information can be usefully tracked?</i>
Feedback channels to appropriate levels	<i>Feedback is often a key part of accountability and many accountability mechanisms focus on this dimension. Projects here could focus on how feedback has been collected in an inclusive way and how it has been fed into decision-making structures, with what effects.</i>

Effective in the short-term	<i>Metrics and proxies have been developed to assess short-term changes such as self-assessment tools, and measures of resilience and adaptive capacity. Projects here could look at what dimensions have been most useful for holding others to account and highlighting any problems or successes.</i>
Effective in the long-term and supports aspirations for the future	<i>Very few measures include a longer-term perspective on adaptation and how adaptation supports people to realise their aspirations for the future. Projects here could look at how different ideas of the future can be captured, how non-linear changes to the climate and aspects such as migration can be considered and tracked in adaptation progress.</i>
Avoids displacing risk onto others	<i>This aspect of accountability is avoiding putting risk onto others and maladaptation. Projects might include how maladaptation has been addressed in different projects and how any maladaptive effects identified have been addressed.</i>
Appropriate change or sanction follows. Can be policy/political change, or soft sanctions such as reputational damage.	<i>Are there any examples of when accountability mechanisms have caused changes in national or international approaches? What led to these changes?</i>

Details/practicalities

Grants will be a GBP 3,000 honorarium to each researcher as a contribution to the work involved and up to GBP 1,500 for national research costs if needed based on actual expenditure. The grants will be disbursed in early-mid 2025 and the work of data collection and output generation should take place in the first six months of 2025. ARIN will host a writing workshop in Nairobi in the third quarter of 2025 and the costs of attending the write-shop will be met in addition to the initial grant. Each grantee will be responsible for producing a working paper and we will publish these online as a compendium of case studies and organise sharing opportunities with relevant research and policy communities. We will also support grantees to publish these studies in the peer-reviewed literature and if there is interest, we will produce a special issue or co-authored article from the studies.

Each successful grantee will be paired with an academic mentor. This person will be a senior researcher with relevant expertise and experience who will provide guidance. Applications can include suggested mentors with justification or alternatively ARIN and UCL will provide a suitable mentor for successful grantees. Successful grantees will also have access to range of support and networks beyond their mentor.

Application process

Complete applications should be sent to E.akinyi@arin-africa.org and irdr.accountableadaptation@ucl.ac.uk, copying e.kowenje@arin-africa.org. The applications should be sent by Wednesday 1st January 2025.

Applications should include:

- Written proposal of no more than [2 pages];
- CV and letter of motivation.
- Short indicative budget detailing direct costs if needed;
- The contact details of two referees (including email addresses) who will be available between 1-15 January if needed.
- If you are offered a grant we will need to see evidence of your highest academic qualification before signing the fellowship agreement.

Applications will be reviewed against the following criteria:

- Originality and contribution;
- Feasibility of proposed work;
- Alignment with Accountable Adaptation dimensions of accountability (figure 1);
- Track record and motivation of applicant.

Successful applicants will be notified by Friday 17th January 2025. Successful applicants will receive written feedback on their proposed research design and budget, where necessary, and invited to re-submit reflecting any changes by Friday 31st January 2025.