

Terms of Reference: Lead Researcher (Urban Development and Innovation)

Innovations Born from Place – grassroots innovations in Africa for urban futures

About Results for Development (R4D)

Results for Development (R4D) is a leading non-profit global development partner. We collaborate with change agents around the world — government officials, civil society leaders and social innovators — to create strong systems that support healthy, educated people. We help our partners move from knowing their goal to knowing how to reach it. We combine global expertise in health, education and nutrition with analytic rigor, practical support for decision-making and implementation and access to peer problem-solving networks. Together with our partners, we build self-sustaining systems that serve everyone and deliver lasting results. Then we share what we learn so others can achieve results for development, too. www.r4d.org

About the role

We are looking for a Lead Researcher to design and run a six-month pilot study of 15–20 grassroots social innovations in African cities, co-produced with the innovators themselves. The study is part of the Urban Futures track of the International Development Innovation Alliance (IDIA), hosted by Results for Development (R4D). The funding for this work comes from a combination of IDIA and directly from one of its members, the Judith Neilson Foundation (JNF). The Lead Researcher will be accountable for delivering the work, designing and running the methodology, gathering the information from the innovators and producing the final synthesis.

This role is suited to an established researcher or practitioner with a recognised track record in urban development and innovation in African contexts. Applicants should be able to demonstrate existing expertise in this field.

Purpose of the research

The literature on urban innovation(s) is dominated by themes of capital, technology and city politics. Success stories are framed by ‘western’ and/or ‘global north’ innovations being scaled within their context and then transferred to different parts of the world.

Our aim with this report is to come from a different viewpoint; it will tell the story from the point of view of innovators and residents who build, run or use innovations mainly in informal settlements and within the informal economy, where roughly 1.1 billion people live and work. A new typology is expected to be produced, with more holistic and future facing framings of how urban innovations scale, and where financing and support should be directed.

The work will feed into IDIA’s and JNF’s thought leadership and positioning ahead of the UN’s post-2030 development agenda negotiations, which are set to begin in 2027. The primary audience is funders and the innovators themselves (to use the material for their own benefit/purposes); secondary audiences are city governments and researchers.

Four key principles shape the work: resident-anchored, researched *with* not *about*, focused on innovations that grew from place, and post-research action, which will be supported by a small advisory body.

Key responsibilities

Scoping and set-up (months 1–2)

- Engage with key funding partners (IDIA and JNF) on the premise of the research
- Confirm editorial control and governance
- Build a dissemination plan with key funding partners and advisory council (focusing on the type of outputs that we would like to produce, and the audiences that will receive/value them)
- Finalise the interview questions, the case template and the six-lens typology (community finance; community data and knowledge; care and mutual aid; tenure and land; informal-to-formal bridging; co-produced services)
- Put the safeguarding framework and consent materials in place with R4D's safeguarding focal point
- Shortlist and confirm 15–20 cases from the IDIA and JNF networks, balanced by region and model, with innovators able to co-author/engage

Case co-production (months 3–4)

- Co-produce each case with its innovator through short interviews, written inputs, research and community-produced photography or film.
- Apply the same case template to every initiative: root cause, who initiates, owns and funds it, how it sustains, power and gender, how it scales, and how it fails, stalls or is co-opted.
- Return the data and outputs to each innovator as they are generated and agree stipends and credit with them (this will be supported by an IDIA/R4D focal point)
- Supervise any additional researchers or local creators and manage the Advisory Council's input (2–3 thought leaders).

Synthesis and sharing (Month 5)

- Synthesise across cases into the typology and the inverted map of actors (to be shared at the state of the work), keeping place-specific texture alongside comparability.
- Write the report and draft audience briefings, working with a design team to produce appropriate dissemination materials
- Share drafts with contributors first for comment, then with wider audiences (based on dissemination plan, editorial control and governance).
- Run a short post-process reflection with contributors on whether the work was fair and non-extractive.

