

CODESRIA

Policy Research



CODESRIA

COUNCIL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF
SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH IN AFRICA

CONSEIL POUR LE DÉVELOPPEMENT DE LA
RECHERCHE EN SCIENCES SOCIALES EN AFRIQUE

CODESRIA Research Policy

1. The CODESRIA Mandate

- 1, 1. CODESRIA, the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa is headquartered in Dakar Senegal. It was established in 1973 as an independent Pan-African research organization with a primary focus on the social sciences, broadly defined. It is recognised not only as the pioneer African social research organisation but also as the apex non-governmental centre of social knowledge production on the continent. Its objectives are:
 - To promote and facilitate research and knowledge production in Africa using a holistic, multi-disciplinary approach. In this connection, the Council is committed to the goal of combating the fragmentation of knowledge production, and the African community of scholars along various disciplinary and linguistic/geographical lines;
 - To promote and defend the principle of independent thought and the academic freedom of researchers in the production and dissemination of knowledge;
 - To encourage and support the development of African comparative research with a continental perspective and a sensitivity to the specificity of development processes in Africa;
 - To promote the publication and dissemination of the results of research undertaken by African scholars;
 - To strengthen the institutional basis of knowledge production in Africa by proactively engaging and supporting other research institutions and their networks of scholars within its programs of activities. As part of this goal, the Council also actively encourages cooperation and collaboration among African universities, research organisations and other training institutions;
 - To encourage inter-generational and gender-sensitive dialogues in the African academy as a further investment of effort in the promotion of awareness of and capacity in the use of different perspectives for knowledge production;
 - To promote contacts and dialogue between African researchers and researchers elsewhere in the world, as well as interaction between the Council and similar international organisations

1, 2. CODESRIA was established out of a desire to contribute to the growth of an independent, pan African community of scholars engaged in the production of scientific knowledge of the highest quality and of high social relevance.

1, 3. The CODESRIA mandate is being fulfilled through the establishment of a number of research vehicles such as working groups and networks, and the designing and launching of research programmes and projects. Some of these programmes and projects are conceptualised and implemented as part of a variety of collaborative initiatives.

1, 4. The promotion of research also includes the nurturing of new generations of researchers through training programmes and the creation of opportunities for mentoring, the enhancement of the research capacity of more experienced scholars, the promotion of research

based publishing, and the defence and promotion of academic freedom. The Council's documentation centre, CODICE, is a central element of the research support mechanism. CODESRIA also gives direct support to research centres, institutes, professional associations and journals at critical stages of their development.

1, 5. CODESRIA challenges the fragmentation of research and knowledge through the creation of thematic research networks that transcend regional, disciplinary and linguistic boundaries. It encourages the scholarly community to strive for the achievement of a more holistic understanding of the historical and contemporaneous experiences of the continent through multidisciplinary interventions that draw on a variety of traditions and approaches, integrate gender perspectives, and tap into the insights of different generations of scholars. CODESRIA encourages African scholars to strive to make readings of developments in other regions and at the global level and engage with scholars all over the world from the standpoint of Africa's interests, needs and development challenges.

2. The Context

2, 1. A Challenging Research Environment

Several decades after the creation of CODESRIA, the research environment in which the Council and the entire African scholarly community operate is still full of challenges. The socio-political environment is still not entirely favourable to the development of university based social research, particularly basic research. The economies of most countries are in crises. In a number of countries, the universities are affected by conflicts such as the ones in the Great Lakes, West Africa and the Horn of Africa. The Universities and university based research centres and institutes who form the bulk of CODESRIA's institutional members, are yet to fully to recover from the long drawn out crises and conflicts that have been raging in the continent, and from two decades of economic crises and structural adjustment. Although there is some re-generation taking place in the higher education and knowledge systems, many institutional members of CODESRIA are still under-resourced. A number of universities are also facing problems having to do with the political environment. Others are confronted with governance problems of their own. Such developments in the broad research environment are likely to impact on CODESRIA's work, for they affect the Council's constituencies.

2, 2. An institutional landscape where academic research institutions feature less and less prominently.

