



From the Executive Secretary's Desk

This is the first issue of the CODESRIA Bulletin in 2018. It comes six months after I assumed duty as the new Executive Secretary of CODESRIA. This issue of the Bulletin is significant in several ways. But by far the most important is that it allows us an opportunity to set an agenda for it as an indispensable platform of CODESRIA. It is a revamped issue of the Bulletin, different from the previous one in two critical ways. First, we aim in this and subsequent issues of the Bulletin to recapture the historic spirit of the Bulletin. This specifically includes the central, indeed, critical role the Bulletin has played in projecting the image, aspirations, scientific content and convictions of the community of scholarship around CODESRIA. Second, this issue returns the Bulletin into a platform of vigorous debate; the forum through which urgent but pithy debates on issues relevant to the African social science and humanities community are discussed. We aim to continue doing this from a pan-African standpoint.

It bears re-emphasizing that at the core of the work of CODESRIA is a pan-African conviction and commitment. This is the touchstone that defines our intellectual project and one that we wish to amplify. The idea of 'African' historically envisioned by the Council is broadly understood. It is not necessarily a racialised idea; it is an idea defined by a commitment and conviction to Africans. Underlying pan-Africanism is a struggle for the humanity of African peoples across the world. Whether this struggle is waged for independence or continental unity, it is invigorated by the fact that the humanity of Africans has historically been battered and the agenda to reassert that humanity is not, and should never be, taken for granted. It is therefore an incessant struggle that calls for utmost intellectual care but that must also be waged with greater tenacity today than ever before. After all, we live in a world where some continue to express doubt about the humanity of a whole race and where civil rights gains are subject to rollback. The relevance of struggle cannot therefore be overstated.

The Bulletin has historically given voice to struggles; it has done so by allowing the many-sidedness of struggles by Africans to be shared, discussed and heard. The Bulletin has, as a result, emerged as the

space where divisions that deter African scholarly communities from articulating their thoughts are resolved. It is the space from where we have been able to reconcile linguistic as well as geographic distinctions and allowed the community of scholarship in Africa to immediately relate to the debates that occur within and beyond the continent in different languages, disciplinary orientations, theoretical frameworks and gendered perspectives.

This is the reason why this issue of the Bulletin represents, for us, a revived commitment of the Secretariat to the community of scholarship in Africa and beyond. Not only do we want to work for quality, vigorous debate, timeliness and relevance, we also want all these to turn the Bulletin into the space everyone goes when they want to feel the heartbeat of Africa's social science and humanities thinking.

We however cannot achieve this objective if the community of scholarship in Africa does not engage us and take ownership of the various platforms the Council offers. This therefore is also an invitation to the community to re-engage the Bulletin in fresh ways; ways that push the boundaries of debate, test the frontiers of radical scholarship, invite all audiences to the CODESRIA staple of intellectual outputs.

Over the last six months since the departure of Dr. Ebrima Sall, the sixth Executive Secretary of CODESRIA, we have reflected in the Secretariat about the best way to steer the work of the Council. We have also received messages from members of the community raising critical questions about our programming, the ease with which we communicate and overall quality of services we offer. It is for this reason that I wish to use this space to outline very briefly the thinking that is taking shape in the Secretariat with a hope it will enable us to find a most suitable way to steer the Council.

The Council has over the last 45 years sought to support basic research in the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) with an eye to shaping public debate in and about Africa. In doing this, the Council has focused on supporting African academics in universities and research centres. As a consequence, the Council has

played a major role in sustaining this intellectual community by committing to facilitate them to conduct basic research and, through their outputs, shape public debate.

In the last few years however, the need to pay specific attention to the reproduction of this community has become more urgent in order to respond, in more deliberate ways, to gaps in university postgraduate training. This is particularly the case with postgraduate training that currently produces graduates in mass but plays a limited role in sharpening and advancing their conceptual and methodological skill for high quality research output. The Council is better positioned to respond, in some measured ways, to the need for advanced training with an aim of creating Africa's best in the social sciences and humanities.

The idea therefore is to enhance the position of the Council in reproducing the next generation of African SSH scholars and scholarship. This will be achieved, first, by aligning our intellectual programmes to achieve internal coherence and, second, by refocusing our dissemination strategy in a way that affirms the key messages from our research. Ultimately, CODESRIA must project a message that shapes public discourse, demonstrates the relevance of basic research outputs to experiences of ordinary peoples of Africa and shapes a future that intellectually affirms human dignity by speaking to our common humanity.