Deliverables and timeline

The pilot runs for roughly six months, with final sharing running into month 7. Start date to be confirmed.

Deliverable	Due
Confirmed case template, interview guide and typology	Month 1
Safeguarding framework, consent materials and contributor agreements	Month 1
Shortlist of 15–20 confirmed cases	Month 2

Deliverable	Due
15–20 co-produced case studies, with data returned to each innovator	Month 5
Draft report: typology, inverted map of actors and cross-case synthesis	Month 5
Final report and funder/policy briefing	Month 5
Attendance of a Skoll World Forum side event to share the research	Month 5
Short methodology notes and shortlist of relationships/actions for a possible second phase	Month 5

Person specification

Essential

- 5+ years urban development and innovation, particularly in Africa, with evidence of contribution to thinking on urban futures, particular on the post-2030 agenda (for example, publications, policy work or convening)
- Strong track record in qualitative, participatory or co-produced research, ideally on urban development, informality or community-led development.
- Experience working directly with grassroots organisations or informal communities, with a clear commitment to non-extractive, fair-credit practice.
- Knowledge of African urban contexts and the ability to work across several cities or countries.
- Ability to build a consistent analytical framework (typology, case template) and synthesise varied material into clear, accessible writing.
- Experience with informed consent, research ethics and safeguarding.
- Able to manage a small team, multiple partners and a tight timeline within a fixed budget

Desirable

- Existing relationships with networks such as Slum/Shack Dwellers International, WIEGO or IIED, or with IDIA and JNF portfolio partners.
- Experience commissioning or supporting community-produced photography or film.
- Experience writing for funder and policy audiences.
- Comfort using AI tools within agreed protocols.
- Lived experience of the urban settings being studied, and relevant local languages.

Terms and working arrangements

- **Fee and time commitment:** daily fee rate commensurate with experience, with an expected 40 days maximum
- **Contract and reporting:** contracted through R4D (IDIA's legal host); reporting line to be confirmed
- **Governance:** works with the IDIA and JNF teams and an Advisory Council of 2–3 Urban Futures thinkers
- **Location:** assignment can be undertaken remotely, no travel anticipated.

- **Ethics and safeguarding:** follows R4D's safeguarding policy, with a named focal point and reporting route; uses layered, revocable consent for participation, attribution and use of images, film and quotes; and agrees stipends and credit with each innovator.
- **Use of AI:** an LLM may be used to help synthesise findings, in line with R4D/IDIA's AI protocols.

Application instructions

Please submit the following using the online submission form on R4D's Business Opportunities page:

- CV (maximum 2-pages)
- Cover note (maximum 2-pages) outlining your relevant experience against the criteria specified above, including examples of previous work, with confirmation of your earliest available start date
- Daily fee rate

The deadline for applications is **Tuesday 27th October 2026**.

Applications that do not clearly demonstrate experience against the essential criteria, particularly expertise in urban development and innovation in Africa, will not be shortlisted. Due to the expected volume of applications, only shortlisted candidates will be contacted.

General information

- All information contained in this RFP is proprietary. It is for the sole use of the Offeror in connection with bid response preparation and is not to be used by Offeror for any other purpose or revealed or disclosed in any manner to any other individuals and/or company without specific written permission from R4D.
- R4D reserves the right to make all decisions regarding this RFP, including the right to reject any proposals received in response to this RFP. Offerors understands that the issuance of this RFP does not create any obligation on the part of R4D to enter into any contract or to undertake any other obligation with respect to the requirements referred to herein.
- If any modification to this RFP becomes necessary, R4D will publish updates in the same formats and locations as the original RFP.
- All costs incurred by Offeror in the preparation of its response to this RFP, and any oral presentations requested, shall be wholly absorbed by the Offeror.
- Former Employees and Board Members must disclose their prior relationship with Results for Development and should contact the point of contact listed in this RFP to verify eligibility to do business with R4D.