

CODESRIA 14th General Assembly

Rethinking CODESRIA's Future: Priorities to Consider

Fatima Harrak
Former President
CODESRIA

The outgoing President of CODESRIA's Executive Committee, Fatima Harrak, has identified five areas of concern the Council must focus on as it repositions itself for the challenges of the twenty-first century. In her report at the 14th General Assembly of CODESRIA held in Dakar, June 2015, she identified some of the Council's challenges and proffered various recommendations to overcome these challenges. Excerpts of her speech:

It has been a great privilege, but also an immense challenge, for me and for the outgoing Executive Committee I worked with, to serve CODESRIA during the last three years and half.

- Let me proudly present to you my companions in this journey:
- Helmi Sharawy, from Egypt: the most dynamic and the youngest at heart
- Mwallimu F.E.M.K. Senkoro, from Tanzania: the sage
- Emmanuel Yenshu Vubo, from Cameroun: the most reflective
- Dzodzi Tsikata, from Ghana: the barrister
- Kenneth Inyani Simala, from Kenya: the passionate Mwallimu
- Jessie Kabwila-Kapasula, from Malawi: the political animal

Claudio Alves-Furtado, from Cap Vert, Etanislav Ngodi, from Congo Brazaville & Puleng Lenka Bula, from South Africa – respectively sociologist, Political scientist and Dean of Students specialist of Ethics and leadership. This trio is the youngest, and proved to be the most resourceful and innovative element of this Executive Committee.

Working with this group of brilliant and engaged pan-African scholars who all have CODESRIA at heart – and who in their majority (7/10) served their first term of office in a CODESRIA governing organ – was both pleasurable and gratifying. The challenges we had to face together as a unit during our mandate brought us close to each other and it was always in a climate of *entente*, even of complicity, that we performed our duties.

Teaming up with the Executive Secretary, Ebrima Sall, well known to the constituency for his scrupulousness and his identification with CODESRIA, has also been a motivating experience.

Please find here, dear Ebrima, the expression of our gratitude to you and your aids and staff for your kind support and always courteous collaboration.

On behalf of the Executive Committee I would like now to highlight some of the achievements of this Executive Committee since its election in December 2011, the details of which will be elaborated by the Executive Secretary in his report to this Assembly.

The 2012-2015 Framework Special, Focus 14th AG

Global environment

The global environment during the second decade of the twenty-first century is characterized by an exacerbation of the financial crisis. The debate prompted by Thomas Picketty's book is symptomatic of the ambient anxiety about the future of Capitalism as a result of the increasing scarcity of resources, the greater debt, and the intensifying popular resistance to sustaining the burden of the politics of austerity (the Greek case is indicative).

At the same time as the US and the European Union (the previous economic engines of global expansion) have exhausted their potentialities and are in open decline, the new centres of growth, the BRICS, which provided a new impetus for world growth during the first decade, are also showing signs of de-acceleration.

The political and military outlook is also bleak, even hopeless: NATO, led by the US and the EU are engaged in declared imperial wars, directly or through proxies, and a number of other so-called civilizational clashes around the world, including in Africa (North Africa, the Sahara and Sahel).

Situation in Africa

These developments have all left their imprint on Africa, but there is also a specifically African context.

- In essence, Africa today is at the crossroads. It is saddled by a myriad of political, social and economic challenges which have left many countries politically unstable.

Yet, the paradox of a continent richly endowed with natural resources and still struggling with grinding poverty is illustrative of the African economic structural challenges. These political and economic conditions have triggered a wave of forced migration sometimes with tragic results.

In North Africa a wave of popular protests promised a new dawn of democratic revolutions, but the Spring did not naturally progress to a bright summer of democracy; it has even regressed, in some cases, and the progress towards the institution and/or consolidation of democratic governance disrupted and the return to military, despotic and repressive rule legitimated by the so-called "war on terrorism".

The dismantlement of the State in Libya and the total destruction of its economy, society and political order has offered yet another African base, after Somalia – and

an inexhaustible source of funding – for the combatants of the "war of civilizations", a war now proclaimed in North, Central and West Africa.

The Ebola crisis in West Africa, which we have lived with directly in CODESRIA, came to demystify and deflate the Afro-euphoria and the "Africa Rising" narrative. It displayed to the world the dramatic and persisting damages inflicted on African states and societies by Structural Adjustment Policies, and which the Millennium Development Goals did not succeed in remedying

Now that the MDGs have come to an end, the time has come for Africa to pause for an evaluation of this experience before embarking on a "post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals" agenda that the UN and other international development agencies are currently working on, on its behalf!

State of African higher education and social science research

In the field of African higher education and social science research, the second decade of the twenty-first century has been marked by:

- Growing awareness by African stakeholders, including some political leaders, of the value of higher education in achieving their visions of prosperity, peace and integration... Whence the tremendous growth in the higher education and research sphere in Africa and the phenomenal increase in the number of public and private universities, research centers and institutes, think tanks and research NGOs, and the multiplication of initiatives geared towards encouraging higher education, research and innovation – even if the share of Social Sciences in this effort is insignificant.
- the creation of more African funding institutions, public and private, and the implication of some BRICS countries in funding research and higher education projects in Africa.

