Africa Early Years Fellowship

Summary

The World Bank’s Early Learning Partnership (ELP) works closely with country governments and World Bank country teams across regions to promote investments in the early years and support early learning and early childhood development (ECD). Demand for expertise in the early years is increasing and exceeds current capacity, especially in the Africa region. The ELP is launching the Africa Early Years Fellowship to recruit a cadre of young African professionals to support governments and World Bank teams to scale up investments in the early years. The Fellowship will build capacity within countries in the Africa region by developing a cohort of young professionals with technical and operational skills to support increased investments in the early years.

Fellows will receive cross-sectoral training and work experience, working across education, health, nutrition, social protection and other relevant sectors. Well-prepared young professionals from Africa can reduce over-reliance on international consultants and ensure countries have the domestic capacity to respond to the urgent need to promote child development and improve early learning opportunities. The Fellowship will be a path to develop a sustainable and skilled workforce to support analytical work and operations on the African Continent to increase investments in the early years.

Background

A child’s earliest years present a window of opportunity to address inequality and improve outcomes later in life. Investing in young children is critical to create opportunities for all children to grow into healthy, educated, and capable people. The benefits of early investments accrue to individual children and to society broadly, and can be leveraged to influence diverse policy objectives. As understanding of the importance of early investments grows, demand for ECD services is increasing. However, each year nearly 250 million children fail to reach their developmental potential due to poverty, chronic malnutrition and a lack of appropriate care and early stimulation; a disproportionate number of these children live in the Africa region.

Children falling behind in their cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional development are more likely to: enter school late, repeat grades, get poor grades, drop out in primary school, suffer poorer health throughout life, be less productive and earn less, and engage in high-risk behavior. This lost potential has significant implications for countries’ development and potential to emerge as productive, innovative and stable societies and economies. This underdeveloped human capital also represents a major barrier to achieving the World Bank Group’s twin goals of reducing poverty and promoting prosperity.
Investing in the early years and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which include a number of targets related to early childhood, is critical to create opportunities for all children to grow into healthy, educated, and capable adults. The World Bank is committed to setting ambitious, medium-term milestones to accelerate progress towards the SDGs, to be achieved through a measurable scale up of the World Bank’s investment in the early years by 2020. This strengthened focus on the early years by the World Bank builds upon existing initiatives and mechanisms to support country governments.

African governments are increasingly requesting support to scale up investments in the early years and demand from parents is growing as well. Stunting rates remain high, evidencing chronic malnutrition. Access to pre-primary school on the Continent has increased from 12% in 2000 to slightly below 20% today. Africa faces a crucial moment for early learning: many countries are announcing universal preschool expansion; however, some policies are not accompanied by adequate plans to ensure quality, which could put young children at risk. In addition to the entry point of early learning, there are many opportunities to promote early stimulation, increased parental knowledge and multi-sectoral approaches to support young children’s development.

The Early Learning Partnership (ELP) is a multi-donor trust fund (MDTF), managed by the World Bank, which provides resources and technical assistance to support ECD and early learning around the world. The ELP engages closely with other international agencies, bilateral donors, academia, civil society and foundations. The ELP influences early childhood programs and policies through two streams of work: 1) Direct funding for country level activities to achieve countries’ early learning goals; and 2) Global analytical work and action research to improve existing programs and fill knowledge gaps. The ELP team, based in Washington, DC, works closely with World Bank staff and client countries around the world to carry out research and operational/project work. Currently, the demand for ECD/early learning expertise exceeds available team capacity, especially in the Africa region.

The ELP is launching the Africa Early Years Fellowship to recruit young African professionals to support country governments and World Bank teams to increase investments in the early years and improve early learning opportunities and outcomes for young children, especially the most disadvantaged.

**Program Description**

The World Bank seeks to recruit a cohort of young African professionals interested in a career in early childhood development. The objectives of the Africa Early Years Fellowship are to:

- Improve the quality of ECD/early learning analytical work and program implementation in select African countries by increasing the number of experienced
professionals available to advise and support country governments and World Bank teams

- Build the capacity of young African professionals in the field to respond to client demands in ECD/early learning, reducing reliance on technical assistance from abroad
- Raise the profile of the ECD/early learning sub-sector among young African professionals by demonstrating it can be a viable and prestigious field of study and work

The fellowship will be for one year, initially, and is renewable for a second year, based on fellow’s performance and World Bank needs. Fellows will be based in African countries; current high priority countries for the fellowship include Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Tanzania. Fellows should be based in-country or willing to relocate (with minor compensation). Each fellow will have a work program focused on one or two countries. Fellows might also engage in analytical work at the cross-national level.

Fellows will take part in an ongoing professional development program designed to strengthen fellows’ technical skills in ECD/early learning and their understanding of World Bank operations. The professional development program will include an initial session at the World Bank’s headquarters in Washington, DC.

Fellows will be hired as Short Term Consultants for one year, with a second year renewable, based on performance and continued work program demand. Selection and compensation are competitive.

Fellows’ specific duties and responsibilities might include:

- Support World Bank Task Teams to design or implement operations in ECD/early learning or a related field
- Support country and core teams in activities associated with the Investing in the Early Years initiative
- Support countries’ early learning research agenda associated with the World Bank Early Learning Systems Research Program
- Contribute to analytical work in ECD/early learning or related fields
- Coordinate initiatives to strengthen the capacity of local academic institutions in early learning and ECD

Regardless of each fellow’s specific work arrangement, all fellows will be considered part of the ELP core team and will engage with ELP leadership on a regular basis.

**Required Profile**
The ELP is looking for candidates with the following profile to participate in the Africa Early Years Fellowship:

- African national
- 25-40 years of age
- Educational and professional experience in ECD/early learning
  - Graduate degree in a relevant field (including education, economics, statistics, health and nutrition, and social service) and at least 3 years of professional experience in education, health and nutrition or social protection, with preference for previous work in ECD/early learning; OR
  - Undergraduate degree in a relevant field (including education, economics, statistics, health and nutrition, and social service) AND at least 5 years of professional experience in education, health and nutrition or social protection, with preference for previous work in ECD/early learning
- Functional experience in economics, evaluation, project design and operations, policy dialogue, or advocacy desired
- Experience in the public sector, civil society, or multilateral organization preferred
- Demonstrated interest in ECD/early learning
- Demonstrated high potential and commitment to ECD and/or human development in Africa
- Strong analytical skills
- Strong written communication skills and ability to work well in teams, including with senior officials
- Ability to work effectively remotely
- Fluency in English required of all candidates; fluency in French or Portuguese required of candidates interested in working in francophone or lusophone countries

**Application Process and Timeline**

To apply, please submit a completed application form and resume by **October 20, 2016**. Only short-listed candidates will be contacted. Fellows will be selected by December 2016 and will start work in January 2017.