

A Globally Acclaimed Economics Guru

The name, Samir Amin, first caught my attention in 1968 when, as a young graduate student in the Netherlands, I read in the Dutch press about a debate scheduled by the Development Association in Amsterdam between him and Jan Tinbergen, father of econometrics and co-winner, in 1969, of the first Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences.

I was particularly struck by the fact that facing the already globally-acclaimed economics guru was a son of Africa – and the additional fact that an entrance fee of no less than ten 1968 Dutch guilders was payable for the privilege of observing what was promoted as an intellectual event!

Impressed by these tributes to him, by his impressive performance in the debate itself and by my subsequent reading of some of his early works I, some six years later and, by then a junior researcher at the Tangier, Morocco-based African Training

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and Research Centre in Administration for Development (CAFRAD), took the opportunity of a mission in West Africa in 1974 to pay a courtesy call on the man I had grown to appreciate as a formidable intellect and development activist who also happened to be the Director of IDEP – and present to him for the possible favour of his eventual comments a paper I had prepared for the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex and further developed for possible publication on rural development in a Ghana and Africa under neo-colonial occupation.

Ecstasy and complete disbelief are mild words to describe my reaction when, on my return visit to Dakar and his office a couple of weeks

later, Samir offered me a research-cum-teaching appointment at IDEP – having decided on the basis of that one paper and our follow-up discussion that I could make a useful contribution to the development and implementation of the Institute's research, education, training and consultancy programmes for Africa's independent and democratic development.

The fact that I was recruited and installed at IDEP, a United Nations Institute, two months later – and before the requirements of a United Nations job application, entry medical examination and other recruitment formalities could be initiated, let alone completed – is but one example of Samir, the man's and the activist's, trademark prioritization of substance and results over ceremony and form.

May the light of the great intellect and activist that he was in life continue to shine on us and lead us for as long as we live.