Nonetheless,

- Higher Education in Africa continues to be fragmented, increasingly privatized and internationalized, and it continues to suffer from brain drain and the "expert/consultancy syndrome"

- African governments continue to prioritize the teaching and research in STEM (Science Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (with few exceptions) for which they provide infrastructure and funding (national and endowment funds).
- Social sciences in Africa continue, therefore, to operate under conditions that are seriously under-equipped and under-resourced, both in African universities and in independent research institutions and NGOs. This means that African social scientists and social science research institutions are still in a situation of dependence vis-à-vis international donors and funding agencies.
- And today these resources are no longer reliable, nor are they always adapted to the local research priorities.

Obviously, these developments had direct bearing on the functioning, scientific production as well as on the working conditions at CODESRIA.

The cutback and delay of disbursement of funds from some of our key donors did constitute one of the major challenges we faced during our mandate. Both the financial crisis, and the fact that some of our partners were funding newly created social science research institutions in Africa, explains the difficult situation in which CODESRIA found itself during the last three years. This brought home the obligation to confront the challenge of diversification of our funding sources.

The other difficulty we faced during our term was the Ebola crisis which made it obligatory for CODESRIA to suspend many of its activities. This situation also brought home the urgent need to develop the capacities of CODESRIA, both technical and human, for assimilating and integrating ICTs in its functioning.

The convulsions in North and Sahelo-Saharan Africa caused the halting of some of our activities but were also the source of lively intellectual debates and an inspiration for a substantial number of research proposals and activities at CODESRIA.

Another difficulty faced during this period was the fact that the Secretariat had to work with a reduced workforce as the result of the voluntary and involuntary parting of a number of senior staff.

Notwithstanding all these inconveniences, however, important achievements have been made by this Executive Committee.

Achievements since the 13th GA

Institutional development

The general disenchantment induced by the predicaments of the 13th General Assembly made that the Executive Committee elected in Rabat had among its major tasks, if not its main task, the revision of the governance mechanisms of CODESRIA. What was required of us was the initiation of an internal evaluation of the root causes of the malaise we witnessed in Rabat, an evaluation that was to lead to the renewal and revitalization of the membership, governance and management of CODESRIA and the re-actualization of its intellectual agenda.

Kicking off this process to a start was not easy; that is why we consider that coming to this General Assembly with an internal review is a major achievement of this Executive Committee.

It is an Internal Review in three parts:

- (1) An Internal Review on Membership and Governance, chaired by Professor Thandika Makdawire with the participation of Dr. Pierre Sané and Professor Aki Sawyer. This review was finalized in February 2015 and the report, recommendations and proposed Charter amendments circulated to CODESRIA membership in early March, for examination and discussion in this GA;
- (2) An Internal Review on Management, chaired by Prof. Zenebe Tadesse with the participation of Profs Akwasi Aido and Temba Masilela, launched in April 2015. A preliminary report of this review will be presented to the GA for information;
- (3) And a third internal review concerning CODESRIA's intellectual agenda, is chaired jointly by Profs. Elisio Macamo and Mustapha Raufu with the participation of Profs. Pamela Mbabazi and Dickson Eyoh. This review was launched in March 2015 and a preliminary report of the committee will also be presented to this GA for information.

The work undertaken – or underway – by these three review teams and the spirited and fertile debate we will have around their documents, will assuredly unfold into a new vision and new directions for CODESRIA.

Another important contribution of this EC to the institutional development of CODESRIA is the elaboration and adoption of a Code of Ethics for the members of the Executive Committee. This was our way of contributing to strengthening accountability, guarding against conflict of interest and abuse of power and establishing a moral protocol for this governing organ of CODESRIA. This document may serve as a model for the development of a more general code which will bind all officeholders at CODESRIA.

Together with the Secretariat, this EC has also been able to put membership issues on a stronger footing, by urging for the compilation of the list of members, adopting a membership policy and almost completing the modalities of payment of membership dues through electronic means.

This EC has also overseen the preparation and adoption of several policy papers the aim of which was the rationalization of CODESRIA's work and the reinforcement of responsibility.

Intellectual Agenda

The mandate of this EC coincided with the launching of a new strategic plan to cover the period 2011-2016. Work started on this plan since 2009 but could only be finalized in 2012, with the contribution of the EC and the SC.

Our mandate also coincided with the celebration of CODESRIA's 40th anniversary. Various activities of CODESRIA during 2013 were held under the umbrella of the anniversary celebration but the grand celebration was, for logistical reasons, held in June 2014 under the theme of "Forty Years of Research and Knowledge Production for Africa"

Apart from these two big events this committee has had to regularly oversee the completion of various activities of the research, training and publication programmes, with a particular concern for the rationalization and refocusing of our efforts and our resources (decentralizing, privileging research over micro-methodological training, optimizing use of ICT, delegating to African universities...)

