The African Association for the Study of Religions (AASR) and the Council for the Development of Social Science Research (CODESRIA) invite proposals for individual papers, panels, and roundtables for the 9th AASR Conference in Africa to be held in Dakar, Senegal at the King Fahd Palace Hotel from 29 July – 1 August 2020.

See the AASR website for more information: http://www.a-asr.org/meetings/
CALL FOR PAPERS

Religions play critical roles in the lives of African peoples all over the world. As such, political, social, and economic activities are often explained and rationalized through spiritual lenses and practices. While on the one hand, spirituality and religiosity continue to thrive in many African countries, with religious leaders typically sustaining high levels of public trust, on the other hand, poverty, poor governance and misuse of public resources, disease, insecurity, inequality, and underdevelopment, among many other adverse factors, continues to define the lives of many in Africa. This existential paradox has been underlined by many African scholars, who argue that while religion continues to flourish in African contexts, including in the Diaspora, many Africans remain among the world’s poorest. Many nations in Africa also top the world corruption index while security challenges, especially those posed by groups such as Boko Haram and al-Shabaab, remain a global challenge, but with serious implications for Africa. These and many other challenges directly obstruct human development, including the capacity to have and access health rights, fair justice, quality education, sufficient food, adequate housing, and personal security.

Despite this gloomy image, there are notable social transformations taking place in Africa. These include greater accessibility to remote areas through massive infrastructure developments, improvements in the banking sector with the rise of mobile banking, easier and better access to the Internet with the entry of fibre optic technology, and a general consciousness of environmental conservation. Innovations are equally taking place in African countries where the youth are finding innovative ways for political participation and demanding better governance through social media. Relatedly, contestations over what counts as ‘good’ governance and ‘good’ social transformation continues to be re-evaluated in many postcolonial African settings. Western ideas and principles of liberal democracy, human rights, and the nation state are being called into question, just as indigenous ways of conceptualizing and evaluating governance and social transformation are receiving increased attention.

Within these changes and re-evaluations, religions continue to exert a huge, if controversial and contested, influence. In many cases, religion is regarded as the key institution through which good governance should be mediated and upon which a foundation can be laid to support social transformation. In one intriguing instance in Zambia, religion is classified as one of five key pillars of the nation, along with the press, judiciary, legislature, and executive. In many other cases, religion remains a core part of the foundation of the country as leaders persistently cited their countries as Christian or Islamic nations. Not only are public functions opened by word of prayer, but in the context of the spread of evangelical traditions and practices, leaders closely identify themselves with their religious leaders and revivalist movements. In more recent times, leaders such as former Malawian President Joyce Banda have travelled long distances to seek spiritual nourishment from their spiritual leaders, or as is the case of Edgar Lungu in Zambia, been avid in presenting their born-again credentials as key pillars of their leadership legitimacy. Further invocation of religion and prayers has become ever widespread as exhibited by John Pombe Magufuli who repeatedly asks Tanzanians to pray for him because the evil of corruption that he is fighting is driven by powerful forces.
Of course, the relationship between governance and religion cuts both ways. Politicians may be held accountable by religious means just as religious leaders are subject to secular laws. The recent closing of thousands of churches in Rwanda offers a case in point of this interactive relationship between religion and governance. Like politicians, religious clergy are increasingly coming under sharp focus as diffused forms of media highlight their actions and inactions; their habit for preaching water while drinking wine. The exponential growth and expansion in churches, the burgeoning of the prosperity gospel, the (ab)use of state regulations mandating that religious institutions operate tax-free, the persistence of exploitation of congregants in the name of God all have complicated the terrain of religion and raised questions about its relevance. And just as religions can play the role of social change agent, contesting and challenging cultural, social, historical, economical, and political barriers to good governance and social transformation, they can also play a stifling role as well.

