



2020 Democratic Governance Institute

Theme: Governing African Civil Society in a Context of Shrinking Civic Spaces.

Call for Director, Resource Persons and Laureates

Application Deadlines:

Director: 30th April 2020

Resource Persons: 30th April 2020

Laureates: 15th May 2020

Date for the Institute: July 13-24, 2020

Venue: Dar es Salam, Tanzania

The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, CODESRIA, invites proposals from academics, civil society actors and researchers based in African universities, civil society organizations and research institutions to participate in the 2020 session of the Democratic Governance institute, scheduled from July 13-24, 2020 in Dar es Salam, Tanzania. *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 2020 session of the Democratic Governance Institute is “*Governing African Civil Society in a Context of Shrinking Civic Spaces.*” The choice of the theme is informed by the need to intellectually examine trends that are constraining the spaces for civic engagement on the continent. The idea of “governing African civil society” as phrased here draws the attention of those submitting proposals to engage with the theme from three fronts. First is with official or non-official action undertaken by governments to foreclose civic spaces and undermine the legitimacy of civil society organizations. We hope applicants will explore what this means for the work of civil society in particular and the populations of disempowered citizens that benefit from interventions by civil society groups. The second front is from within the civil society organizations themselves. This refers to their internal structures and forms of engagement that might undermine their claims to credibility and provide ready ammunition for governments bent on using this as an excuse to constrict spaces for civic engagement. The third front is prospective and aims to examine ways in which civil society might better organize to protect the integrity of their engagements and expand spaces for civic engagement.

Over the last two decades, governments in Africa, working independently or taking advantage of prevailing economic trends driven by external actors, have made efforts to shrink the spaces

for civic engagement. A Freedom House Report (2019) documents that within the last 15 years, 12 African countries adopted legislation or policies that improperly constrained civil society organizations, six countries had anti-civil society legislations awaiting introduction while another six had introduced measures only to have them abandoned by the executive, rejected by the legislature, or invalidated by the courts. In all the cases, the laws and measures sought to empower the states to legally control the work of civil society especially in the area of human rights and civic engagement. Other efforts by governments have been extra-legal, including violence, blackmail, co-optation and overt support of government controlled CSOs often externally funded from sources that have an interest in controlling governments against the broader interests of the citizens. Either strategy, the overall objective has been to delegitimize civil society and civic engagement as legitimate space for citizens and cast doubt on the credibility of autonomous civic spheres that can activate and channel citizens' interests and demands.

This situation is not peculiar to Africa. Globally, governments are increasingly passing legislations that clawback on previously available spaces for civic action. The rise of illiberal populists both in North America and Europe has contributed to the steady decline of democratic values worldwide and threatened the survival of liberal institutions that served as a vanguard of civil society movements globally. African governments trying to foreclose spaces for civic activism therefore do so in the knowledge and comfort that globally, their actions will find positive resonance among major actors who previously supported the work of civil society. In some cases, ambassadors of Northern countries have been deployed locally to make a case for bilateral and multilateral partnerships for economic growth, something they cast as inconsistent with local civil society demands for basic freedoms of speech, assembly and movement.

Amid the onslaught from governments, civil society organizations also face internal governance challenges that attenuate their capacity to face threats from governments. This has taken various forms. In some countries, government-friendly civil society organizations have been nurtured and encouraged. These organizations operate in ways that legitimise government positions and act as a force for the status quo instead of challenging it. In other cases, there are noticeable schisms between the traditional civil society organizations and the more recent social-media savvy groups, which deploy social media as the new medium for civic activism. In others, the divide between human rights/governance civil society versus development civil society is encouraged. It is a reality that in some countries there are cases of bloggers, funded by politicians who use social media to undermine the work of other civic institutions. In such instances, governments bent on disrupting the work of civil society use such fissures to defuse any transformative agenda from civic activism, thus, creating doubts on what outcomes communities stand to gain from civic engagements. When civil society institutions start having internal challenges of governance and accountability, they undermine the very liberal ideas they are set up to protect and become easy prey to politicians.

The Institute will provide selected applicants with an opportunity to reflect more broadly on what the decline in liberal values means for civic engagement. The focus is on the emerging onslaught by governments on civic space in general and on civil society in particular. While engagements during the institute are expected to provide a mapping of the various strategies governments are deploying to close civic spaces, it will be equally important for proposals to examine the new tools civil society organizations need to re-invent activism and advocacy especially in fighting inequalities of all forms that perpetuate disempowerment of people and communities. More specifically, the institute will aim to relate this concerns on civic engagement to the gender questions, focusing more specifically to the situation of women and girls and how they variously experience the constriction of civic spaces and limit their

engagement. It is acknowledged that engagement in civic spaces is above all gendered and the shrinking of that space has a high propensity to increase the marginalization of girls, women, sexual minorities and those excluded from economic rights. Lastly, proposals should probe the question of how civil society organizations need to deal with issues relating to their internal governance structures so as to strengthen their legitimacy and build strong coalitions to safeguard their value among citizens, overcome the limitations being erected by intransigent governments and widen the space and legitimacy of local civic engagement.

Candidates submitting proposals for consideration as director, resource persons and laureates are encouraged to interrogate the theme more broadly as framed in the foregoing discussion, with a focus on deepening the theoretical knowledge and empirical data available.

Organization

The activities of all CODESRIA Institutes center on presentations by African researchers, Resource Persons and participants whose applications for participation have been successful. The sessions are led by a Director who, with the support of Resource Persons, ensures that the Laureates are exposed to a wide range of research material and policy thinking. Each Laureate is required to prepare a research paper to be presented during the Institute. The revised version of such a paper will undergo a peer review for publication by CODESRIA. The CODESRIA Documentation and Information Centre (CODICE) will provide participants with a comprehensive bibliography on the theme of the Institute. The Institute will be held in both English and French through simultaneous interpretation.

Eligibility and Selection

Director

The Director for the Institute should be a senior academic who is expected to provide intellectual leadership of the Institute. The Director should also have proven expertise and intellectual depth and originality of thinking on the theme of the Institute as evidenced from the record of research and publications. As part of the process, those wishing to be considered as Director should provide a 15-page proposal broadly reflecting on the theme of the institute and a course outline covering ten days and indicating the main topics to be covered with laureates during the institute.

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.

The Director will (co) edit the revised versions of the papers presented by the Resource Persons and the Laureates with a view to submitting them to CODESRIA for publication

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 sufficiently on the theme, 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. They should also contribute to the comprehensive bibliography developed by CODICE.

Once 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 the institutes is limited to fifteen (15) fellowships. Non-African scholars who can 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 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 scholars in the thematic area will select the candidates to be admitted to the Institute.

All applications (for Director, Resource persons and laureates) should be submitted electronically via the link <https://codesria.org/submission/>