

CODESRIA

Bulletin

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Executive Secretary's Note

In 2018, the Council set out to address three challenges. This was on top of organising the 15th General Assembly. The first was to consolidate

scientific and administrative operations after an internal reform process spearheaded by the Executive Committee. The second was to complete a smooth leadership transition with the arrival of a new Executive Secretary in mid-2017. The third, and perhaps most pressing, was to reaffirm relations with partners and enter into new partnerships as a strategy of scaling up funding for our scientific programmes. These tasks were all achieved.

At the programme level, a new framework for mobilising research supported by the Council, the Meaning-Making Research Initiative (MRI), was introduced while all Training and Fellowship programmes were undertaken as scheduled. We successfully held the 15th General Assembly, the apex of the Council's intellectual and governance work, and hosted a stellar team of keynote addresses, including His Excellency Thabo Mbeki, Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka, Harvard University Professor Ousmane Kane and award-winning author Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor. The General Assembly renewed our focus in the Council and sharpened our intention going into 2019.

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This quarterly Bulletin is distributed free to all social research institutes and faculties in Africa to encourage research co-operation among African scholars. Interested individuals and institutions may also subscribe. Contributions on theoretical matters and reports on conferences and seminars are welcome.

We are happy to note that the momentum for engagement with existing partners was renewed while bringing on board new partners. A significant number of outstanding issues with partners, especially those revolving around programme and financial reporting, were also resolved. The Council shifted to the use of new accounting software and has established fresh mechanisms of engaging the CODESRIA constituency. In particular, work on clearing the publications backlog continued apace and our outputs, especially this Bulletin, will constitute a new basis for further engagement with the CODESRIA membership and community.

In 2019, we sought to build on these modest achievements in our reforms and continue a path charted out in 2017–18. First, more focus has been on ensuring success in programme implementation, expanding some programmes while exploring new terrains for research. Better and more effective strategies for dissemination of research outputs including laying the ground for a programme on reflections on policy, have been firmed up. The programme reconceptualises the idea of policy engagement and reframes it as a process rather than a one-off event convened at the end of a research cycle.

The Council announced the results of the 2018 MRI Research applications for 2018. We noted that the number of applicants to all our activities, including the MRI, increased in 2018. This, of course, reaffirms the centrality of the Council in nurturing a new generation of academics on the continent. In 2018, for example, the Council received more than double the number of MRI applications received in 2017. It is notable that there were more female applicants in the pool. Most of the applications were judged by an external team of peer reviewers to be of high quality. We therefore decided to fund double the number of proposals budgeted for in 2018, thus covering up to the 2019 cycle. Hence, the Council did not advertise some of the core MRI programmes in 2019. Instead, the double selection for 2018 was reconstituted into a 2018–19 cohort of MRI grants.

Our commitment to reinforcing both feminist and gendered approaches to our research received a major boost. In 2018, the Council introduced a new MRI grant for female researchers, in an effort to increase the number of female academics participating in the Council's activities. We have opened up discussion with two partners to put more resources, first into female academics within our community, and second into gendered and feminist approaches in our research. While we appreciate the importance of gender as a social relation involving men and women, we need to

re-emphasise that our current strategic plan identified generations as a cross-cutting issue and this will provide us the opportunity to focus our work on women and girls. The Council will continue to support work that grew the cohort of female researchers in 2019. Funding is being sought to focus on bolstering the academic writing and publication skills of early career female academics as part of this effort.

Resource mobilisation remains an area of need in the Council and we intensified our efforts in this direction in 2019. This is designed to increase the annual budget of the Council and also expand on programmes to cover areas that need urgent attention but which we scaled back because of financial constraints. Areas that the Council will give renewed focus to include academic freedom, peace and security, economic justice, trade and health. Also, from a disciplinary point of view, an emphasis on history and the Pan-African anchoring of regional integration initiatives demand more attention, in view of recent moves at the African Union and among regional organisations to rethink institutional architectures and advance integration. Further, investment in interdisciplinary conceptual thinking through our methodology training will continue.

The Council will continue with internal reform initiatives, focusing on enhancing efficiency and oversight. We will ensure that Secretariat processes enhance the capacity of the Council to serve the community of African scholars efficiently while ensuring judicious use of Council resources. By judicious, we mean that a significant percentage of our resources will go towards the execution of scientific activities of the Council.

Finally, better service to the CODESRIA community must become the cornerstone of the work of the Council. We will continue reaffirming this position going forward. The Secretariat will improve the quality of its engagement with the community as an end in itself but also as a strategy to grow the number of active members in good standing. In turn, we will keep our membership fully engaged with the Secretariat. An electronic database of African scholars interacting with the Council is now operational and we would like to hear from you regarding your concerns and achievements in 2019. We want to share your achievements with the community. More work will be done to improve our communication and dissemination processes by launching a new website, digitising most of our operations and uploading our outputs to enhance circulation of books and journals.

Godwin R. Murunga
Executive Secretary