

CODESRIA

2019 Democratic Governance Institute

Theme: Digital Technologies and Election Management in Africa's Democratisation Processes.

Call for Director, Resource Persons and Laureates

Application Deadlines:

Director: 31st March 2019

Resource Persons: 31st March 2019

Laureates: 30th April 2019

Date for the institute: 15th-26th July 2019

Venue: Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, CODESRIA, invites proposal submissions from African academics and researchers to participate in the 2019 session of the Democratic Governance Institute, which will take place in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire from July 15th-26th 2019. *A limited number of non- African academics and researchers from within and outside the continent who will submit proposals and qualify will be selected to attend if they can fund the cost of their participation.*

The theme selected for the 2019 session of the Democratic Governance Institute is *"Digital Technologies and Election Management in Africa's Democratisation Processes."* The choice of the theme is informed by current trends on the continent with respect to the conduct and management of elections as a critical component of democratic evolution. The theme also speaks to the broad concerns that informed the Council to launch an annual 'Democratic Governance Institute' as part of its scientific work in 1992 and after. The launch was driven by the conviction that democratic states were better suited to spearhead Africa's development through long-term economic planning and the pursuit of inclusive development policies. In the 1990s, the yardstick for this democratisation process involved counting the number of African countries that had embraced multiparty politics. Later, the focus switched to elections and the management of the electoral process. Further, as elections became commonplace and were embraced even by most reluctant leaders and groups in society, the focus shifted to what safeguards there were to guarantee a credible process and outcome. The desire to ensure that the outcome of elections represented the true choice of people and therefore a reflection of the exercise of their sovereign will grew in intensity. However, with the onset of disputed electoral outcomes, some of them resulting in civil strife as has occurred since the 1990's, the faith placed in elections has ebbed as some analysts concluded the elections represented a "fading shadow of democracy". The contention has developed that political parties in power have undue influence on the electoral process and outcome, including in the constitution of election management bodies, on voting calendar and register and on funding the infrastructure for the conduct and transmission of election results. This influence gives them

advantages over their opponents. In the end, the manual electoral processes came in for blame for compromising the credibility of electoral process and outcomes.

A number of countries in Africa have over the last two decades resorted to various digital technologies to boost the quality of the electoral system. It is assumed that technology will enhance the quality of the electoral process and deepen the democratic culture. It is also assumed that this will have implications for the way the winners from a credible electoral contest exercise political power. Thus, recourse to digital technologies in the management of elections on the continent is meant to enhance the credibility and quality of the process, enable results that are acceptable to all and contribute to enhancing democratic accountability. The faith in digital technologies is anchored in their capacity to limit electoral fraud at the level of voter registration and manipulation of final counts and to ensure popular will is exercised. A nominal count shows that by 2015, 25 countries in the continent had conducted elections using some form of technology either in the whole electoral process (registration, voter verification, voting and transmission of results) or at least in part to try and enhance the credibility of the elections. But in none of the countries was the outcome of the elections acceptable to all the stakeholders.

The contestations over the outcome of elections conducted using some form or the other of digital technology raises the question whether the use of technology has limited electoral fraud, enhanced the quality of the electoral process and deepened citizens' trust in the electoral process or introduced new dimensions to electoral fraud. To what extent has the deployment of digital technology been a marker of an evolving democratic culture? What is worse has been instances where elections on the continent have been marred by real or manufactured technical hitches that have resulted in disputes over the electoral outcome. The contention has normally been that the electronic devices were manipulated to confer victory to one side. This is not vastly different from the kind of disputes that attended manually conducted elections. The only difference is that deployment of digital technologies was expected to cure the limitations of manual systems including making it difficult to manipulate the election process.

