



Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa  
Conseil pour le développement de la recherche en sciences sociales en Afrique  
Conselho para o Desenvolvimento da Pesquisa em Ciências Sociais em África

مجلس تنمية البحوث الإجتماعية في أفريقيا



**Call for Applications:**  
**2nd CODESRIA/CASB Summer School in African Studies and Area Studies in Africa**  
**Dakar, 22 to 27 August 2016**

## **Interdisciplinarity in Area Studies: Basic and Applied Research**

The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) and The Centre for African Studies Basel (CASB) call for applications for the 2nd CODESRIA/CASB Summer School in African Studies and Area Studies in Africa.

The Summer School sets out to stimulate and consolidate interdisciplinary approaches in research on Africa, but also on other regions of the world undertaken from within the African continent. It focuses on African Studies as an instance of area studies and seeks to identify themes that are theoretically, conceptually and methodologically relevant to the reflection on the intellectual challenge of Africa as an object of knowledge and its contribution to general scholarship while inquiring into the relevance of the findings to African approaches to other regions. The goals of the Summer School can be broadly defined in the following manner:

- The Summer School allows PhD and MA students, under the guidance of senior scholars, to engage critically with new theoretical, conceptual and methodological developments in African Studies and Area Studies in Africa in general and make them relevant to their work;
- The Summer School stimulates PhD students to reflect on the potential relevance of knowledge on Africa to the task of improving our theoretical, conceptual and methodological tools both for the disciplines as well as for interdisciplinary work;
- The Summer School fosters among PhD students a sense of belonging to a community of scholars in pursuit of knowledge and scholarship;
- The Summer School encourages junior scholars to work towards carving a space for African Studies or Area Studies in Africa in general in the broader field of scholarship and in this way helping to place Africa right at the centre of knowledge production.
- The Summer School serves to identify young scholars who wish to develop or finalise a PhD-project in the field of African Studies and Area Studies in general and to further support them in their pursuit of their career goals.

The Summer School is offered with the generous support of the Oumou Dilly Foundation (Switzerland) in cooperation with CODESRIA and aims at strengthening the links between the community of scholars organized in the CODESRIA community and scholars from the African Studies community in Switzerland.

### **Concept: Basic and applied research**

The forthcoming CODESRIA/CASB Summer School in African Studies and Area Studies in Africa will address the prevalent demand – implicit or explicit – that knowledge produced on Africa (as on other regions in the so-called developing world) should be practically based, solution-oriented, relevant for development. It will focus on conceptual challenges this may entail.

It is generally agreed that this knowledge produced on Africa has been shaped, on the one hand, by the unequal nature of relations between Africa and the West and, on the other hand, by critical reactions that have created room for African voices to question the legitimacy of this knowledge. An enduring problem in knowledge production about Africa has been the question concerning the purposes which should be served by such knowledge. It is true that scholarship has rendered the continent visible while at the same time the properties which have been associated with what has come to be understood as Africa have shaped the scholarly ability to describe reality. Much discussion over the study of Africa has centred both on the extent to which knowledge of the continent has been truthful (Apter; p'Bitek; Robinson) and also on the role of the power of representation in the constitution of our idea of Africa (Mudimbe; Hountondji). While earlier critical voices sought either to deny scholarship produced outside of the continent primacy over the definition of what constitutes knowledge of Africa and how it can be adequately retrieved (p'Bitek; Eze), later scholars have focused more on the damage which such knowledge caused to the general perception of the continent (Mudimbe; Wiredu, Mbembe).

The discomfort which has accompanied African reactions to knowledge about Africa generated vigorous intellectual activity that has shaped the production of knowledge on the continent. The reaction to foreign representations of the African continent and its life-worlds has laid the ground within the boundaries of which much intellectual activity on the continent – but also by the intellectual African diaspora – has taken place. It has been more than half a century of critical scrutiny of knowledge about Africa produced within paradigms that are not necessarily sensitive to the lived experience of Africans. Mainly on account of this it appears important to shift the focus slightly away from the substantive scholarly issues entailed in these intellectual exchanges into more practical issues pertaining to the functions of research.

