

## From the Executive Secretary's Desk

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It has been months since the departure of Dr. Ebrima Sall, the sixth Executive Secretary, from the service of CODESRIA. During this time, we have reflected in the Secretariat on the best way to steer the work of the Council following the transition. We have, in the process, also benefitted from messages from members of the community raising critical questions about our programming, quality of research output, communication and overall efficiency in service provision. It is for this reason that I wish to briefly outline 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. The Council has, as a consequence, played a major role in sustaining this intellectual community. CODESRIA has committed to facilitate the community to conduct basic research and, through their outputs, shape public debate at a pan-African level.

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 their conceptual and methodological skill for advanced and high quality research outputs. 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 and projecting their scholarship to the world.

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 efficiency 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 four inter-related 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 in personnel and renew 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. The aim is to direct 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 developing new partnerships that will enable the Council to grow its support. Further, this will ensure 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 and enhancing efficiency. This will be done by growing 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 that allows and enables continuity. The mark of success in building the next generation will be their capacity to produce good quality publications especially single-authored manuscripts. This investment is designed to achieve this goal.

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 CODESRIA Secretariat, that many institutions seek policy impact without necessarily understanding the policy process. Yet policy impact ought to be understood as part of a process, not simply as an outcome. 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 insist in up-scaling the number of female participant in its programmes through deliberate budging for female colleagues. The securing in the 2018 budget 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.

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