The conduct of elections worldwide is guided by a set of international electoral standards that aim at establishing norms of electoral conduct that ensure people's rights to choose political leaders and the system of governance they desire are safeguarded. These choices constitute the cornerstone of the democratic process. The international electoral standards draw primarily from Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and other articles in those documents related to the exercise of rights that are essential to democratic elections, and other human rights treaties, declarations and instruments. The African statement of commitment to these standards was contained in the African Union's *African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance* adopted in January 30, 2007 and entered into force in February 15, 2012. Core to these standards is an effort to safeguard the right of citizens to take part in government and public affairs, directly or indirectly, through freely chosen representatives, by exercising their right to vote and to be elected at credible periodic elections. Elections, it is anticipated in these instruments, shall be by universal and equal suffrage and the outcome representing the free expression of the will of the voters. The choice of methods for conducting elections (voter registration, verification of voters' register, actual voting, counting, transmission and verification of results), should be seen to promote this right of citizens at every level of the electoral process.

In the case of Africa, the reactions to outcomes of elections that have been conducted using digital technologies seem to suggest that these universal standards are not being met. Rather, like the case with manual elections management, digital technologies can actually be deployed to make the process of electoral fraud easier and deprive voters from genuine participation in the democratic process.

A survey conducted in 2014/2015 in 36 African countries by Afrobarometer, a Pan-African research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy shows that demand for democracy as the best form of government declined from 51% recorded during the 2011/2013 round of surveys to an average of 43 % of all Africans interviewed across 36 countries. Barely 35% of Africans surveyed in the same countries thought that the incumbents offered the desired kind of democratic leadership and, tellingly, an average of upward to 48% of the people surveyed did not believe in the quality of the electoral process. The 36 countries surveyed include the majority of the 25 countries that have deployed digital technologies in previous two elections covering the two rounds of surveys. The implications here are that while the embrace of multiparty politics seemed to signal acceptance of democracy in the continent, subsequent processes of election management have led to new levels of ‘choicelessness’. In essence, this gives added meaning to the notion of ‘choiceless democracies’ since the deployment of digital technologies to limit vote fraud have not restored citizens trust in the electoral process and undermined the essence of democratisation. Rather the process seems to dampen citizens trust in the feasibility of democracy and perhaps the feeling that digital technology may be facilitating vote fraud and disfranchisement.

The selection of the theme for the 2019 session of the Institute revolves around CODESRIA’s mandate to create platforms for academics and policymakers to engage and promote a culture of democratic values that allows Africans effectively to identify and tackle the governance issues confronting their continent. The issue of election management and the institutional framework of organizing elections in the continent in an atmosphere of sovereignty is one that the continent continues to grapple with in its attempts to deepen democracy, rule of law and foster economic development. It is anticipated that the theme will throw up the issue of the legitimacy of the state in Africa in organizing credible elections and what role the increased adoption of digital technologies plays in enhancing or undermining this state legitimacy. Further, the theme signals an interest in associated practices surrounding digital elections that affect individual rights. These include, but are not limited to, data mining as an electioneering strategy, targeting specific voters within certain electoral districts in ways that create potential violations for personal data privacy and thus undermine or abuse individual right to vote freely. Even more important is the behaviour of external actors who vend the digital technologies promising credible elections but are driven largely by economic interest. Engagement with these issues will give academics, policy-makers and activists a tool for reforming electoral practices to deepen democracy in the continent.

Organization:

The activities of all CODESRIA Institutes revolve around presentations made by the director, invited guest researchers, resource persons, and the participants whose applications for admission as laureates are successful. The sessions are led by a scientific director who, with the help of invited resource persons, ensures that the laureates are exposed to the range of research and policy issues generated by or arising from the theme of the Institute for which they are responsible. Open discussions drawing on books and articles relevant to the theme of a particular Institute or a specific topic within the theme are also encouraged. Each of the laureates selected to participate in any of the Council’s Institutes is required to prepare a

research paper to be presented in the course of the Institute. Laureates are expected to draw on the insights which they gain from the Institute in which they participate to produce a revised version of their research papers for consideration for publication by CODESRIA. For each Institute, the CODESRIA Documentation and Information Centre (CODICE) prepares a comprehensive bibliography on the theme of the year.