2, 2, 1. This is the 'age of knowledge'. We live in a 'knowledge society', with knowledge economies, and so forth. However, basic research, which is a precondition for scientific knowledge production, is paradoxically still not given the importance that it deserves in African universities. At the global level, with the dominance of neo-liberalism, and as certain powerful non-academic institutions enter the knowledge production field, many universities are being constrained to becoming increasingly vocational. Knowledge itself is often times seen as something 'technical'. Consequently, there is a tendency for the only knowledge that is considered as 'good' or 'relevant' knowledge to be the one that sells well, i.e. the one that can be instrumentalised. As state funding for university-based research diminishes, there is a risk that more and more universities in Africa, in particular, will become increasingly vocational, to the detriment of research.

2, 2, 2. Private, confessional, corporate, vocational, virtual, franchise and many other kinds of higher education institutions with little or no interest in academic research are being established in growing numbers, competing for the academic staff time and teaching material of the public and the few other universities where basic research is carried out. This is likely to affect social research in a negative way.

2,2,3. Independent research centres and research NGOs have grown in numbers. However, although they may be very productive, these centres and NGOs are far from being an adequate substitute to universities when it comes to social research and knowledge production or transmission. In a more general way, in a context where there are no strong research traditions, high respect for scholarship, or adequate public support for knowledge production, as is the case with most African countries, research, especially basic research, is likely to become more vulnerable when it moves out of the universities into the NGO world.

2,2,4. The institutional problems are compounded by the brain drain, which is both internal and external, and by the consultancy syndrome. Both phenomena lead to the diversion of academics away from scholarly pursuits on the continent. Those who remain in the academic institutions are faced with enormous challenges.

2, 3.. New generations of scholars

2,3,1. Developing appropriate mechanisms for inter-generational learning is part of the normal reproduction mechanisms of scholarly communities. It is at the level of PhD programmes that most African universities are weakest. Yet this is precisely the level at which training for research goes on. As the first and second generations of African professors are retiring or nearing retirement, what have been called the third and fourth generations of scholars, including all those who are doing, just completing, or have just completed their PhD training, are likely to be faced with a shortage of qualified mentors within the universities. Because they too may be faced with difficulties in their living conditions, they may be dragged into consultancy, which may take them away from research.

2, 3, 2. Over the years, CODESRIA has had to interpret its mandate in increasingly creative ways so as to take on new roles. One such role has been the support that the Council gives to research capacity building or enhancement, and the multiplication of initiatives geared towards keeping basic research going.

2, 3, 3. With the increasing vulnerability of basic research, there is an even greater need today for an institution like CODESRIA to promote, advocate and support it (basic research) where it can, and ought to be institutionalized and become stronger, and where the reproduction of the research community normally takes place: in the universities.

3. Main Objectives: To Expand the Frontiers of Social Knowledge through Research, and to Bring Research Based Knowledge to Public Issues

3, 1. The main objective being pursued through research is to expand the frontiers of knowledge in and of Africa and the world, which is a key aspect of the processes of, and a condition for the emancipation and social transformation and development of Africa. The achievement of a more holistic understanding of the historical and contemporaneous experiences of the continent and its peoples is both an objective for research in Africa and a condition for social transformation / development. CODESRIA therefore primarily supports

basic research, but also encourages policy and problem solving research, as well as the drawing of lessons for policy and problem solving from the findings of basic research.

3.2. CODESRIA brings research to bear on the challenges facing Africa at the macro, meso and micro levels, and devises ways of communicating research results to the policy communities, civil society and other actors of African development, or working with Africa and its diasporas, through its publication, dissemination, policy dialogue and outreach programmes.

4. Guiding Principles

4.1. The basic assumptions that led to the creation of CODESRIA are still valid: there is no fatality about Africa's current predicament, and social knowledge can play a key role in the social transformation and development of our continent. African scholars, through research, the production and transmission of knowledge can both expand the frontiers of scientific knowledge, and help policymakers and other actors to think through the crises that occasionally confront the continent, and stand up to the challenges of globalisation and all other kinds of challenges facing African societies. More than ever before, CODESRIA reaffirms its commitment to universal values, and to the principles that guided its founding fathers and mothers, which were the same principles that guided the men and women who have been at the forefront of the struggles for a liberated Africa, and those of the promoters of all great civilisations throughout human history: freedom and social justice, as well as the primacy of knowledge, and the freedom to pursue and transmit it.