The work of the Council will therefore be aligned around five pillars including research and training, publications and documentation, dissemination and communication and lastly, administration and finance. For these pillars to have the coherence we seek and to deliver the outputs we desire, the Council will invest on personnel and equipment. We identify these pillars with the hope of working towards internal coherence.

There are some key challenges facing the Council that need to be addressed as a way of ensuring the proper functioning of the identified pillars and optimal operation of the programmes. First, the Council needs to revitalise systems of internal oversight in order to speed up its capacity to respond quickly to the needs of the community of scholarship. While the Council has documented and codified many of its processes and procedures, we are committing to greater diligence in following them. This is with the goal of directing all possible resources the Council raises strictly to the core mandate of the Council – research, training, publication, documentation and dissemination. Second, resolving outstanding management issues resulting

from previous audits, enhancing or repairing relations with funding partners and ensuring that funds allocated are judiciously used for the purposes of growing the scientific achievements of the community. Finally up-scaling the Council into a paperless organisation. This is necessary in order to grow a system of information and data management that supports efficiency, guarantees transparency and reduces wastage.

Meantime, a number of initiatives that have not previously enjoyed the visibility they deserve will be given due attention. Five are particularly important. The first is a *senior scholars initiative*. The Council will progressively invest more in senior African scholars. The desire to reproduce the next generation of African scholars and scholarship is best served by ensuring that mid-career academics have shoulders to stand on. The aim is to make sure there is inter-generational conversation and therefore continuity. The mark of success in building the next generation will be their capacity to produce good quality publications especially single-authored manuscripts.

The second is investing in *Reflections on Policy*. The demand for policy impact has become a box many research institutions feel compelled to tick. However, the tension between policy-driven research and research-driven policy persists. While there is no doubt that policy relevance is core to any academic undertaking, it is not clear if in fact we have a clear understanding of the policy process itself. It increasingly feels, sitting in the Secretariat, that many institutions seek policy impact without necessarily understanding the policy process. In order to ensure proper sequencing of the relationship between research and policy, the Council will invest in understanding the policy process and, in doing so, grow a shared interest in research and policy. This way, we hope to ensure continuous conversations with policy communities. The outcome should be a process of co-production of policy out of shared interest in pressing research questions. The aim is to ensure that issues of policy impact are problematized afresh to understand how impact emanates from a proper understanding of the policy process.

The third is prioritising gender and embracing feminist perspectives. Engendering social sciences has always been a priority of the Council. Indeed, the recent SIDA Evaluation of the 2012-2016 Strategic Plan noted that in percentage terms, CODESRIA funded more female projects in proportion to applications from female scholars. However, the numbers are miniscule and the percentages hide more than they reveal. The Council will invest in up-scaling the number of female

participant in its programmes through deliberate budgeting for female colleagues. The setting up of MRI grants restricted to female scholars is one step in this direction.

The fourth is renewed focus on academic freedom. The Council was founded on the logic of securing academic freedom. Its founders and a critical number of its luminaries have been academics in exile. In 1995, the Council started an academic freedom programmes. This was both an academic as well as activist undertaking headed by a programme officer. While the Council has issued statements highlighting abuse of academic freedoms, this has not been effective in activist and intellectual terms. The Council will revitalise the programme and aim to up-scale it back to a key programme of the organisation.

The fifth is a focus on the Humanities. The Humanities have come up for special attention in the Council in recent times. Previously, the Council invested in the humanities without necessarily emphasising their distinctive contribution to knowledge. Thus, up to roughly 30 per cent of our work has been in the humanities. Not only did the Council initiate the CODESRIA African Humanities programme as a collaborative programme with University of Ghana-Legon, the Council also ran a series of conferences titled SOS African History and continues to support the

journal of the Association of African Historians. These programmes either stalled or are under-performing and need to be revitalised. Discussions around the humanities have commenced and an outline of the pathway to their revitalisation is developing.

The above reflections aim to provide a pathway for consolidating performing programme at CODESRIA while revitalising others. It also touches on issues of administration and finance in order to find a way of getting the different component of the Council to achieve synergy. The task of the new leadership is to spearhead this process of consolidation and renewal with a focus on reproducing the next generation of African scholars and scholarship. It is also to restore confidence in existing partners and invite new ones to join in supporting the agenda of reproducing the next generation of African scholars and scholarship in the SSH.

Finally, this is the year of the 15th CODESRIA General Assembly. Planned to take place from 17th to 21st December 2018 in Dakar, the Assembly will focus on the theme Africa and the Crisis of Globalisation. We invite member to join us as we prepare for the Assembly and to engage us throughout the year in the intellectually edifying output of the Council.

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Executive Secretary