More needs to be done in this direction and we are counting on the Internal Review on Management to initiate change where routine and entrenched ways of doing things have been difficult to extricate.

CODESRIA has been involved in many other exciting intellectual activities which the Executive Secretary will expound in his report.

Challenges

Communication

CODESRIA continues to suffer from a communication deficit (or a "communication challenge" as a colleague put it), in spite of a cognizance of the difficulty and an expressed will to tackle it.

We still have difficulties disseminating our research and projecting CODESRIA within and outside the continent.

Efforts have been made by the secretariat in the form of the development of the website and the social media associated with it. Some of CODESRIA's publications and journals have also been put online, partnerships have been made with commercial publishers and distributors, the process of renewal of tenure for periodicals' editors has been started ...

However, this deficit of communication persists and exists on more than one level; it exists within the institution and between CODESRIA and its constituency.

In spite of the progress made on membership matters, including the long-sought-after list of members and the Membership Review, a lot remains to be done in order to strengthen relations with both individual and institutional members, reach out to the young generation of scholars, especially from the among the marginalized communities – such as the Arabophone, the islanders and researchers in zones of conflict or instability.

The monthly *Newsletter* is a welcome initiative but it is not regular and it needs an editorial team that will invigorate and energize it; more than that, it does not dispense from direct contact, real or virtual, whenever that is feasible. That is why we have continuously urged for:

- a structured Outreach Program for EC members,
- holding of more meetings and activities of CODESRIA outside of Dakar, thus allowing a decongestion and decentralization of our programmes and stimulating the exchanges between the leadership and management of CODESRIA on the one hand and the researchers, universities and research institutions in various parts of the continent, on the other.

During our term, two of this EC's meetings were held outside of Dakar, one in Cap Vert and one in Mombassa, and two outreach missions were organized for EC members to Tunisia and Congo; the lessons learned from these limited experiences pledge in favor of more mobility for CODESRIA activities and more collaboration with African research and higher education institutions.

I cannot end this section without underlying the necessity of improving communication on some other levels:

- between the EC and the CODESRIA staff, and
- between the EC and our funders
- between the EC and the ES

The two meetings that this EC had with our Nordic donors and its encounter with the CODESRIA local staff represent a good step in this direction. These reunions have been very informative and have given us greater awareness of the problems of the local employees and a better understanding of the complexities of the funding milieu.

Communication between the EC and the ES is a governance and managerial matter which needs to be approached through organizational reform.

Sustainability

Like the communication syndrome, the issues of diversification of funding sources and long term financial sustainability have been worrying CODESRIA – as well as its key funders – for some time now. It is now a pressing question.

We have yet to imagine and lay down a strategy, a fundraising campaign for long term, independent and sustainable funding to support CODESRIA's administrative costs and the execution of its scientific programmes.

We have been speaking of the establishment of an Endowment Fund for a long time but moving very slowly in that direction. At the same time, numerous plans and suggestions for mobilizing resources from the continent (Gulf, ADB, Angola...) have been proposed, but not followed up.

We hope that the efforts of this and other Executive Committees to ensure that the Endowment Fund is established will be continued and sustained by the incoming Executive Committee.

We not only need to be more resourceful and more aggressive in our pursuit of the diversification of our funding but we also need to address the emergent and spreading phenomenon of small grants and small funders.

Recommendations

May I close this statement by recommending to the attention of this venerable assembly the major concerns of this EC as it ends its mission:

First concern: the completion and implementation of the three reviews and the concretization the vision for a CODESRIA for the twenty-first century;

Second concern: the diversification, sustainability and independence of our funding and the definitive resolution of the question of the Endowment Fund;

Third concern: the configuration of a decentralization scheme for our programmes and activities as one of the means of facing up to many challenges: communication of research and with scholars;

outreach to young and emerging intellectuals, marginalized regions and scholarly communities; concretization of relations with institutional members; co-funding of a number of activities...);

Fourth concern: the responsible use of ICTs. Driven by CODESRIA's goals and needs, serious thinking must be given to integrating this technology for the efficient management of both the administrative and scientific pursuits of the Council; and

Fifth concern: the intellectual agenda of CODESRIA. While this agenda should be globally engaged, we must be attentive that it remains locally relevant and focused around themes of priority not only to our constituency but to our continent. And while cultivating collaboration between scholars of Africa and those of the global south and between African researchers and their peers in the rest of the world, we must see to it that the knowledge produced by this Council continues to be context specific and

geared towards African needs as formulated by the continent's intellectuals.

It is the enthusiastic engagement of these intellectuals, and the commitment of the African human and social science community of scholars at large, manifested in the presence of so many of you here today (and the so many others who could not come), that give meaning and value to the work of CODESRIA. Thank you, dear members of CODESRIA, for your loyalty and unfailing engagement.

May I in the name of all of you, and in the name of the outgoing EC, express our appreciation to our funders and partners, some of whom have been backing us and valuing our work from the very beginning; we are grateful for their trust and their sponsorship.

Together we can fashion a dynamic and resourceful CODESRIA for the twenty-first century!

Thank you for your kind attention.