4.2. Global trends in higher education, particularly the multiple pressures on the traditional, research universities, and the risk of more or less vocational private higher education institutions outnumbering these universities, call for a reaffirmation of the importance of upholding high standards in the production of scientific knowledge, and upholding the principles of academic freedom and the independence of thought. Among the disturbing dominant trends of the day are those of the standardisation that goes with the mass production and dissemination of policy documents of questionable quality that are going for scientific documents, and the dilution of quality scholarly literature through the borrowing of concepts from agency literature. For Africa, in particular, one of the most daunting challenges is that of continuing to nurture an intelligentsia that is well-grounded both in universal values and in African soil.

4.3. The challenge of producing knowledge about Africa in Africa has basically been met, as can be seen in the volume, range and quality of publications coming out not only of CODESRIA, but also of many other sites of the continent. That of distilling knowledge of universal value from the knowledge being produced in Africa is however yet to be fully met. CODESRIA will strive to support and accompany the effort of African scholars to grapple with concepts, theories and paradigms developed elsewhere, and increase their capacities to conceptualise, theorise and bring about paradigm changes as may be necessary.

The following principles shall therefore guide all research at CODESRIA:

4.4. The *primary form of research* carried out under the auspices of CODESRIA shall be academic research, and CODESRIA will strive to promote excellence in academic research.

4,5. Priority shall be given to **basic/fundamental research**, for it is the kind of research that is most likely to lead to knowledge production; problem solving and policy research shall also be encouraged as research genres.

4,6. The principles of **academic freedom** and of the **autonomy** academic institutions enshrined in the Kampala and Dar Es Salaam Declarations on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility shall be respected in all CODESRIA activities and promoted in the continent;

4,7. CODESRIA shall strive to promote **socially responsible scholarship** in Africa; the responsibility of the intellectual is not only intellectual, it is also political.

4, 8. Participation in CODESRIA research groups and networks shall be based on merit.

4,9. Where the need may arise, some kind of **'affirmative action'** and / or **special initiatives** (such as the Lusophone Initiative) shall be instituted to address the needs of scholars operating from somewhat disadvantageous positions as a result of their gender, age, region, country, linguistic, disciplinary or other kinds of backgrounds.

4,10. All research activities of CODESRIA shall be advertised or publicly announced;

4,11. All research activities shall aim at producing academic publications; policy briefs and other kinds of policy relevant material may also be produced from research carried out by CODESRIA.

4,12. Multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary research shall be encouraged; so shall research in social science disciplines in which research is weak, fragmented or underperforming.

4, 13. CODESRIA research networks and working groups shall be inclusive, and involve male and female researchers of sexes, ages, working languages, regions and disciplines; networks and working groups shall function along principles of democracy and accountability.

4,14. As far as possible, CODESRIA working groups and networks shall be based in or affiliated to universities in Africa, or with university based research centres and institutes. Some form of university anchorage can help both in strengthening the foundation for research and in enhancing its credibility, for it presupposes that standards of quality are upheld through peer review mechanisms.

4, 15. CODESRIA shall give priority, in its use of funds, to supporting African researchers based in Africa; when and where necessary and funding is available, African scholars in the Diasporas and non African scholars taking part in CODESRIA research activities shall benefit from CODESRIA support.

5. Operational Modes

5, 1. CODESRIA research priorities shall be determined collectively, by the General Assembly of CODESRIA. Prior to each GA, members of the community of African scholars

Research Vehicles

1. Green Books

Green Books are critical state of the art reviews of the literature, followed by an agenda for research. The purpose of Green Books is to stimulate a debate on the topic in question as a way of preparing for the establishment of a MWG that will lead to the production of *new knowledge* on the said topic.

- Green Books shall be written on topics identified by the CODESRIA General Assembly as priorities for research; they shall reflect a thorough and up-to-date knowledge of the literature on the topic chosen, and propose a research agenda that is at the cutting edge of research;
- Green books shall be authored by two or three authors commissioned by the Executive Secretariat of CODESRIA on the basis of concept papers submitted to the Council for that purpose.
- Green book manuscripts shall be peer reviewed prior to publication, exactly like all other CODESRIA publications; particular attention shall be paid to the innovative nature of the approach and thinking on the topic.
- Green book authors shall be assisted in accessing the relevant literature on the subject of their book; besides making the resources of the CODESRIA documentation and Information Centre (CODICE) available to them, this may also require spending some time at a documentation centre where the literature could easily be accessed;
- The choice of green book authors shall be based above all on proven expertise on the topic chosen for review.

2. Multinational Working Groups (MWG)

The MWG is the flagship research vehicle employed by CODESRIA for the promotion of multi-country and multidisciplinary reflection on critical questions of concern to the African social research community.

