CODESRIA

2026 MRI

Call for Applications

MEANING-MAKING
RESEARCH INITIATIVE

MRi

INITIATIVES DE
RECHERCHE POUR
LA CONSTRUCTION
DU SENS

Meaning-making Research Initiatives (MRI) 2026
General Call
Application deadline: February 27, 2026

Founded in 1973, the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) promotes research by African and Diaspora scholars in the Social Sciences and Humanities with the view to better understanding social phenomena in Africa. This commitment is rooted in the belief that a sound knowledge base about the continent is invaluable to collective efforts to foster opportunity and equity, rights and well-being in the continent.

In 2017, CODESRIA introduced the Meaning-Making Research Initiative (MRI) as its principal tool for research support, amalgamating the National Working Groups, Multinational Working Groups, Comparative Research Network, Transnational Working Groups and Post-doctoral Grants. The MRI is designed to facilitate research that contributes to agendas for imagining, planning, and creating African futures. A key objective of the MRI is to increase the visibility of the research supported by the Council.

The adoption of MRI marked a renewed commitment to the task of interpretation and explanation that saw CODESRIA produce ground-breaking work on thematic issues such as democratization and economic reform in Africa. The program strongly encourages scholars to build on close observation of African social realities, addressing key challenges on the continent through thorough analysis and understanding. The initiative is characterized by reinforced support for researchers and their deeper integration into the Council's work. The MRI fosters scholars to explore diverse, innovative, and alternative ways of presenting their work beyond traditional formats such as books, journal articles, or policy briefs. The grant spans a total duration of 16 months.

Individual and Group Initiatives: MRIs may be either individual projects or group initiatives. Groups can include researchers from one or multiple countries and should ideally consist of 3 to 5 members. We strongly encourage applications from groups with members from different countries. It is essential that groups adhere to CODESRIA's core principle of gender, linguistic, and interdisciplinary diversity. Each member should demonstrate ability to contribute meaningfully to the collaborative project's work. The Council will offer up to USD 10,000 for individual projects and up to USD 25,000 for group projects.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Projects funded under this initiative should:

- Address key aspects of African societies aligned with CODESRIA's strategic priorities listed below in this call.
- Demonstrate theoretical ambition and originality, offering new analytical perspectives or methodological approaches.
- Address challenges of shaping African futures with attention to issues of diversity, perspectives on the national question, and rural–urban contexts.
- Show familiarity with existing knowledge produced within the community of knowledge organized around CODESRIA.
- Explore diverse spatial, temporal and sectoral configurations where relevant to the process of meaning-making.
- Applicants must hold a PhD at the time of submission. For group applications, the coordinator should hold a PhD at the time of submission.

Note: CODESRIA maintains a zero-tolerance policy regarding plagiarism. Please ensure that the project you submit is entirely your own work.

THEMATIC PRIORITIES

All applications must align with CODESRIA's 2023-2027 thematic priorities and cross-cutting issues. Please note that, while **Higher Education Dynamics in Africa** is among the Council's thematic priorities, it has been excluded from the MRI scheme, as the Council offers dedicated research grants specifically for higher education. The following are the thematic priorities and cross-cutting issues:

1) The State and Democratisation in Africa: Trends and Prospects

This thematic priority signals the desire of the Council to reconnect with CODESRIA's historic work on democratization processes in Africa; aiming to assess democratic transitions in Africa, in order to probe the origins, context and evolution of the transitions, examine their status, question the depth of the impact of democracy on the people and on the nature of the state, and analyse prospects for democratic consolidation in Africa. Applications can also focus on the state in Africa to illuminate the context of the evolution of politics, the deployment and use of power, the resulting impact on citizens and the implications for citizenship. Applicants are encouraged assess the current state of democracy in Africa, generating in the process a typology that might be useful for comparative work on the state and democratisation, but bearing in mind that such comparative work necessarily requires a study of the trends in global democracy processes.

2) Transformations in African Economies

This thematic priority focuses on theoretical frameworks that inform discussions on economic policy-making; the current tensions in economic development driven by orthodoxy as opposed to heterodox approaches; how these approaches refract issues of economic policy-making in Africa; discussions of dependency and structural transformation; export economies and indus-

trialization; the issue of informalization of economies; histories and evolution of labor union-ization; public-private partnership; challenges and impact of multilateral governance; the idea of planning in current economic thinking; heterodox traditions and welfare policy; alternative economic theories; reinventing economic systems; structural and institutional challenges of development; interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary conversations on economic policy; policy sovereignty for Africa, among other themes.

3) Ecologies and Society in Africa

This theme focuses on the interaction of human populations with the environment in Africa, the forms it takes, its histories and trajectories, and its impact on a broad set of sectors, including the continent's burgeoning economies and their new capacity, whether its positive effects or negative consequences, to turn ecological inheritance (or environmental resources) into commercial products and assets. The emphasis is on interactions between people and ecological systems; targeting on land and agrarian questions, food sovereignty and poverty in the developing world; histories and trajectories of environmental interactions; the urban and the rural nexus and their complex interactions; mineral extraction and the transformation of habitats; structural transformations in agriculture and industrialization; conservancy practices, commodification and impact on societies.

Cross-cutting themes

 (1) History, Memory and Archive
 (2) Gender
 (3) Generations
 (4) Rurality and Urbanity.

HOW TO APPLY

Interested applicants should submit application packages containing the following required materials:

a) Applicants are required to develop a brief, to the point proposal that provides:
-     i.   an introduction that outlines the overarching theme and objectives;
-    ii.   a clear statement of the key research question(s);
-   iii.   concise review of the relevant literature, that highlights the proposal's expected contribution to existing debates;
-    iv.   explains the theoretical significance of the study, including its anticipated contribution to knowledge production outlines
-     v.   the research methodology to show how data or evidence will generate and analyzed;
-    vi.   a research plan outlining key activities and timelines.
-   vii.   Budget: a concise and realistic budget that reflects the strict 16-month duration of the grant. Click on this link to access and complete the budget template MRI Budget Template Individual / MRI Budget Template Group

b) Annotated plan of deliverables: Individual projects should include a one-page annotated plan for one scholarly article and one policy brief/blog post. Group projects should include a one-page annotated plan for two scholarly articles and two policy briefs/blog posts.

c) A letter of institutional support from a dean or any other official of the university above the dean in university hierarchy.
d) The CV of the scholar(s) applying, including full contact details.

Applicants are reminded that *proposals must be submitted in Word documents and should not exceed 10 pages including bibliography (Times New Roman, font size 12, double-spaced).*

Please note that applications that lack any of these elements will not be considered.

The deadline for submitting applications is **February 27, 2026.** Please use the CODESRIA online submission system via the following link : **https://codesria.org/application-form-meaning-making-research-initiatives-mri-2026/**

NB:
- Previous recipients of an MRI grant are ineligible and should refrain from submitting a new application.
- Applicants may submit only one application across all three categories. Multiple submissions are not permitted.
- In accordance with CODESRIA's guidelines, this grant scheme is open exclusively to African scholars, primarily those residing on the continent, while allowing a limited number of applicants from the Diaspora.
- Applications from consultants or consulting firms are not eligible.