



Call for research proposals
Case studies of innovation for scaling renewable energy in
Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean
Terms of reference
Proposals due Jan 12, 2026 (8pm UTC)

Background

The [Impulsouth Initiative](#)¹, led by [Fundación Avina](#) and [United Nations University \(UNU-VIE\)](#), with funding from the [International Development Research Center \(IDRC\)](#), launches a call for research proposals to better understand the potential for governments, businesses, NGOs and other stakeholders to scale renewable energy technologies (RETs) in the Global South. Our goal is to identify the technological, sociopolitical, financial and cultural conditions that shape the uptake of renewable energy technologies (RET).

We seek to understand how innovation efforts by businesses, governments, NGOs and other stakeholders can accelerate the uptake of RETs by vulnerable groups, and how such efforts can lead to tangible improvements in jobs, income, gender equality, and climate-change resilience and mitigation. Recently, research has shed light on the potential economic and environmental benefits of RETs for households, farmers and small businesses. However, in some contexts, the expansion of RETs has been slower than expected due to low consumer demand, limited finance options, scarce services for equipment purchase, maintenance and repair, and poor coordination among stakeholders (e.g. power companies, regulators, suppliers, and grid operators).

Innovation can take various forms, from innovation in technology design, application of existing technologies in new contexts, regulatory innovation that makes energy technologies more accessible, or new ways of coordination among stakeholders. We are especially interested in nature and variety of innovation that includes women, youth farmers and small-scale entrepreneurs.

¹ The **Impulsouth Initiative** aims to strengthen the capacity of local organizations (e.g. universities, NGOs, enterprise support organizations, sectoral associations and regional and international technical policy associations) to advance a just energy transition across the Global South. Impulsouth focuses on building organizational capacity through training, reflection, dialogue and local action. Impulsouth has established a Community of Practice to foster knowledge exchange and peer learning and has developed and implemented a Training of Trainers course to strengthen the capacities of organizations working to advance energy transitions in their countries. In addition, the initiative offers the *Just Energy Transition Learning and Innovation Grants* that enable participating organizations to put ideas into action. This call for research looks to address a gap in the training curriculum: Innovation opportunities for scaling RETs with vulnerable groups.

Areas of interest

This call seeks to generate evidence and insights that enrich strategies to scale RETs with vulnerable groups in the Global South. The findings will serve two purposes: 1) to expand the global discussion on scaling strategies and actions for RETs and 2) enrich the *Impulsouth Training of Trainers* course, thus helping to strengthen future capacity-building efforts across participating countries.

The call provides funding to explore cases where strategies and actions have sought to expand RETs with vulnerable populations (e.g. low-income rural and urban households, indigenous groups, community associations, women and small-scale businesses). The following are examples of approaches and strategies that would be of interest for case-study research funding through this call:

- new financial instruments designed to reduce the upfront costs of RETs
- collaboration efforts between independent businesses/organizations to reduce costs, expand services, or stimulate demand
- regulatory changes aimed at reducing the costs for RETs for consumers or providing incentives for sellers to expand sales
- campaigns designed to change consumer perceptions and behaviors to build demand for RETs
- targeted subsidies to incentivize RET uptake by consumers, farmers and small-business owners
- inclusive, multistakeholder engagements to agree on the best pathways for RET adoption.

The initiative will fund six to eight research products. Each research proposal will receive between USD 20,000-40,000.

What we aim to learn

Each case study funded through this call will focus on an intervention (or set of interventions) designed to expand RETs with vulnerable populations. The intervention may be led by a private business, an enterprise support organization, an NGO, a sectoral association, or a government agency, and be on-going (but mature enough for changes to be observed) or recently completed. The research will seek to shed light on successes (failures) of the intervention, and the critical factors that enabled success (failure). Among the specific issues to be addressed are:

- nature of interventions to scale RETs
- growth of RET uptake among vulnerable groups
- appropriateness of assumptions the underpin efforts to scale RETs
- barriers that prevent uptake by women, youth, and ethnic minorities
- access to essential services, infrastructure, and financing
- demand by households and small businesses
- supply of RETs, including services for maintenance and repair

Eligibility criteria

Please consider the following eligibility criteria when considering a proposal submission:

- Proposals will be led by research centers and universities with strong interest in energy transitions in the global South and demonstrated capacities to lead applied research. Organizations based in Latin America and the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa are eligible to apply.
- We strongly encourage collaborations between research organizations and development practitioners, private businesses, enterprise support organizations, sectoral associations and government agencies.
- Proposals must be grounded in a solid and proven collaboration between a stakeholder actively implementing (or with the capacity to implement) energy-related initiatives, and a research organization with relevant and demonstrated expertise to carry out the proposed study.
- Geographical Scope for research: Latin America, the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa

Expectations

In addition to the design and implementation of the proposal research, the engagement between the leads of selected proposals and the Impulsouth initiative will include the following activities:

- Participation in the Impulsouth Community of Practice (CoP): Lead research organizations are expected to engage with Impulsouth's CoP throughout the process. This includes attending scheduled meetings, contributing to discussions, and integrating insights from the CoP into their research reflections. Most meetings are conducted in English. Interpretation may be available.
- Attendance at a Writeshop (August/September 2026): Researchers will take part in a collaborative writing workshop designed to refine their research brief (see below).
- Elaboration of a research brief (approx. 3,000 words): Each team will produce well-structured research brief summarizing the development challenge, research opportunity, research findings and recommendations.
- Presentation in a webinar: Researchers will present their findings and recommendations in a webinar, sharing lessons learned and engaging with a broader audience.

Evaluation criteria

- Innovation and originality of proposed research
- Strength of partnerships
- Feasibility of the proposal and methodological clarity is encouraged
- Potential impact of research results on policy and practice

Selection committee

The selection committee will be composed of a member from Fundación Avina, a member from United Nations University, a member from IDRC, and one external expert.

Key dates

November 20, 2025	Launch of the call for proposals
December 10, 2025, 2 pm UTC	Virtual informative session
January 12, 2025, 8 pm UTC	Deadline for proposal submission
January 23, 2026	Announcement of preselected proposals and request for legal and administrative documents
January 28, 2026	Recommendations sent to leads of preselected proposals
February 2nd, 2026	Submission of final version of research projects
February 6, 2026	Signing of grant agreement
February – August 2026	Research implementation period
August/September 2026	Writeshop (dates, place to be determined)
September – October 2026	Research brief elaboration
November 2026	Webinar presentations (date to be determined)

How to apply

Submit your application until January 12, 8 pm (UTC) via this [Google Form](#), including:

- Research proposal and budget (max 4 pages), according to provided templates.
- Two-page CV(s) of principal researcher
- Two examples of previous research publications, such as briefs or articles, where the lead researcher is the first or second author

Applications should be presented in English.

For questions, please contact Marko Carrasco at marko.carrasco@avina.net.