- MWGs shall be established to work on one of the research priorities identified by the CODESRIA General Assembly.
- The establishment of a MWG shall be preceded by a green book or a concept paper consisting of a state of the art review of the literature and an agenda for research on the topic of the MWG; and a call for proposals, at least partly based on the green book or concept paper shall be issued prior to the launching of the MWG.
- Each MWG shall be led by two to three coordinators; as far as possible, coordinators shall have different disciplinary and linguistic backgrounds and genders.
- Coordinators of MWGs shall be appointed by the Executive Secretary of CODESRIA
- A MWG shall have a minimum of 15 and a maximum of 30 researchers.
- Members of MWGs shall be selected on the basis of the proposals they submit, by an independent selection committee;
- Membership of the MWG shall be individual or in the form of small groups of researchers.

- Members of MWGs shall provide evidence of their affiliation with universities, research centres, research institutes, research NGOs or other knowledge producing institutions in Africa or in the diasporas;
- CODESRIA shall give a research grant and provide adequate support in terms of access to documentation, and the expertise of relevant resource persons to each member of the MWG.
- Three senior scholars shall be designated as independent reviewers who serve as discussants during the meetings of the group. The reviewers shall be senior scholars who have done ground breaking work in the field.
- Each MWG is encouraged to hold a methodological workshop involving all of its members and, if the resources permit, a mid-term review workshop to assess the progress made by each of the participants in the work of the group, a terminal workshop to review the draft papers.
- Members of MWGs are encouraged to carry out fieldwork over extended periods of time.
- Members of MWG shall produce publishable, research based papers
- More experienced scholars in the MWG are encouraged to mentor the younger ones in course of the life of the MWG
- MWG coordinators shall edit the research papers of the MWG members and submit a book manuscript for publication in CODESRIA Book Series
- The average lifespan of a MWG is two years during which time all aspects of the research process are expected to be completed and the final results prepared for publication in the CODESRIA Book Series

3. National Working Groups (NWG)

Unlike the MWGs, which are CODESRIA's direct offshoots and which are always multinational in composition, the National Working Groups are constituted as autonomous initiatives coming from members of the research community based in any African country or interested in studying any aspect of the social processes in a particular country.

- The participants in an NWG identify the area of research that is of interest to them and formulate their research problematic through a proposal which also sets out their priorities; in this sense, the NWGs are developed and supported on the basis of a perceived national need.
- Initiators of proposals for the establishment of an NWG are always encouraged to pay attention to the Council's abiding commitment to the goal of transcending disciplinary, gender and generational barriers to knowledge production, and to the respect of the academic freedom of all researchers.
- The *autonomy* of the NWG is considered an essential factor for its success; it is also integral to the Council's strategy for enhancing national research capacity and interdisciplinary contacts at the national level.
- A NWG shall have a minimum of five (5) and a maximum of fifteen (15) members.
- NWGs shall choose their own coordinator (s), and decide collectively on who is a member and who is not; the coordinator (s) shall be the link persons between the NWG and CODESRIA.

- Proposals for the constitution of NWGs are received on a continuing basis by the CODESRIA Secretariat and assessed through an independent process involving scholars with knowledge of the country and issue to be covered; the Council shall issue a call for proposals for NWG at the beginning of each year.
- Each NWG is encouraged to hold a methodological workshop involving all of its members, and a mid-term review workshop to assess the progress made by each of the participants in the work of the group, a terminal workshop to review the draft papers.
- Members of NWGs are encouraged to carry out fieldwork over extended periods of time
- CODESRIA shall give a research grant and provide adequate support in terms of access to documentation, and the expertise of relevant resource persons to each member of the NWG.
- Members of the NWG shall produce publishable, research based papers
- More experienced scholars in the NWG are encouraged to mentor the younger ones in course of the life of the NWG
- NWG coordinators shall edit the research papers of the NWG members and submit a book manuscript for publication in CODESRIA Book Series
- The average lifespan of a NWG is eighteen (18) months, during which time all aspects of the research process are expected to be completed and the final results prepared for publication in the CODESRIA Book Series

