

## World Social Science Forum 2015: Transforming Global Relations for a Just World

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The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) and the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) co-hosted the third World Social Science Forum (WSSF) which took place in Durban, South Africa, in September 2015. The WSSF is a global event of the International Social Science Council (ISSC) that brings together researchers and stakeholders in international social science co-operation to address current topical global issues and future priorities for international social science. The Forum promotes innovative and cross-disciplinary work, cross-science collaborations in the natural and human sciences, and engagement with donors and decision makers in the science community worldwide. While delivering the closing remarks at the occasion, Dzodzi Tsikata, President of CODESRIA's Executive Committee emphasized the need for the social sciences to produce knowledge which can be used by different constituencies - policy makers, business, social movements and the general public to strive for a more just world.

### The closing remarks is presented here in full

Dear colleagues and fellow participants,

After four remarkable days of excellent presentations, the sharing of ideas and important debates on one of the most serious challenges of our time, there is not much left to say except to say thank you and to call on all of us to act. I hope you are leaving here inspired and rejuvenated to re-examine your research, policy and advocacy agendas and have begun to ask new questions about the rising inequalities between and within countries and regions of the world.

It is gratifying that the problem of inequalities is taking centre stage once again, after many decades on the sidelines of social science research when poverty took the centre stage and became a proxy for inequalities. In prioritising inequalities at this forum, this community of social sciences is responding to

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longstanding and increasingly urgent concerns within the policy space and the wider society that inequalities constitute a huge threat to peace and democracy as well as to sustainable development. For CODESRIA, this reaffirms our firm belief that the social sciences should be proactive in producing knowledge which addresses some of the most fundamental problems of our times, while remaining rigorous autonomous and not ensnared in the service of the powers that be.

The decision to hold this forum in South Africa, in the city of Durban has been inspired. It enabled researchers, policy makers and activists from across the world to get a feel of a country whose citizens engaged in a sustained and inspiring struggle against inequalities and prevailed. While the struggle for a just society is still not fully won, South Africa offers the example of what is possible when people organise to overthrow an entrenched system of inequalities in order to restore the citizenship rights and the dignity of the majority. Being here has reminded us of the importance of social movements in the fight for a more equal world. It enables us to interrogate the positioning and demands of different social actors in the quest for a just society. All over the world, young people, women's movements, workers movements and a range of new social movements are leading struggles for a better world, and our research going forward needs to account for these.

Many questions raised by the papers presented and the discussions that have followed at this conference are building blocks of a broad and solid research agenda on inequalities. For example, we spent several sessions discussing the nature of global inequalities in the economic, social and political domains, and several speakers have drawn

attention to the fact that these global inequalities are deeply implicated in intra-country inequalities. Going forward, we need to examine more closely the inter-linkages and relationships between global and in-country inequalities. This would make it possible to advance both academic and policy debates beyond whether to blame endogenous or exogenous factors for the rising inequalities.

Questions have also been raised about the measurement of inequalities and which indicators bring us to a better understanding of the multifaceted character of inequalities, its structural elements and its drivers, and take us beyond a narrow focus on economic inequalities. A dimension of accounting for inequalities is the question of whether we should be concerned about inequalities of opportunities or inequalities of outcomes. Given that some indicators e.g. access to education and access to land, are both opportunities and outcomes, a forward looking social science would take inequalities both in opportunities and outcomes seriously.

One uncontroversial issue is the importance of inter-disciplinary work which addresses the different domains of inequalities and their interconnections. It came up in different ways- from the excellent plenaries and parallel sessions which involved conversations among different disciplines, direct calls for the inclusion of different disciplinary perspectives in future work on inequalities, and the celebration of the life and work of Arthur Lewis, the Caribbean economist, whose remarkable achievements demonstrated clearly the importance of taking cognisance of different disciplinary perspectives and also going beyond economic issues in understanding the challenges of development. In any case, gender and women's studies and feminist scholars have long demonstrated the value of inter-disciplinary research. Their longstanding focus on understanding and interrogating the intersections of social relations and their deep understanding of power relations

and inequalities offer many insights to the social sciences into how best to approach the study of inequalities, but also how to ensure the relevance to research of different constituencies. The social science community has much to learn from paying attention to the work of this constituency.

Going forward, our research agendas should therefore take cognisance of not only the range and complexities of the inequalities we have identified, but also interrogate policy efforts and activism to address these. As well, new developments in the policy space require our attention. The recent inclusion of inequalities as a stand-alone goal in the SDGs, the adoption of Agenda 2063, the AU's ambitious programme of structural transformation and regional integration are just two examples. The social sciences need to produce knowledge which can be used by different constituencies-policy makers, business, social movements and the general public to strive for a more just world.

Each of us should participate to the best of our abilities and inclinations, and join

with others to enlarge our efforts. In this regard, our organisations such as CODESRIA, the HSRC and the ISSC should deepen their collaborations with others across the globe to provide the solidarity and the space to strengthen the social sciences. In doing this, we should continue to address the inequalities and hierarchies in knowledge production and the control of knowledge dissemination within the social sciences themselves. Only then can we prove equal to the task of participating in the transformation of unequal relationships at all levels of levels- national, regional and global.

Before I take my seat, I would like to say express on behalf of CODESRIA, our profound gratitude to the Forum chair, Professor Olive Shisana, and to the dynamic staff at HSRC who hosted us and were responsible for execution of WSSF 2015. Together, they delivered a well-organised and innovative programme which ensured that conversations took place between the different constituencies who have a stake in the building of a just and prosperous world. I also would like to express our deep gratitude to the chairs

of various committees and their members- Prof Shisana, chair of the executive and programme committees, Prof. Vasu Reddy, chair of the local organising committee, Ms Bridgitte Prince, chair of the scholarship committee, Profs. Adebayo Olukoshi and Jayati Ghosh, co-chairs of the scientific and abstract review committees, and Dr. Temba Masilela, chair of the logistics committee. I also want to thank the incoming head of the HSRC, Crain Soudein, and the ISSC President and its current and former executive directors, and the entire board and secretariat, particularly Heidi Hackman, Vivi Stavrou and Mathieu Denis. I want to acknowledge the years of hard work of these committees which came to fruition in the last four days.

I would also like to thank all those who supported the WSSF in diverse ways, particularly SIDA, NORAD and DANIDA.

Finally I want to wish the organisers of the next WSSF success and urge all of us to continue participating actively in the planning and execution of future WSSF.

Thank you.

