

## Announcements // Annonces

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### African Fellowships for Research in Indigenous and Alternative Knowledge (AFRIAK)

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#### CONFERENCE CALL FOR PAPERS

**Deadline: 15 May 2025**

The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) is pleased to announce a call for proposals for a new research and fellowship programme, the **African Fellowships for Research in Indigenous and Alternative Knowledges (AFRIAK)**. This programme is offered with the support of the Mastercard Foundation as part of the Foundation's commitment to advance education and skills for young people in Africa, and in recognition of the contribution of the late Ghanaian intellectual, Dr Sulley Gariba, in advocating for the place of African knowledge in Research and Evaluation.

This programme seeks to implement an innovative approach to training a new generation of young people to design research projects and produce knowledge as a partnership between academic mentors on the one hand and bearers of Indigenous knowledge on the other. This approach will privilege local, Indigenous and endogenous knowledge as forms of knowledge or knowledge systems that are deeply embedded in communities and closely tied to their lived experiences. Although these forms of knowledge may be geographically proximate to the young people in Africa, they remain inaccessible to them partly because of the dominance of Western formats of learning in our school and university curriculum

and partly owing to the gerontocratic nature of our communities, where such knowledge is preserved for a few, predominantly male, knowledge-bearers. The AFRIAK approach is innovative because it re-directs us to use what we have in our communities and invites us to appreciate the many ways in which *what we have* in our communities is used, preserved and disseminated.

At its core, AFRIAK is premised on the conviction that training a new cadre of young people with the skills to produce and apply knowledge derived from Indigenous and local realities will generate unique but useable data. This data, we believe, contains important knowledge that will support policy interventions aimed at creating fulfilling livelihoods for young people and Indigenous or local communities.

We acknowledge that the notion of 'Indigenous' is contested. Its colonial pedigree carries pejorative connotations. This research and fellowship programme seeks to critically examine and strip the term of its negative connotations, allowing for the full value of 'what we have' in our communities to be recognised and appreciated.

Previous research at CODESRIA, led by the Beninois philosopher, Paulin Hountondji, located the problematic use of the notion to its colonial heritage and persisting

scientific dependence in Africa today.<sup>1</sup> In colonised societies, 'Indigenous' was contrasted with 'exotic', implying that the former was native, traditional, primitive and resistant to change. Indigenous knowledge (IK) was thus framed as vernacular, uncivilised, deprived and superstitious. Hountondji analysed these forms of knowledge, noting that the persistence of the pejorative connotations made sense only in contexts of persisting extraversion of knowledge in Africa.<sup>2</sup> He preferred the notion of 'endogenous' to 'Indigenous' arguing that this reframing would recentre Africa in knowledge production. This programme, while acknowledging these debates and the historical baggage many terms carry, uses the notion of 'Indigenous knowledge' to refer to what is organic to society, to borrow Gramsci's concept of the organic intellectual. It underscores the idea of 'using what we have', while recognising that what we have in society is not static nor does it exist in splendid isolation; rather, it evolves through continuous interaction with other knowledge systems.<sup>3</sup>

The AFRIAK research and fellowship project will involve three related activities. These are:

1. A research, training and mentorship fellowship programme for young people.
2. Policy convenings.
3. An alumni and community of practice in Indigenous and alternative knowledge network.

The three interrelated programme activities are designed to facilitate the attainment of the following outcomes:

- a) Create opportunities and spaces for young researchers to engage in multidisciplinary knowledge production and apply it jointly with academics, activists, policy practitioners and IK-bearers and -keepers.
- b) Facilitate collaborative research that will minimise the isolation of Indigenous knowledge-bearers/keepers/scholars from other knowledge-bearers or -keepers and help eliminate asymmetries and silos within knowledge production systems.
- c) Expand opportunities to enhance the capacity of participants, especially those who have been historically or culturally marginalised, to acquire and inquire into knowledges embedded in communities.
- d) Transform knowledge into action while enhancing its capacity to create dignified and fulfilling work opportunities for young people in several sectors, including the creative sector; agriculture and agri-foods systems; digital systems, and other industries; in curriculum development, pedagogy and learning; nutrition and climate health;

and in human, plant and animal health, among other sectors with pressing needs and opportunities in Africa.