4. The Transnational Working Groups (TWGs)

TWGs were introduced as a key innovation in the scientific agenda of the Council. They are a direct response to the increasingly globalised world in which the production of knowledge and information about Africa is taking place. The TWG is conceived as a vehicle for promoting and sustaining dialogue between African and non-African researchers around a selected theme of common scholarly interest. It stems, in part, from the convergence of research concerns and interests between African and non-African scholars, particularly those from CODESRIA and one or several of its partner research institutions in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and other regions of the Global South, as well as partner institutions of the North. In addition to encouraging a sustained dialogue between African and non-African researchers, the TWG serve the objective of bringing African perspectives into the wider global reflection on Africa itself, the wider international system, and the social sciences. It confers the distinct advantage of encouraging a first hand understanding by Africans of non-African experiences through direct scientific interaction with non-African scholars. Conversely, the TWG offers non-African scholars an opportunity to reflect on all aspects of the historical and contemporary experiences of Africa beyond the tendentious interpretations to which they are too frequently exposed. Finally, the TWG offers African researchers a framework for participating in and contributing to the promotion of international comparative approaches in social research and knowledge production.

- TWGs shall be established on themes of the CODESRIA research agenda, adopted by the General Assembly
- The initiative for the establishment of a TWG shall come from CODESRIA, who would issue a call for proposals on the basis of a concept note prepared by

- Research carried out in TWGs shall have clearly spelled out South-North / South-South comparative dimensions;
- TWGs shall promote collegial relationships of equality among their members;
- Coordinators of TWGs shall be appointed by CODESRIA; where the TWG is a collaborative venture, the coordinators shall be appointed in consultation with the partner institutions involved;
- Members of TWGs are selected by an independent selection committee on the basis of the quality and relevance of their proposals to the theme of the TWG;
- CODESRIA shall give a research grant and provide adequate support in terms of access to documentation, and to the expertise of relevant resource persons to each member of the TWG.
- Each TWG is encouraged to hold a methodological workshop involving all of its members and, if the resources permit, a mid-term review workshop to assess the progress made by each of the participants in the work of the group, as well as a terminal workshop to review the draft papers.
- TWG coordinators shall edit the research of the papers of the TWG members and submit a book manuscript for publication in CODESRIA Book Series
- The average lifespan of a TWG is two years, during which time all aspects of the research process are expected to be completed and the final results prepared for publication in the CODESRIA Book Series

5. The Comparative Research Network (CRNs)

The CRNs also form part of the research programme innovations recently introduced by the Council. They are designed to foster and enhance comparative research in Africa at the national, sub-regional and continental levels around a specific theme. Such a vehicle is deemed particularly necessary on account of the huge toll on the capacity for comparative research exacted by the prolonged crises in the African higher education system. In contributing to the revival and sustenance of comparative thinking, the Council also hopes to strengthen the African contribution to the comparative studies literature on the African experience.

- Proposals for the constitution of CRNs are received by the Secretariat on a continuing basis; the Council shall issue a call for proposals for NWG at the beginning of each year.
- Researchers are encouraged to initiate proposals for the establishment of CRNs within the broad intellectual agenda being pursued by the Council.
- The proposals are required to identify the coordinator(s) and members of the network, the comparative questions which they seek to explore, and the time frame within which they hope to realise their objectives.
- Those wishing to propose the creation of CRNs are encouraged to observe an 18-month time frame for the initiation and completion of the study.

6. Other kinds of research groups and networks

In addition to the kinds of working groups and networks listed above, the Council may also support groups and networks formed by researchers who are interested in doing research and / or writing a book on an important topic of their choice, provided that the topics they choose to work on fit in the framework of the Council's research priorities. This allows for some flexibility. However, such ad hoc / spontaneously established groups and networks shall remain a relatively small number at any given time.

7. Research Programmes

These are sets of diverse but interconnected research activities on a theme or in a given area. A research programme may therefore include several of the research vehicles, such as the NWGs, the MWGS and the CRNs.

- Research programmes are initiated and managed by the Research Staff of CODESRIA; a research programme may also be formed in the framework of a collaborative initiative with a partner institution.
- Research programmes shall have clearly stated objectives and deliverables, as well as clearly defined activity calendars.
- Research programmes shall be entirely CODESRIA owned and managed, or jointly owned and managed with partner institutions in Africa and/or elsewhere.
- Programmes shall have *reference groups* to guide them; membership of such groups shall be restricted to experts in the field of operation of the programme.
- *Special Programmes and Initiatives* are research programmes designed to address the need to promote research in certain areas or regions where research is weak or fragmented, or to target certain marginalized research communities.