Application for Director

Those wishing to be considered for the position of scientific director of the Institute should be scholars with a proven track record of quality work and capacity to provide intellectual leadership. Directors are senior scholars known for their expertise in the theme of the session and for the originality of their thinking on the theme. They are recruited on the basis of a proposal they submit and which contains a detailed course outline covering methodological issues and approaches; the key concepts integral to an understanding of the subject of the Institute and the specific theme that will be focused upon; a thorough review of the state of the literature designed to expose laureates to different theoretical and empirical currents; a presentation on various sub-themes, case-studies and comparative examples relevant to the theme of the institute; and possible policy questions that are worth keeping in mind during the entire research process. Candidates for the position of director should also note that if their application is successful, they will be required to:

- participate in the selection of laureates;
- identify resource-persons to help lead discussions and debates;
- design the course for the session, including the specification of sub-themes;
- deliver a set of lectures and provide a critique of the papers presented by the resource persons and the laureates;
- Submit a written scientific report on the session.

In addition, the director is expected to (co-)edit the revised versions of the papers presented by the resource persons with a view to submitting them for publication in one of CODESRIA's collections. The director also assists CODESRIA in assessing the papers presented by laureates for publication as a special issue of Africa Development, working papers or as monographs.

Applicants for the position of Director should submit:

- an application letter;
- a proposal, not more than 15 pages in length, indicating the course outline and showing in what ways the course would be original and responsive to the needs of prospective laureates, specifically focusing on the issues to be covered from the point of view of concepts and methodology, a critical review of the literature, and the range of issues arising from the theme of the Institute;
- a detailed and up-to-date curriculum vitae; and
- three writing samples relevant to the theme.

Resource Persons

Lectures to be delivered at the institute are intended to offer laureates an opportunity to advance their reflections on the theme of the Institute and on their own research topics. Resource Persons are, therefore, senior scholars or scholars in their mid-career who have published extensively on the topic, and who have a significant contribution to make to the

debates on it. They will be expected to produce lecture materials which serve as think pieces that stimulate laureates to engage in discussion and debate around the lectures and the general body of literature available on the theme.

One selected, resource persons must:

- Submit a copy of their lectures for reproduction and distribution to participants not later than one week before the date of the lecture;
- Deliver their lectures, participate in debates and comment on the research proposals of the laureates;
- Review and submit the revised version of their research papers for consideration for publication by CODESRIA not later than two months following their presentation.

Applications for the position of resource person should include:

- an application letter;
- two writing samples relevant to the theme of the session;
- a curriculum vitae; and
- a proposal, not more than five (5) pages in length, outlining the issues to be covered in their proposed lecture.

Laureates

Applicants should be African researchers who have completed their university and /or professional training, with a proven capacity to carry out research on the theme of the Institute. Intellectuals active in the policy process and/or in social movements/civic organizations are also encouraged to apply. The number of places offered by CODESRIA at each session of its institutes is limited to fifteen (15) fellowships. Non-African scholars who are able to raise funds for their participation may also apply for a limited number of places.

Applications for Laureates should include:

- an application letter;
- a letter indicating institutional or organizational affiliation;
- a curriculum vitae;
- a research proposal, including a descriptive analysis of the work the applicant intends to undertake, an outline of the theoretical interest of the topic chosen by the applicant, and the relationship of the topic to the problematic and concerns of the theme of the 2019 Institute; and
- two reference letters from scholars and/or researchers known for their competence and expertise in the candidate's research area (geographic and disciplinary), including their names, addresses and telephone, e-mail, fax numbers.

An independent committee composed of outstanding African social scientists will select the candidates to be admitted to the institute.

All applications (for Director, Resource persons and laureates) should be sent as electronic documents to the CODESRIA Democratic Governance Institute portal using the link [**Governance Institute Submission**](#)