



**GETSPA**

Gender Equitable and Transformative  
Social Policy for Africa

# CALL FOR PROPOSALS FOR PAPERS ON PROMISING SOCIAL POLICY INITIATIVES IN AFRICA

*The **Institute of African Studies (IAS)** at the **University of Ghana** with funding support from the **Open Society Foundations** is calling for proposals for issue papers that investigate the potential for and challenges of transformative social policy in Africa.*



Funded by the Open  
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# Background

The Gender Equitable and Transformative Social Policy for Africa (GETSPA) is a multi-country research project focused on investigating the trajectories, processes, and outcomes of social policymaking in Africa since the colonial period. It brings together researchers of social development from over 30 African countries, committed to working toward transformative and gender-equitable social policy for Africa's development by transforming the discourses, approaches to, and cultures of social policymaking.

To this end, GETSPA is commissioning ten papers on 'Promising Social Policy Initiatives' in Africa. These could be country-level or sector-specific interventions or innovations. They could also concern emerging issues and critical continental challenges. The aim is to derive transferable lessons from successes or, conversely, propose alternative solutions where existing interventions have not worked. The goal is to enrich both academic and policy discourses with new insights and practical solutions to the continent's social policy and social development challenges.

A 'Promising Initiative' study may do any one or more of the following:

- Identify, document, and analyse African social policy interventions that have delivered measurable improvements in human well-being, decreased inequalities, catalysed structural transformation, or transformed policy-making.
- Explore pressing continental crises and emerging challenges in order to generate conceptually-grounded alternative approaches to addressing them.
- Examine the enabling conditions or processes that underpin successful or promising social policy outcomes.
- Engage, to the extent relevant, with existing continental or global policy frameworks such as the SDGs, the AU Social Policy Framework and the Doha Political Declaration coming out of the Second World Summit for Social Development (WSSD II).

The overall aim is to produce agenda-setting, policy-oriented papers—rather than academic research reports—that are accessible to diverse audiences and suitable for engagement with national, regional and continental policy actors.





# Approaches

We are open to a range of approaches for identifying and analysing promising initiatives.

## 1. Country-Level Success Cases

These will be in-depth studies of countries considered relatively successful in their social policymaking processes and outcomes, either over an extended period or within a specific historical moment. The focus will be on cases demonstrating a whole-systems approach, where a clear overarching policy vision drives coordinated, interdependent interventions across sectors. These studies should undertake focused inquiry into (among other questions):

- what worked, why, and under what conditions;
- the institutional foundations and policy processes that enabled success;
- how governments secured political and social licence for ambitious reforms, including the opposition encountered and how this was navigated;
- the challenges faced and how they were managed;
- which lessons are transferable to other African contexts, with a clear-eyed assessment of what can and cannot be replicated. For example, many success cases are concentrated in smaller states—what does this imply for larger, more complex countries, and how might lessons be adapted rather than simply adopted?

Proposals under this approach should clearly define the criteria for selecting a country as a success case and critically assess what the case can (and cannot) offer to countries with different scales, contexts, and institutional histories.

## 2. Sector-Specific Promising Initiatives

This approach focuses on specific policy innovations across sectors, rather than whole national systems. It adopts an expansive understanding of what counts as “promising.” Initiatives need not be fully implemented to warrant study. Analytical papers and think pieces on emerging ideas, ongoing pilots, or early-stage proposals are all within scope, provided they engage rigorously with evidence from African contexts.

A priority for this approach is the critical interrogation of conceptual frameworks. Researchers should assess whether the ideas underpinning policy—many of which are imported—have been sufficiently adapted to African realities and subjected to robust African intellectual and political debate prior to adoption.





