

Debate: The Humanities in the CODESRIA Project

From 28 to 29 August 2015, CODESRIA held a planning meeting in Accra, Ghana in collaboration with the University of Ghana to deliberate on the location of the humanities in the life and work of a social science organisation like CODESRIA. The think pieces featured in this section emanated from the meeting.

Rethinking the Humanities in CODESRIA's Programmes

The Busan Declaration Towards a New Humanism for the 21st Century¹ rightfully expresses concerns about the current state of the humanities that impede their capability to accomplish "their historic role of shaping the self-understanding of peoples and societies, and thereby giving meaning to life." Indeed, the humanities are basic to every society's understanding of not only itself but also the environment that surrounds it and the wider world out there. The humanities should, therefore, be an essential, integral and fundamental component of a society's development and the discourse of such development, taking into account, and giving all other disciplines, including the social and hard sciences, their "human face" and values. Such values, which come, partly, within the cultural dimensions of development, must not only be renewed and redefined, but also re-emphasized in the emerging, new contexts of globalization. This, to me, should be the main mission of CODESRIA's efforts to rethink the role and articulation of the humanities in the 21st Century Africa and in the context of the nexus between the social sciences and humanities within the Council.

The rethinking can be done through various channels, some of them specific to humanities, but mostly by interfacing the humanities and social sciences. Such rethinking can take diverse approaches, a few of which are touched on and enumerated hereunder:

- (i) Instituting a Programme or Programmes that will involve research and intellectual intercourse (dialogue and cooperation) between humanities scholars, thinkers, and artists/innovators, in the different fields and backgrounds that form the humanities, as we know them today. Through these programmes such scholars will be able to theorize and reflect on the humanities and how their different disciplines can address contemporary challenges.

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- (ii) Holding Annual Thematic Conferences that can rotate from one African country to another, dealing with different disciplines within the humanities. Such themes of conferences can, alternatively, be developed into fully-fledged research programmes within CODESRIA.
- (iii) Establishing Humanities Fellowships, and Visiting/Resident Scholarships that will aim at not only developing individual doctoral and postdoctoral scholars, but also resulting into scholarly publications on humanities. The procedures and logistics of such fellowships and scholarships will have to be formulated by the Council, and followed through rigorous peer review system that can include manuscript development workshops.
- (iv) Trying as much as possible to mainstream the humanities in most of CODESRIA's social science programmes. This could be done through, for example, factoring in areas of humanities in the various calls for proposals and in different programmes and institutes conducted by the Council. Here is where those who formulate such calls for proposals can help younger scholars who are so prone to the compartmentalization of knowledge that happens in most of the education systems in Africa right from secondary to tertiary education syllabi; a practice that creates gaps between the arts, humanities, social sciences and even natural sciences.

More often than not, when there are calls for abstracts on such topics like urbanization, environmental conservation, migration, population matters, etc., the attitude that one

gets from, especially, younger scholars are that these are mainly for social scientists. Such abstract calls from CODESRIA will guide the scholars showing them the vast possibilities of adding the voice of the humanities in social science research and discourse.

While mainstreaming the humanities in most of CODESRIA's social science programmes will bring about the interface between the two, it will also provide avenues for alternative voices and perspectives regarding those areas that have erroneously been regarded as the concerns of social sciences only.

- (v) Encouraging and facilitating the formulation of National Humanities Working Groups, Multinational Humanities Research Networks, and Comparative Humanities Research Networks. Alternatively, as suggested in (iv) above, efforts can be made to enhance interdisciplinary approaches by encouraging the social science NWGs, MRNs, and CRNs to ensure that they factor in the humanities whenever and wherever possible.
- (vi) Increasing and solidifying CODESRIA ties with those like-minded organizations, which specifically deal with the humanities in Africa and beyond. This could take many forms, but one that comes to mind is sponsoring wider participation at such cultural events like the AU's Pan African Cultural Congress, The Cairo Conference on Interaction of Cultures, and World Humanities Forum – just to mention a few.
- (vii) Strengthening the Humanities Institute at the University of Ghana, Legon, so that it caters for African scholars across the continent. This could be done by establishing visiting fellowships, sabbaticals, and planned annual institutes such as an institute on African Popular Culture. Part of the efforts to strengthen the



Humanities Institute can be through establishing it as a Centre of Excellence that will be the main reference and resource point whenever one wishes to research on African Humanities.

In carrying out the above suggestions, it is important that CODESRIA takes heed of the call made within the Busan Decla-

ration, to ensure that “scholars, artists and intellectuals...undertake to promote and support the principle of pluralistic, inclusive and open-ended reflection, across disciplinary, national, linguistic and cultural boundaries, in collaboration with the social and natural sciences, with a view to enhancing the capacity of re-

search systems, the media and societies to understand their present and to imagine their futures”.

Note

1. Made during the 1st World Humanities Forum held in Busan, Republic of Korea, 24-26 November 2011