Given these developments, it is important to ask what roles religions play in the governance and social transformations taking place on the African continent and beyond. A range of empirical issues can be addressed through this theme and across Africa’s religious traditions, which include but are not limited to African Indigenous Religions, Christianity, and Islam. This inter/multi-disciplinary conference aims to bring together scholars and researchers of religion, political science, anthropology, history, theology, human rights, gender studies, media studies, security studies, youth studies, and postcolonial studies, among many others, to interrogate the link between Religions, Governance, and Social Transformations in Africa and the African Diaspora.

Paper, panel, and roundtable proposals that interrogate the following themes in English and French are welcomed:

- Religions, Governance, and Accountability
- Religions, (In)equality, and African Economies
- Religions and Human Development
- Religions, Community, and Rural Transformation
- Religions and (Global) Politics
- Religions and Transnational (Political) Networks
- Religions, Governance, and Political Economy
- Religions and Civil Society
- Religions, Violence, Peace, and Security
- Religions, Gender, and Governance
- Religions, Social Transformations, and Intersectionality
- Religions and Social Transformations ‘From Below’
- Religions, Ethnicity, and the Practices of Exclusion and Inclusion
- Religions and Traditions of Resistance
- Religions and Human Rights
- Religions, Authority, and State Power in Africa
- Religions, (Social) Media, and Governance
- Religions and Citizenship
• Religions and Sexuality
• Religions, Environment, and Climate Change
• Religions, Health, and Society
• The Youth Question and Religions
• The Role of the African Diaspora in African Development
• Religions and Imagination of the After-Life

Proposal Submissions

• The Call for Papers closes on 31 January 2020.
• Please use the official Proposal Form available on the AASR website.
• All proposals should be emailed to: aasrsenegal@gmail.com
• Abstracts should not exceed 300 words. If you are proposing a panel, a title and abstract for the panel as well as for each individual paper must be provided.
• Authors should ensure that abstracts reflect the title of their paper/panel proposal.
• Author’s contact details (name, position, institutional affiliation, email address, and phone number) must also be provided.
• If you have any questions, please email the Local Organising Committee (aasrsenegal@gmail.com).

Registration costs and accommodation options will be announced soon.
About the AASR

The African Association for the Study of Religions (AASR) is an academic association that promotes the study of religions in Africa through international collaboration in research, publishing, and teaching. AASR was founded in 1992 in Harare, Zimbabwe at a Regional Conference of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR). The AASR has been an affiliate organization of the IAHR since 1995. In particular, the AASR aims to stimulate the academic study of religions in Africa in the following ways:

- By providing a forum for multilateral communications between scholars of African religions
- By facilitating the exchange of resources and information
- By encouraging international collaboration in research between scholars and institutions in Africa and those outside the continent
- By developing publishing opportunities particularly for scholars based in Africa
- By establishing a travel fund to enable scholars to attend academic conferences
- By organising conferences in Africa and panels on the religions of Africa
- By establishing a newsletter and website to increase communication between scholars of African religions
- By creating a directory of scholars in the field of African religions

About CODESRIA

The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) is headquartered in Dakar, Senegal. It was established in 1973 as an independent pan-African research organisation primarily focusing on social sciences research in Africa. 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, multidisciplinary approach. The Council is committed to combating the fragmentation of knowledge production, and the African community of scholars along various disciplinary and linguistic/geographical lines;
- Promote and defend the principle of independent thought and the academic freedom of researchers in the production and dissemination of knowledge;
- Encourage and support the development of African comparative research with a continental perspective and a sensitivity to the specificity of the development process in Africa;
- Promote the publication and dissemination of research results undertaken by African scholars;
- Strengthen the institutional basis of knowledge production in Africa by proactively engaging and supporting other research institutions and their networks of scholars within its programmes of activities. As part of this goal, the Council also actively encourages cooperation and collaboration among African universities, research organisations and other training institutions;
- Encourage inter-generational and gender-sensitive dialogues in the African academy as a further investment of effort in the promotion of awareness and capacity for the use of different perspectives for knowledge production;
- Promote contacts and dialogue between African researchers and researchers on Africa elsewhere in the world, as well as interaction between the Council and similar international organisations.