

Call for bilateral academic and scientific cooperation on developing frugal AI

Cooperation in the field of digital & green innovation

As part of its new project of cooperation in digital & green innovation, the French Embassy is organizing a call for academic and scientific exchanges between partners in France, South Africa, Lesotho and Malawi.

Context

The digital transformation of the economy and the imperative to move towards a more sustainable development model are two major trends with great potential to transform societies, particularly in emerging markets. However, these trends are often considered in isolation from one another, or even seen as conflicting. Yet the potential of a twin transition to drive sustainable and inclusive development is significant.

Building on the AI Action Summit in Paris in February 2025, a new initiative by the French Embassy aims to support innovators (entrepreneurs and researchers) in South Africa, Malawi and Lesotho who are contributing to the deployment of a digital and green economy, either by using technology to address environmental challenges (clean and low-carbon energies, etc.) or by helping to make digital technology more resource-efficient, and to connect them to the dynamic French greentech ecosystem to promote closer ties between our countries through this dual transition.

This call aims to support **mobility between academics and scientists from South Africa, Lesotho or Malawi and France**, with the goal of advancing the development of **AI models with a low environmental footprint**. Actions may include, for example: short-term mobility or researcher residencies, with a view to sharing knowledge, designing joint projects, facilitating scientific networks, and establishing new partnerships.

You can send your applications and questions to by emailing science@ambafrance-rsa.org **until Sunday October 12th included**. Please ensure that your partner is included in the Cc field of your application messages.

Guidelines

Participants must be affiliated with public institutions conducting research activities in the countries concerned (at least one from France and at least one from South Africa, Lesotho or Malawi). Private organizations may participate, provided they are self-financed.

We expect most projects to fall in the €5,000 — €7,000 € range. Projects involving larger sums must be justified accordingly and broken down into several distinct actions (with corresponding budgets). Such a breakdown may also be proposed for projects involving smaller sums. All actions must be completed in full by **December 2026 included**.

Once all applications have been received, the jury may propose that certain candidates consider only some of the proposed actions and the corresponding budget. This counterproposal does not constitute a decision. Candidates must then respond as soon as possible to indicate whether they agree to submit the specified partial application.

If accepted, funding will be paid in the form of a grant to a legal entity, preferably the French partner, at the jury's discretion in October 2025.

The jury will pay particular attention to: 1) the complementarity of the contributions made by the French and African teams; 2) the reciprocity of exchanges; 3) the impact on concrete applications (participation from a start-up or an expression of interest will be viewed favourably).

To calculate the amounts requested, we recommend you use the following parameters.

The estimated cost of a return flight is:

- € 1,000 between France and South Africa;
- € 1,200 between France and Lesotho;
- € 1,210 between France and Malawi.

The estimated daily cost of an expert's stay is:

- € 150 / day for an expert travelling to France;
- € 138 / day for an expert travelling to South Africa;
- € 120 / day for an expert travelling to Lesotho;
- € 101 / day for an expert travelling to Malawi.

The estimated cost of a study or research scholarship to France is (including the payment of an allowance and related expenses):

- € 2,050 / month for a PhD student or young researcher travelling to France (including a stipend of around 1,700 €/month)
- € 2,250 / month for a researcher, having a PhD for more than 5 years' experience, travelling to France (including an allowance of € 2'055 /month)
- € 1,200 / month for a bachelor's or master's student travelling to France (including an allowance of € 920 month); please note that to be eligible for a scholarship, the student must be enrolled in a French university.

The estimated cost of a study or research scholarship to South Africa, Lesotho, or Malawi is assumed to be equal to or less than the above values.

These values are given as a guide and can be adapted to reflect particular circumstances.

Application

African Partner

☐ South Africa

☐ Lesotho

☐ Malawi

Name, surname: Cliquez ou appuyez ici pour entrer du texte.

Institution: Cliquez ou appuyez ici pour entrer du texte.

Title or Role: Cliquez ou appuyez ici pour entrer du texte.

Partenaire français

Nom, prénom : Cliquez ou appuyez ici pour entrer du texte.

Laboratoire : Cliquez ou appuyez ici pour entrer du texte.

Université ou établissement : Cliquez ou appuyez ici pour entrer du texte.

Titre, rôle : Cliquez ou appuyez ici pour entrer du texte.

Proposal

Project title:

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Amount of grant requested (€): Cliquez ou appuyez ici pour entrer du texte.

Objectifs of the action (1 to 3 lines):

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Context (history of cooperation, challenges):

Cliquez ou appuyez ici pour entrer du texte.

Detailed description of the project and specific actions planned (1 to 3 paragraphs):

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Budget and breakdown of expenditure:

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Direct and indirect beneficiaries of the project (number and quality):

Cliquez ou appuyez ici pour entrer du texte.

Human resources involved (number of participants, employees, volunteers):

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Material resources involved (if relevant):

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Project implementation schedule:

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Final outputs:

Cliquez ou appuyez ici pour entrer du texte.

Other potential financing:

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Any other comment:

Cliquez ou appuyez ici pour entrer du texte.