

Notes on the creation of CODESRIA

This short note is based on a presentation by Samir Amin about the battles that took place during the creation of CODESRIA

1. The objective: What were the challenges faced in this battle? What were the functions that the founders wanted to assign to CODESRIA in the struggle of African peoples and African states for an economic and social development worthy of the name? What kind of institution was imagined to best fulfill this function?
2. The steps and negotiations undertaken for this purpose; the reasons why Dakar chosen; what status was envisaged for the organisation of the institution and the headquarters agreement.

I. The objective

There were two visions for the role and functions of CODESRIA, between which a choice had to be made:

- i. CODESRIA conceived as a sort of common home where university social science research institutes, would choose the leadership and would decide on its orientation and programs. These institutions would be represented either by their directors or others.
- ii. CODESRIA conceived as one of the engines needed to promote independent and audacious African reflections on the challenges of the contemporary world. Thus

a call was made to African thinkers able to contribute to this, regardless of whether they were part of academia (the idea was not to eliminate the role of universities, but rather to combine their contributions with others). This was because it was recognized that creative thinking is not the exclusive monopoly of universities. Fanon and Cabral brought much from outside of universities through their reflections on the struggles for the liberation of African peoples. Today, the intellectual activists in civil society have their contribution to make.

This second concept was deliberately chosen, said Samir Amin, and the reasons for that choice were shared openly. This choice set the framework for the subsequent negotiations conducted to create the organization, and guided the founders in the choice of the first leaders. This deliberate choice has been at the heart of the success of CODESRIA.

II. The first steps

- i. The Rockefeller Foundation took the initiative in October 1964 to invite to Bellagio (in Italy) ten directors based in some of the major research institutions of that time.
- ii. The invitations were addressed only to 'Sub-Saharan Africa':

the five Arab countries of North Africa were excluded.

- iii. Of the ten directors invited, eight were British or French, one was Sudanese and one Nigerian (Onitiri).
- iv. Samir Amin was not invited as at the time because he did not have a position that entitled him to be invited (he was then a teacher at IDEP). He was nevertheless brought up to speed by an Italian friend at the OECD (who was associated with the Rockefeller Foundation). He immediately grasped the reasons for the initiative: the Western powers feared that with newly established independence, the directors of the institutions in question would be replaced by Africans sooner or later. They were afraid of losing their privileged influence in guiding the activities of these institutions, and wanted to ensure that the new leaders would conform to the views of foreign and international development cooperation.
- v. Samir said he immediately understood that it was necessary to engage in these battles, to derail these plans and to open the way for the creation of an African institution capable of contributing to the development of autonomous reflections and critique.

vi. The acronym for the institution imagined by Rockefeller and the OECD was CODESRIA, but at the time the letters stood for 'Conference of Directors of Institutes of Research in Africa'.

vii. Onitiri then took the initiative of organizing, in Africa, two successive conferences of these selected directors (still only those from Sub-Saharan Africa).

viii. The first took place before August 1970 (when Samir took office as director of IDEP in Ibadan). Samir was not invited, again since he did not have a position that entitled him to be there.

ix. The second was in 1971 in Nairobi at the Kenyan institute then led by Dharam Ghai. Samir was invited in his capacity as the director of IDEP. The atmosphere was friendly, but the crucial choice about the objective of the institution was still not clear. The majority of the Anglophone participants were inclined towards the first vision. Samir remembers that only he and Dharam Ghai frankly defended the second vision, fearing that even the 'Africanisation' of the leadership of the institutes would remain in the flow of the dominant thinking of 'international cooperation' that backed their governments.

x. The 'Standing Committee' of this conference was charged with the responsibility of advancing the establishment of CODESRIA (if one sticks with that acronym) and appointed Samir Amin as the 'Vice President' and chose IDEP (in Dakar) as the provisional headquarters of the 'Depository Centre' (that

was the name given) responsible for the coordination of these efforts.

III. The choice of Dakar

Samir was convinced of the need to accelerate the procedures for moving forward.

a) He carried out what some have called (as he said, not without reason) a 'coup d'état'. He kept the acronym CODESRIA but used other words: 'Council for the Development of Social Sciences' rather than 'Conference of Directors of ...'.

b) He said he was convinced that it was necessary to integrate North Africa into the project in the pan-African spirit of the OAU and to break away from the isolation of 'Black Africa'.

c) He was also convinced that the final headquarters of CODESRIA should be established in Dakar, but not at IDEP, even if the latter could provide a temporary shelter, as brief as possible, in the implementation phase.

