

CFR: Towards an Inclusive and Sustainable Future for Work(ers) in Eastern and Southern Africa.

Information session | January 28, 2026 | 3pm SAT/4pm EAT

Structure

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Introduction: the FutureWORKS Collective

- The FutureWORKS Collective is a global research network committed to a more inclusive and sustainable world of work.
- In Eastern and Southern Africa, our objective is to develop a network of leading research institutions to support labour policies and skills interventions towards a Just Transition.
- In this second round of calls, in this second round of calls, we will offer grants of up to **ZAR 400,000** to conduct original research on skills formation systems, over the period of a year, where possible building on the insights of research from the first phase.

Background and context

- African countries face the enormous challenge of preparing a rapidly growing, urbanized and youthful population for a changing world of work in the context of a "double transition" towards decarbonization and digitalization.
 - Deagrarianization, accelerated by the intensification of droughts and floods.
 - Deindustrialization, past pathways to carbon-intensive industrialization constrained.
 - Services, informalized downward pressure on working conditions.
- African governments hope that strengthening education and training systems will address unemployment, labour insecurity and inequality;
- However, mainstream approaches have had little impact because they focus exclusively on addressing 'skills mismatches', and overlook the economic, social, and political context in which skills are embedded.

Research themes

1. Education and Learning Pathways

This thematic area examines the extent to which education and training systems are structurally aligned with how young people move into work. It is interested in understanding whether education and training systems can support pathways into stable, skilled, and decent employment, or whether they produce credentials that are weakly connected to existing occupational structures and labour market opportunities.

Research themes

2. Occupations and Occupational Change

How occupations are constituted, transformed, and governed within changing regimes of production, accumulation and redistribution. Occupational training and skills development depend not only on technical requirements, but on social and institutional arrangements that define what counts as an occupation, whose knowledge is recognised, and how expertise is rewarded. Where occupations fragment, lose coherence, or are weakly institutionalised, the links between training, employment, and decent work are often weakened, with important implications for workers' bargaining power, working conditions and inequality.

Research themes

3. Labour Process and Worker Power

The workplace as a central site of class relations, skill formation, and the exercise of managerial and worker power. Training, restructuring, and technological change are not neutral processes, but contested terrains through which capital seeks to reorganise labour, reduce costs, and increase control, and through which workers and their organisations attempt to defend livelihoods, skills, and collective power. The aim is to understand how skills, transitions, and technology are embedded in labour processes and industrial relations, and how these factors shape inequality, precarity, and the distribution of risks and rewards.

Research themes

4. Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment

Small, micro, and community-based economic activity as a central terrain in which livelihoods are produced under conditions of informality, precarity, and uneven development. Rather than treating SMMEs simply as engines of growth or entrepreneurship, this strand approaches them as sites of labour relations, survival strategies, and local accumulation, shaped by power, access to resources, and institutional support. The focus is on how skills, work, and livelihoods are organised at local scales, and on how state, market and community institutions, structure opportunities and constraints for workers and small producers.

Methodological considerations

- Proposals must involve **original research**, focused one or multiple countries in Eastern and Southern Africa;
- We encourage interdisciplinary proposals that explore both **quantitative and qualitative** aspects of the research
 - Eg. statical analysis of official data, discourse analysis of archival materials, an (online) survey or questionnaire, individual or group interviews, ethnographic observation, or innovative research method.
- Apply an intersectional lens, with **a focus on gender**
- In the proposal, applicants are expected to explain the rationale for the case studies selected and the research methods used.

- To ensure the coherence of the research across countries and promote peer-learning, the selected research teams will be expected to **actively participate in the FutureWORKS Collective: Eastern and Southern Africa**.
 - inception workshop in April 2026, to develop a common conceptual framework;
 - regular meetings every two months to refine the country research approach, share emerging research findings, and plan dissemination events;
 - online reading groups to build common perspectives.
 - online seminars to disseminate final research findings to a wider audience, including researchers, policy makers, civil society groups and trade unions, employers' organisations and business groups, and the media.
- Research teams will also be required to develop a public engagement strategy for their respective countries.

Eligibility criteria

- Researchers based at or affiliated with **research institutions based in Eastern or Southern Africa**.
 - public or private universities, independent research centres and non-governmental organisations
 - Multilateral organisations, government departments, consultancy companies, and for-profit organisations are *not* eligible to apply as lead institutions
- Research teams must be led by a researcher with a **demonstrated track record of producing high-quality research** for policy impact, with a focus on labour markets, conditions of work, social reproduction and/or skills formation systems.
- Proposals must explicitly outline how the research teams will integrate the principles of gender equity and inclusion into the research team structure, the research design, and the research process.
- The research team must have the capacity to work in English as well as the working languages of the country or countries.

Expectations and responsibilities

The grant cycle for this second call will run from April 1, 2026, to March 31, 2027, with the disbursement of funds made on the basis of research outputs. Each research team will be expected to publish:

- a working paper based on original research, on [Wits WIReDSpace](#);
- an article based on the working paper, for a special issue convened by the research hub
- a summary brief in a prescribed format based on the working paper for dissemination to a wider audience

Research teams will be expected to participate in online seminars and co-organise public engagements, including policy dialogues, as part of research dissemination.

Research must meet the ethical standards outlined by the IDRC and by the University of the Witwatersrand. Research teams will be expected to comply with the IDRC's Open Access Policy and the Open Data Principles Statement. Applicants must include a Stage 1 Data Management Plan, outlining their approach to managing the research data collected.

Table 1: Indicative timeline for the disbursement of funds

Tranche	Deliverable	Deadline
25%	Upon signature of the contract	April 1, 2026
25%	Upon submission and acceptance of the inception report	July 1, 2026
25%	Upon submission and acceptance of the working paper	December 31, 2026
25%	Upon submission of an article for a journal special issue or edited volume and summary report	March 31, 2027

Proposal guidelines and structure

Proposals must be submitted in English **by February 15, 2026 at 23:59 SAST** via the [Online Platform](#)

- A: information about the researcher(s), the research institution, and an abstract of a maximum of 250 words.
- Part B: the proposal, which must follow the format below and cannot exceed the allocated word limit.
 - Introduction (350 words)
 - Objectives and questions (150 words)
 - Literature review (500 words)
 - Methodology (750 words)
 - Approach to incorporating an intersectional lens (300 words)
 - Research outputs (350 words)
 - Public engagement strategy (500 words)
 - Workplan (1 page)
 - Budget itemized (1 page)
- Applicants must upload a compiled list of all the CVs of the members of the research team, the [Stage 1 Data Management Plan](#) and proof of legal status of the research institution.

Evaluation criteria

- The proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:
 - Contribution of the proposed research to conceptual, empirical, and policy debates in Eastern and Southern Africa (35%):
 - Coherence of the research design, which provides a clear articulation between the research questions, methodology, research instruments, and sources of data (35%)
 - Public engagement strategy (10%)
 - Team composition (10%)
 - Quality of the writing (10%)
- In selecting shortlisted proposals, the review committee may choose to prioritise proposals that allow for greater geographic and thematic diversity.

Submission, review and contracting

- Complete applications will be evaluated by a committee of reviewers from SCIS, the REAL Centre and the ILO. Applicants will be notified of the outcome by **March 2, 2026**.
- The anticipated start date is **April 1st, 2026**.

Q&A



THANK YOU