

Social Research Funding in Africa*

Let me start with this quote attributed to Aristotle:

“To give away money is an easy matter ... and in any man’s power. But to decide to whom to give it, and how large and when, for what purpose and how, is neither in every man’s power nor an easy matter. Hence it is that such excellence is rare, praiseworthy and noble.”

This is my way of acknowledging the commendable endeavour of this respectable institution, the Volkswagen Foundation. May I also take up this opportunity to recognize the Foundation’s directorate for their gracious act of integrating the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa in an internal meeting dedicated to the evaluation of its “Africa Initiative.”

It is a great pleasure and a privilege for me to be able to discuss with my distinguished German and African colleagues the challenges facing research in the African social sciences, particularly the issues of funding which I was specifically invited to address in this presentation. I will do that from the perspective of CODESRIA, which I am representing, and which I will present at the start of this talk. I will then address the strengths and the opportunities posed by the context in which social science research is conducted in Africa today, drawing attention, in particular, to the financial constraints and the drawbacks of the present funding system. I will conclude by sharing with you CODESRIA’s approach to cooperative research and capacity building.

Introductory remarks

Even in Africa, there is a growing awareness that the knowledge-based society in which we live today is called upon to foster audacious and daring research in order to devise rapid, innovative and efficient solutions to the many challenges, current and future, generated by the rapidly changing global realities. In this research, social science knowledge is deemed a basic ingredient and an indispensable part in the scientific,

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policy and social mobilisation effort that is necessary for the formulation of adequate responses to problems such as climate change, food and water shortage, inequality, social discontent, financial crises or fundamentalism.

There is also a growing awareness in Africa that more space should be given in international research to African perspectives on the understanding of these global issues, if we do not want the development gap between Africa and the rest of the world to further widen, if we want to allow Africa to compete equally in the knowledge-based world economy, and if we want African research to produce knowledge that can be relevant, not only globally, but also locally.

Whence the urgent need for the revitalization of African higher education and research which has been crippled by the Structural Adjustment Programmes.

In CODESRIA we have always considered that research in/on Africa should be globally engaged but locally relevant; it should generate context specific knowledge geared to African policy and practice, and foster collaboration between low and middle-income countries of Africa, between Africa and the global South and between Africa and the rest of the world.

Presentation of CODESRIA

CODESRIA was established in 1973 as an initiative of centres of social and economic research from across the continent based on the conviction that education, higher education, research and the production of knowledge are the keys to the transformation of Africa.

The context in which CODESRIA was established was one of poverty, dependence and low level of development and, as a consequence of these problems, the marginalisation of Africa and Africans,

including the scholarly community. It was also characterised by extreme political fragmentation as a result of the colonial partition of the continent into a multitude of small territories which strove to build themselves into nation-States. Many of the leading higher education institutions were mere extensions of French or British universities where the curricula and research were dominated by Western paradigms, concepts and theories and where African scholarly voices were hardly audible.

Promoting social science research in such a context therefore required the overcoming of many barriers that were not only of a disciplinary nature, but also, linguistic barriers (in addition to the many African languages, each one of the colonial powers had left its own language as the official language of its former colonies), political, ethnic, gender and generational barriers.

To overcome these multiple fractures, CODESRIA adopted a pan-African approach right from the start, first, out of conviction, given that it came out of the long history of liberation of which the global pan-African movement was an integral part, and second, also out of necessity. The need for an autonomous and independent continental research space and a networked pan-African research community was all the more necessary that the prevailing African regimes at the time were authoritarian.

Forty years after its creation, CODESRIA has to deal with a new context in which Africa and its higher education and research systems still face many challenges but are also engaging with new opportunities.

Changing Global and African contexts – Strengths, Challenges and Opportunities

The global environment in the first decade of the twenty first century is characterised by neoliberal globalisation, the ICTs revolution, the emergence of a polycentric world and the arrival of the BRICS in the global scene, the new forms of scramble for natural resources

(including forest, land and mineral) and markets, greater global recognition of the magnitude of the challenge of climate change and, finally, the growth and marketisation of higher education and research around the world.

All of these challenges have left their imprint on Africa, but there is also a specifically African context.

Africa is still a politically fragmented continent despite the progress towards regional integration being made at the level of the African Union. However, the “unholy trinity” of poverty, ignorance and disease is still a major challenge. Africa is still home to the largest numbers of refugees, displaced peoples and least developed countries (LDCs); and most African economies are still characterised by extroversion and the export of primary commodities with little local value addition.

Moreover, decades of structural adjustment and neoliberal globalisation have significantly reduced the developmental role of African institutions, particularly the African state, and liberalised trade in ways that make the prospects for industrial development seem dimmer. The extreme vulnerability to global and local hazards that Africa is facing make the challenge, for African countries, of having to develop under less than optimal global conditions, no less formidable today than it was 40 years ago.