This choice was not the obvious one. The large Anglophone universities of Africa advanced solid arguments about their capacity to provide a good number of their professors who would be capable of managing the programs of CODESRIA. But Samir saw two dangers there: first that Francophone Africa would play only a minor role; and secondly, the majority of professors provided by the Anglophone universities would be facsimiles of their foreign masters, conventional and anxious not to displease either their governments or donors.

Samir sought an audience with

Senghor and told him of his fears. Senghor immediately grasped the importance and told Samir - you are right, go ahead, you have my support.

Samir said he feared, in return, that some would regard CODESRIA as a "new cheese" reserved for the 'Francophones'. That was why he thought it was necessary to include at this stage some Anglophones who believed in the fundamental choices to ensure the balanced pan-African character of the new institution. Fortunately Cooperation Française, although well-disposed to giving its support to a Francophone institution, was not at all so disposed if this was to be a pan-African one that would give space to Anglophone, Lusophone or Arabophone countries.

d) Onitiri decided in 1971 to take his sabbatical leave at IDEP. It was a friendly decision even if Onitiri had probably not renounced his idea of establishing the institution in Ibadan. That was his legitimate right; the Nairobi decision of 1971 had not settled the question of the final location of the headquarters.

Onitiri made only a few brief visits to Dakar during his sabbatical leave. One of his Nigerian students - Abangwu - had been invited to assist him with getting permanent residence at IDEP, but he was not much help. In fact, he proved to be dishonest, leaving (after Onitiri) without leaving his forwarding address (on his return to Nigeria) but ... after having tapped into the small funds allocated to CODESRIA at its birth. Samir insisted that he be sued in Nigeria, but without success.

IV. The start-up team

1. With whom should he constitute a small team of collective reflection for conducting the business of CODESRIA? In Samir's opinion (and he informed Senghor of this), he did not wish to take over CODESRIA. He wanted the institution to become completely independent without delay and to have its own headquarters agreement with Senegal, its own offices in Dakar outside of IDEP, and an Executive Secretary that was not Samir himself.

He knew that some adversaries would not miss the opportunity of saying that he was spending too much time on the establishment of CODESRIA and that he was neglecting his duties as director of IDEP. He took the initiative of informing Gardiner, then the Secretary General of ECA, who supported him without hesitation.

Samir seconded Amoa (a Ghanaian) to IDEP for whom he had suggested the creation of a post of Deputy Director, with the consent of Gardiner who undertook to convince the IDEP Board. Amoa was extremely effective.

But, said Samir, this was not enough. It was then that he took advantage of a visit to Tanzania to invite Abdalla Bujra (a Kenyan who had a post at the University of Dar es Salaam) to join the team at IDEP and to lead the CODESRIA team. Bujra fulfilled his duties with intelligence and dedication.

Samir also took advantage of a visit to Stockholm to move things forward.

- i. There he discovered a young Malawian, T. Makandawire, then a brilliant doctoral student, respected in Sweden, and invited him to join the Dakar team. History has shown that this choice would provide CODESRIA with a quality leader of the greatest magnitude, an independent and bold spirit.
 - ii. Samir took the opportunity to get SAREC on side. That was not an obvious step. SAREC, solidly implanted in East Africa, could have, with legitimacy, required that a Dar es Salaam headquarters would facilitate matters as well as their financial support. Samir explained to SAREC the reasons for the preference for Dakar: to give CODESRIA a real pan-African dimension from the start, to focus on critical thinking in matters of development and thus guarantee its own independence from all governments, as it should. Samir convinced them. SAREC immediately substituted the starter funders (Rockefeller Foundation, OECD, Cooperation Française and others) by, firstly, providing IDEP with urgent funds for the nascent CODESRIA (which helped to negate the argument of some adversaries that he was using IDEP funds for this purpose); and secondly, pledging substantial long-term support for CODESRIA (SAREC has scrupulously honored this commitment).
2. It was necessary also to obtain the signature of the government of Senegal for the agreement on the headquarters.

The responsibility for these negotiations was entrusted to Bujra, supported by Professor Twum-Barima, director of the Institute for Statistics and Social Research at Legon University (Ghana).

