

25 years after the Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility: Progress Report, Critical Perspectives and Future Prospects

The commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility, held from 9 to 11 April, 2016 in Lilongwe (Malawi), was a great opportunity for CODESRIA to objectively assess its core commitment: ensuring and promoting for all and across the African continent the establishment of a scholarly community which, in a conducive environment, reflects on and implements the necessary transformations for the welfare of the largest number of people. Not only does this commitment demonstrate CODESRIA's priority, it also highlights a form of radicalism in the positive sense. This is related to the idea that freedom is not an option but a necessary and sufficient condition for any society faced with both itself and the world; any society trying to address its problems and understand what is befalling it. The promotion of intellectual freedom, a broader concept exceeding the very field of academic freedom and incorporating all those who are involved in and striving for the emergence of intellectual products; journalists, writers, artists, etc., is also indicative of the deep-rootedness of CODESRIA's ideals in a democratic culture where debate and controversy are the primary conditions for building peaceful citizenship across the continent.

The Lilongwe Conference helped to successfully assess how intellectual freedom is concretely implemented in the variety of African experiences, 25 years after the Kampala Declaration. One of the strong points and highlights of the event, was the critical assessment of the Declaration.

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Some speakers called for greater embodiment of the principles promoted by the Kampala Declaration. This is particularly the case of Fred Hendricks and Mkan-dawire, who delivered two Keynote Lectures, but also Delmas Tsafack who made a critical assessment of the Declaration, through a socio-historical analysis. They formally expressed its method: wider dissemination, ownership and constant discussion of the philosophy it promotes, not only within the small community of scholars, but also in the entire society. The commitment for the future was to set the 'theme' of intellectual freedom in the public space and make it the means by which everyone within a community can have a critical intellectual relationship with their fellows, discuss with them, and even contradict them; in short, co-produce meaning.

During the conference, using some contextual and sociological approaches to intellectual freedom helped to measure the gap between principle and reality, and to assess both structural and cyclical difficulties, hindering the implementation of the Kampala Declaration. In some countries such as Morocco, for which Brahim El Morchid made a detailed analysis of some adverse effects of higher education privatization on the quality of content, there is an organizational and pedagogical orientation subject to the market laws and the logic of profit; success, at what-

ever the cost, is used as a marketing tool to reinforce and/or increase the capital investor which appears here to be made up of students and their families. Such an approach tones down the nature of transmission in the academic space of its symbolic value and of what it represents.

In the same vein, the conference was an opportunity to realize if it were still necessary, the consistency of a solid fact which is, despite significant progress in the trade union level, conflictuality in itself that seems to organize the academic field and, beyond this, the social field. Whether in Senegal (Seydi Ababacar Ndiaye, Buuba Diop), Nigeria (Sule-Kano Abdullahi, Chyniere Kopokolo) or the Democratic Republic of Congo (Jacques Tshibwabwa), there are apparent restrictions on freedom of speech; the right to express one's opinions without fear of reprisal which is one of the major breaches to intellectual freedoms. These restrictions may emerge as a result of political and administrative devices that curb them through a type of territorial organization of the academic structures that produce socio-spatial injustices within educational community (Jacques Tshibwabwa), or through a blatant financial dependence of public research altering its independence by forcing it into damaging adjustments (John Ishengoma), etc.

According to the majority of the Lilongwe conference participants, if one cannot brag about the 25 years of implementation of the Kampala Declaration, it is far from a failure. This is evidenced by the very choice of Malawi as the conference venue.



Indeed, this is one of the first countries on the continent, along with Ghana, to have incorporated the principles of the Kampala Declaration in its fundamental

law; which indicates at least formally and legally some notable progress to replicate across Africa. However, the major point of consensus at the meeting was that the

paramount urgency in Africa was far beyond a "textual consecration" of intellectual freedoms, but rather their concrete embodiment in the whole society.