Indicative sectors and thematic areas include, but are not limited to:

- *Universal Basic Income (UBI)* – examining UBI debates and pilots in South Africa and Kenya (focusing on the promise, pitfalls, political feasibility, and the tension between income-focused approaches and broader frameworks of decent livelihoods, access to critical services, and dignity).
- *Health* – transition from 1980s “cash and carry” neoliberal models to emerging universal health coverage; community health initiatives that may be marginal in status but transformative in impact.
- *Natural resource governance and resource sovereignty* – including the renegotiation of resource exploitation agreements.
- *Transformations in the informal economy* – policy innovations supporting income and livelihood security for informal workers; critical engagement with what formalisation means for those whose livelihoods are embedded in informal social arrangements, etc.
- *Energy* – social dimensions of energy policy and access.
- *Grassroot interventions* – including community-level innovations such as rotating credit schemes that have been successfully scaled, as an example of a grassroots initiative that has moved from local to national scope.

### **3. Critical Challenges Calling for Alternative Solutions**

The third approach is to investigate pressing continental crises in order to generate alternative, transformative policy approaches to solutions. Rather than studying success, research under this approach will critically analyse where existing approaches have failed to diagnose the structural and conceptual roots of that failure.

Papers can also take on emerging issues on the premise that the fact that a challenge is still evolving is not a reason to defer analysis. For instance, both the climate crisis and questions of digital governance and data sovereignty are going to be among the most consequential domains of social policy in the coming decades. African policymakers and scholars should be developing frameworks to address these challenges now.

Indicative challenges and emerging issues include:

- *Gen Z uprisings and youth unrest* – examining the deep social policy roots of youth mobilisation across Africa; the intersection of youth unemployment, informality, inequality, and the demand for dignity and political recognition; alternative social contracts between youth and their governments.





- *Crisis in the Sahel* – social policy innovations developed in conflict-affected and fragile contexts. For example, Burkina Faso's efforts to organise farmers into cooperatives and food banks in the context of active conflict; Niger's cross-border livestock mobility agreements and specific governance mechanisms developed to address farmer-herder conflict.
- *Land and migration issues* – policy responses to land insecurity, displacement, and cross-border migration as interconnected social challenges; resource sovereignty in land-based communities; youth, land, and the agrarian question.
- *Climate transition policy* – social policy frameworks that treat climate disruption as the permanent structural condition of life in Africa, rather than an exceptional event; what long-term social protection, livelihood support, and managed transition policies should look like in this context.
- *Digital rights and transformation* – policy frameworks governing digital rights, data economies, AI governance, and the social implications of digital transformation for employment, services, and civic life.

Papers under this approach may be theoretical, conceptual, or empirically grounded but must engage seriously with the African context and with the lived realities of the communities most affected by the challenges being studied. Proposals should demonstrate conceptual rigour both in diagnosing the inadequacy of existing approaches and in articulating what a genuinely transformative alternative would involve.





# Format of Applications

Applicants are requested to submit the following documentation:

- 1 CV
- 2 Concept note of not more than 2,500 words (excluding references and footnotes), with the following sections:
  - Background
  - Nature of the issue and importance of the topic for social policy
  - Current academic and policy debates on topic in Africa
  - Theoretical or conceptual approach to the paper
  - Scope of the paper
  - Research questions/objectives
  - Data sources and analysis
  - Outline of paper
  - A professional profile section with:
    - a brief description of the experience/background of the researcher(s) that illustrates relevant qualifications and skills
    - examples of similar reports/papers with a few links to published work.

**We accept proposals in English, French and Portuguese.**

Send applications and enquiries to [getsipa.ias@ug.edu.gh](mailto:getsipa.ias@ug.edu.gh) with *GETSPA Promising Initiatives – Research Proposal* as the subject.

## Timelines

Activity	Date
Deadline to submit proposals	Jun 30, 2026
Communication of selection outcomes to candidates	Aug 15, 2026
Orientation Meeting	Aug 20, 2026
Deadline to submit revised proposals	Sep 10, 2026
Deadline to submit first full drafts	Jan 31, 2027
<b>Final submission of revised reports, blogs and policy brief</b>	<b>Apr 30, 2027</b>





# Grant Amount & Duration

Total grant of **USD 12,000.00** with a breakdown as follows:

**Field work** - USD 3,000.00

**Honorarium** - USD 6,000.00

**Advocacy and dissemination activities** - USD 3,000.00

**Duration:** 8 months after contracting



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