Samir had in his possession a model agreement: that which Bugnicourt and himself had negotiated and obtained for ENDA. A 'fabulous agreement', it is said, due to the generosity of Senegal. Revised for the draft agreement for CODESRIA, Abdou Diouf, then Prime Minister of Senegal, accepted it without hesitation. Samir emphasized that the government of Senegal accepted the idea of an independent, authentic pan-African institution, and since then, no subsequent Senegalese government to this day has exerted the least pressure on CODESRIA. This was not the current practice in Africa or indeed elsewhere. The choice of Dakar was definitely a good one.

V. Exiting from the colonial isolation of Africa

The goal of CODESRIA as it was imagined was to contribute to breaking the colonial isolation of Africa by building close and direct relations with Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia. Samir had started by organizing the first big Africa-Latin America-Caribbean conference at IDEP in 1972, followed by the first Africa-Asia conference organized in 1974 in Antananarivo.

In Dakar, for the first time, Africans heard the profound voices of the nascent dependency theories: Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Pablo Gonzales Casanova, Ruy Marini, André Gunder Frank and others. In

Madagascar they met for the first time the great figures of India and South-East Asia: Amiya Bagchi, Ashok Mitra and others.

Samir's previous meetings with these innovative critical thinkers of Latin America and Asia gave him a small advantage. Invited as a foreign guest in his personal capacity to the conference in Mexico of 1972, he witnessed the birth of CLACSO and made friends with Enrique Oteiza, its future Secretary General. The goal defined for this new institution was very similar to what had been imagined for CODESRIA: to think for ourselves independently in order to contribute to the commitment of our countries and continents outside the beaten path of globalization constructed by the imperialist expansion of capitalism.

VI. Looking at the past, perspectives for the future

1. Samir Amin hoped that his brief presentation would help a new generation to understand that the building of CODESRIA required the fighting and winning of great battles against enemies whom it was not necessary to name here. We would not have won these battles without the support of those whom we do need to name here, in the first place: Senghor, Gardiner, Dharam Ghai, SAREC.

The intelligent and dedicated contributions of the team at IDEP (Amoa, Founou) should equally be remembered, said Samir. We must also acknowledge our colleagues invited to constitute the first group charged with the task of creating CODESRIA,

prime place given to Bujra and Mkandawire. Without them, CODESRIA would probably not have seen the light of day. But over and above the magnificent work of this small team, we managed to build a first network of African thinkers of the highest quality with whom debates have been permanent and ongoing, such as Claude Ake, Issa Shivji, Helmy Sharawi, Shahida el Baz and others. The members of the academic Council of IDEP - created on the initiative of Samir Amin with the support of Gardiner - and especially Celso Furtado (Brazil), Ismail Abdalla (Egypt), the British Dudley Seers and the French Charles Prou, but also other members of the Council who closely followed the first steps taken by CODESRIA. Other younger African thinkers in turn quickly made important contributions, like Mahmood Mamdani, Sam Moyo and others. The early involvement of African feminists (Fatou Sow and others), it should be remembered, happened at a time when it was exceptional in Africa (as well as elsewhere!).

CODESRIA was launched officially on 1 February 1973, with Samir Amin in charge as the first Executive Secretary. He was followed quickly by Bujra and then Mkandawire, and he credits the success of CODESRIA to them. Bujra and Mkandawire placed CODESRIA on track, which allowed their successors (Zen Tadesse, Sam Moyo, Teresa Cruz e Silva) to move forward.

2. CODESRIA is today facing a new and difficult situation.

Africa is the major victim of the momentary triumph of the new imperialist globalization known as neo-liberalism. Its universities have been devastated and largely subjected to the exigencies of the funders. Impoverished and without a clear perspective of the real challenges with which Africa is confronted, many of the universities on the continent see in CODESRIA a source of financing for their own 'research projects', regardless of their relevance or importance. If CODESRIA is reduced to being the "receiving vessel" of these applications, it will lose its real function, which is to promote through its own initiatives the debate on the major challenges of our times. In this spirit, said Samir, it is necessary to understand that the discussions concerning the eventual revision of the statutes of CODESRIA and the definition of membership are downstream to the goals of CODESRIA and not upstream. For example, the proposal concerning excellence (who could suggest recruiting mediocre people!), for example, is irrelevant: 'Excellence' in the eyes of some can hide in fact a great mediocrity (irrelevant) from the perspective of the requirements for responding to the real challenges faced by Africa.

Note

Based on notes taken on Samir Amin's presentation in Dakar, February 2016.