Research on Africa is expected to yield knowledge that is relevant to development. This is an uncontroversial expectation when viewed against the background of the massive developmental challenges faced by African countries. Research cannot afford to ignore what is going on in the world and must seek to be relevant by committing itself to addressing the problems afflicting countries and peoples in the real world. There are however problems with this view. In fact, it is one thing to gather data, analyse it and draw conclusions from it and another to apply the implications of the findings to the real world. The practical task of implementing research, i.e. drawing policy implications from it and working out the practical policies which will address problems in the real world, has been a major challenge to researchers and practitioners alike not only in the developed world, but also in the developing world. This is particularly acute within the social sciences where practical orientation in the sense of applied research is not easy to establish. As more and more research funding privileges projects which have an exclusively applied research orientation the problems with the relevance expectation deserve to be addressed in a more forceful, but systematic manner.

Conceptually, the challenge of implementing research results can be understood as the problem of making a clear distinction between conceptual problems and practical problems. In most research projects this distinction tends to be taken for granted, but experience shows

that matters are more complicated on the ground. While practical problems refer to the challenge of finding a solution to a known problem which needs to be addressed, e.g. how to ensure that an anti-corruption law is understood and implemented by the police force in order to protect citizens from arbitrariness, conceptual problems refer to what we need to know in order to understand a problem, i.e. whether the sense of insecurity felt by citizens is caused by the absence of anti-corruption legislation. Policy recommendations can easily flow from research that addresses practical problems; they can hardly be derived from conceptual problems. Practical problems call for solutions whereas conceptual problems call for understanding. Blurring these distinctions has led in practice either to placing demands on research which it cannot meet or to the very real impossibility of translating results into practice on account of the fact that research was conceived as one which addressed conceptual problems.

The purpose of the learning event is, therefore, to raise the awareness of research partners from Africa to these difficulties while at the same time working out ways of making research relevant to development challenges. The main elements of the learning event are five one-day workshops that will address these challenges along the following lines:

- **Research design: Conceptual problems vs. practical problems**  
This unit introduces participants to fundamental epistemological issues around the production of knowledge by making a distinction between basic research (conceptual problems) and applied research (practical problems).
- **Analytical design: Formulating problems**  
This unit elaborates on the nature of basic research by exploring the ways in which it can be understood as research which helps to formulate problems for which there may already be solutions or, at any rate, which require solutions to be worked out.
- **Practical design: Formulating solutions**  
This unit is the counterpart to the previous one (formulating problems) and focuses on the process of identifying problems for which solutions can be worked out.
- **Policy design: How solutions work in the real world**  
The focus of this unit is on the political, economic and social conditions which must be met for a solution to be effective.
- **Evaluation design: Checking the relevance of research**  
This unit introduces participants to the important task of drawing up criteria to ascertain the extent to which the implementation of research results can be used to improve research design.

The expected outcome of the Summer School is a deep theoretical and practical understanding of the difference between basic research and applied research as well as the development of the ability to translate research results into practical action in the context of African Studies and Area Studies in general.

## **Experts**

Elísio Macamo (Summer School Director), Associate Professor of African Studies at the University of Basel (Switzerland)

Ralph Weber, Assistant Professor of European Global Studies at the University of Basel (Switzerland)

Jean-Bernard Ouédraogo, Directeur de recherche au CNRS/EHESS, Rédacteur en chef de la revue Method(e)s ;

Nkolo Foe, Professeur titulaire à l'Ecole supérieure de Yaoundé I, Cameroun

## **Format**

The Summer School will be structured in such a way that each thematic issue will form the focus of a workshop. The first two thematic issues, namely (1) research design and (2) analytical design are theoretical in orientation. They will deal with texts addressing issues in the philosophy and methodology of the social sciences. The remaining three thematic issues, namely (3) practical design, (4) policy design and (5) evaluation design are practical, hands-on blocks which draw from participants' own research projects, country profiles and institutional backgrounds to translate research results into policy action.

Already in advance, the participants prepare written input based on their own research as well as on readings. During the course they form workgroups preparing inputs for and playing an active role in the different sessions.

## **Application & Registration**

The summer school is open for PhD students enrolled at an Institute of Higher Education in any country. We encourage the application of PhD students enrolled in African and Swiss institutions. Travel, accommodation and meals during the summer school will be provided for participants enrolled at institutions in Africa.

Participants will be selected on the strength and merits of:

1. One duly completed application form;
2. A cover letter;
3. A five-page application in which they explain:(a) what they are working on, and (b) how their work relates to the topic of the Summer School;

In addition, applications must be supported by a CV and two letters of recommendation.

Please submit your application as PDF to [area.studies@codesria.sn](mailto:area.studies@codesria.sn) (until 31 May 2016).