- e) Facilitate the emergence of a critical mass of young women researchers who will engage with and train future generations of IK research and practices, including embracing new technologies such as AI to mobilise and apply IK.

Overall, the project is expected to lead to the uptake and scaling of Indigenous and other forms of alternative knowledge as the basis for supporting dignified livelihood strategies for young people and communities, in key sectors including those highlighted above. Proposals submitted under this call should revolve around the following areas:

- a) Indigenous knowledge and methods of knowing.
- b) Indigenous medical science and practices.
- c) Indigenous knowledge, the creative sector and systems of entrepreneurship.
- d) Agriculture and agri-foods systems.
- e) Mobilising digital systems for Indigenous knowledge in Africa.
- f) Indigenous pedagogies and curriculum development.
- g) Indigenous knowledge in social capital development.
- h) Indigenous technologies and sustainable development.
- i) Indigenous knowledge and climate change.
- j) IK heritage in nutrition and climate health.
- k) Indigenous languages and science.
- l) Indigenous knowledge, religion and spirituality science.
- m) Indigenous science and ecological sustainability.

### Target for this call

This call targets young people aged 24 and 35 years, engaged in research and knowledge production activities that draw, or aspire to draw, on Indigenous or local knowledge perspectives. The targeted youth should be based in formal research and knowledge institutions or Indigenous knowledge research centres in Africa. Practitioners with formal education qualifications, who are engaged in activities that draw on the application of Indigenous or local knowledge perspectives, are also encouraged to apply. **Up to 70 per cent of the young people to be selected for the fellowship will be young women.** Applicants should highlight their research area/theme of interest, aligning with CODESRIA's priority areas identified above.

## Structure and duration of fellowship

The fellowship includes induction, mid-term institute, fieldwork, dissemination activities and post-fellowship activities, where alumni will contribute to a community of practice in Indigenous and other knowledge systems. Fellows will be grouped into teams of seven, accompanied by two bearers of Indigenous or local knowledge and an academic mentor. Conceptualisation of the research, its execution, and dissemination approaches will be co-developed between the young fellows, academic mentors and bearers of Indigenous knowledge. The duration of the fellowship, including fieldwork and dissemination, will be seven months. Throughout the fellowship, research teams will receive mentorship and support from intellectual hubs, which will be identified and constituted by CODESRIA to enhance scholarly and community engagement.

## Application modalities

**Individual and group applications are welcome.**

**Individual applicants are required to submit the following:**

1. A one-page CV that indicates, among other details, date of birth and current occupation or engagement and institutional affiliation.
2. A two-page concept note that identifies a topic; explains how that theme is aligned with a priority area that CODESRIA has itemised; provides a justification for the choice of theme and how compelling it is; and summarises the key steps the individual aims to go through to achieve the outcomes from the research and fellowship process.
3. A one-page reference letter from two referees familiar with the work of the applicant.

**Group applicants (maximum of 7 persons) are required to submit the following:**

1. A one-page CV for each of the group members to be submitted as one consolidated document. Each CV should indicate, among other details, date of birth and current occupation or engagement and institutional affiliation. **The Principal Investigator or Group Leader must be clearly identified at the top of the set of CVs.**
2. A two-page concept note that identifies a topic; explains how that theme is aligned with a priority area that CODESRIA has itemised; provides a justification for the choice of theme and how compelling it is; and summarises the key steps the group aims to go through to achieve the outcomes from the research and fellowship process.
3. Two letters of reference that specifically endorse the group, rather than individual members.

Applications should be submitted through the CODESRIA portal reserved for this fellowship, at <https://submission.codesria.org/african-fellowships-for-research-in-indigenous-and-alternative-knowledges-afriak/>

**The deadline for applications is 15 May 2025.**

## Notes

1. Paulin Hountondji, 'Scientific Dependence in Africa Today', in *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 21, No. 3, 1990.
2. Paulin Hountondji, 'Recherche et extraversion: éléments pour une sociologie de la science dans les pays de la périphérie', in *Africa Development / Afrique et Développement*, Vol. 15, No. 3/4, 1990.
3. There are similar discussions along these lines led by Yuen Yuen Ang, the Alfred Chandler Chair Professor of Political Economy at Johns Hopkins University and author of the *How China Escaped the Poverty Trap*.