

# CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

## Gender and Judging in Pluralistic Societies: A Comparative Assessment of Access to Justice for Women Across Africa

**DATE:** 7-11 August 2019

**VENUE:** Institute for African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon

**DEADLINE FOR ABSTRACTS:** **30 APRIL 2019**

### INTRODUCTION

Access to justice is a fundamental principle of the rule of law. Yet, studies have shown that a higher proportion of women in rural areas and some urban areas do not have access to justice through the regular courts. We conceptualize “access to justice” in two ways; first, is the issue of accessibility to adjudicatory institutions such as statutory courts, house of chiefs, and traditional or religious courts. Second, the existence of rules, norms and laws that protect women’s substantive rights. In legal pluralistic societies across Africa, customary courts operate side by side statutory courts, providing different opportunities and constraints for litigants who access these institutions. Access to these institutions are gendered to the extent that some existing rules, laws and policies restrict women’s rights and deprive many of their right to fundamental human rights and dignities.

Existing evidence suggest that efforts being made to improve women’s access to justice across Africa are often biased towards the formal means— the statutory courts. However, there exists a large sphere of informal means of accessing justice which is prevalent especially in the rural parts (deprived urban communities) and which is more easily accessed by the urban poor as well. These spaces are the traditional courts, chief courts and some religious courts where most matters arising within local communities often find redress and where women often find themselves seeking justice. The overarching goal of this workshop is to examine the changing relations between state/statutory courts and customary/traditional courts and how these changes affect women’s access to justice in both spheres.

This interdisciplinary workshop brings together mid to early career scholars and doctoral and postdoctoral candidates from around the globe with the goal of developing innovative, interdisciplinary and comparative research on the topic of access to justice for women in Africa. The workshop is organized by the German funded program, Project Point Sud, in collaboration with the Institute for African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, and the Institute for African Women in Law.

### WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

The workshop seeks to convene an *interdisciplinary* collection of scholars employing intersectional paradigms to critically assess the gendered nature of law and how intersectionality affects women’s access to justice within statutory courts and customary courts.

This workshop will be held at the Institute for African Studies (IAS) at the University of Ghana.

**Language Barriers:** Since this project will bring scholars from across the globe, the main working language of the workshop and conference will be in English with French translation provided by a certified language translator. For scholars coming from Lusophone Africa, we will emphasize a basic understanding of English or French as a necessary requirement for the application.

## **STRUCTURE**

1. The workshop is designed as an interactive space for participants to present their ongoing work and to receive feedback from discussants.
2. Participants will gain valuable input from senior scholars on topics such as data collection, research methodology and data analyses.
3. Visits to courts and the House of Chiefs will provide empirical grounding for the workshop.

## **THEMES**

We invite submissions from doctoral, postdoctoral and early career individuals. This workshop will explore the following preliminary themes (not a conclusive list):

1. Examine the pluralistic ways in which some communities remain prone to having more customary or religious courts than statutory courts.
2. What are the opportunities and challenges for women accessing justice within these plural judicial systems?
3. The gendered patterns of access to customary and religious courts—do men or women use these courts more often, and if so, are the pathways for accessing these courts equal?
4. Are there discernible patterns of gendered outcomes in these courts—do women receive harsher sentences or punitive measures than men?
5. What challenges do women face in accessing these courts? What innovative solutions and strategies can be used to improve access to justice, and equitable outcomes for women?
6. How have institutional policies at the domestic level, and regional level (African Union, ECOWAS, SADC, EAC etc) sought to address issues of women's access to justice, and what have been the outcomes? Are there any lessons to be learned across regions and countries?
7. What is the role of technology in questions of women's access to justice? The role of artificial intelligence, social media, pharmaceutical and health disparities etc.
8. How are women navigating environmental factors in their communities and are there avenues for making claims for environmental destruction and exploitation?
9. What are the protections for double marginalized groups of women such as women with disabilities, prostitutes, LGBT etc?

## **OUTCOMES**

The workshop aims to achieve the following:

1. ***Publish an edited volume:*** The best papers presented at the workshop will be published in an edited book.

2. *Establish a collaborative research network (CRN)* to continue addressing the issue of access to justice for women.
3. *Provide innovative policy solutions to* governments and policymakers.

### **SUBMISSION GUIDELINES**

1. We invite submissions of extended abstracts (1000 words maximum) or working papers
2. All abstract submissions must be in word document, single spaced and using Roman font 12
3. Abstracts should have a title that captures the goals of the paper, six key words
4. Abstracts should contain a well-defined research question(s), the theoretical and methodological approaches to be used, and the sources of data to be consulted.
5. Additionally, submit a separate document containing a brief bio (250 words max) and contact information (email, institutional affiliation and phone number)
6. All submissions should be emailed to [conference5050@gmail.com](mailto:conference5050@gmail.com) (subject line: *Point Sud Accra*)
7. Abstracts and bios are due on **30 APRIL 2019**
8. Once accepted, participants agree to submit their final papers on **1 JULY 2019**

### **PARTICIPATION**

The workshop costs (economy flight, hotel, meals and ground transportation) for all accepted participants will be fully covered by the organizers.