Climate change is, certainly, a major global challenge; but responses to this challenge have entailed the commoditisation of part of the commons, such as forests, and the transfer of the costs to the South, with little attention paid to the issues of sustainability and the involvement of local communities in the programmes that are supposed to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change.

But the present context also presents some opportunities:

- Since the beginning of the New Millennium, African economies have been among the fastest growing economies in the world (UNCTAD Economic Development in Africa report 2012).
- There has been significant progress made in terms of infrastructure development and provision of education and health services.

- There are also many positive new developments in and around the African Union (AU), and the African Regional Economic Communities (RECs), indicating awareness of the need for, and renewed interest in moving towards greater regional integration.
- Considerable progress has also been made towards the institution and/or consolidation of democratic governance at different levels.
- Growing citizen awareness and engagement, particularly of the youth, as this is manifest in the contestation movements springing up around the continent
- Creative use of the new technologies (ICTs) in social media, in trade, industrial and agricultural development, teaching, in social and political action, and creating new opportunities for research in and on Africa.
- The engagement of China and the BRICS with Africa has created new policy space and led to significant developments in infrastructure (beyond stadiums) that have been going on over the last decade.

As for African higher education and social science research in this second decade of the twenty-first century, it continues to be characterised by:

1. Continued and accelerated fragmentation: In addition to the fragmentation of African knowledge systems along disciplinary and linguistic lines, but also along “Europhone” / “non-Europhone” lines, endogenous/non-endogenous knowledge, etc, the “Internationalisation” in higher education – meaning the infusion of a market logic and commoditisation in the sector and the marketisation of the social sciences themselves – has come to further partition HE in Africa. Besides the multiplication of private institutions of higher education world class universities (such as Sciences Po, Oxford...) are now opening extensions in Africa, while China is recruiting the best African professors and researchers for its own universities
2. Need for a new generation of scholars: As the first generation of post-independence African scholars is nearing retirement, there is a need

for the training of a new generation of African scholars whose emergence is hampered by the loss of good academic staff to brain drain, the rising numbers of private universities, the consultancy syndrome and the lack of resources for academic research.

3. Lack of area studies: The very limited number of research centres dedicated to the study of other regions and countries of the world, whence the thinness of the knowledge base on Africa’s trade and investment partners (knowledge on China, India, Brazil, Europe, Germany, the United States etc.) This prevents African policy communities, traders and investors from having a body of knowledge within Africa about their trade and development cooperation partners to rely on, and to identify opportunities and challenges associated with global trends, etc.
4. Prioritisation of STEM: African governments continue to prioritise the teaching and research in Science Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. The result is the absence of a clear vision, policies or institutional frameworks to support social sciences and humanities research (with few exceptions). And where social sciences and humanities are seriously considered and supported, the tendency is to emphasise market relevance, rather than the public good or the cultivation of critical thinking and democratic values.

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.

But if we want to see the half-full glass we would admit that in Africa today there is a relatively more conducive research environment. The progress of democratisation coupled with a relative economic growth has led to greater openness to new ideas and greater academic freedom. The examples of the BRICS countries has finished to convince our political elites of the value of HE and research as keys to development in the knowledge economies we live in. Therefore, there have been both a phenomenal increase in the number of public and private universities, research centres

and institutes, think tanks and research NGOs and a multiplication of initiatives geared towards encouraging HE, research and innovation.

More funding institutions have also been created. In addition to the traditional International Organisations and the European and North American funding agencies which have and continue to fund social research in Africa, there are more and more African institutions, public and private, funding Higher Education and research such as Trust Africa, Mo Ibrahim Foundation, Dangote Foundation, Danjuma Foundation, etc. New donors include also the BRICS countries (particularly China, India and Brazil) which are taking greater interest and are already providing support to HE and Research in Africa.

Moreover, there is today a broader, more diversified and more self-confident community of scholars who bring the production of knowledge on Africa back to the continent. The African scholars in the Diaspora are playing a great role in this direction. And even if African studies remain dominated by the paradigms developed in the West many African scholars from the first post-independence generation have established themselves as competent theoreticians and are widely quoted in relevant fields. But replacing this generation of scholars is a difficult task at a time when African universities are facing the challenges of marketisation of higher education, brain drain, the consultancy syndrome, and lack of resources for academic research.

There is also a greater interest, both on the individual and institutional levels, in using new information technologies in HE and research, and the connectivity levels and rates are rising.

Nonetheless, the absence of adequate research infrastructure and the lack of interest on the part of the majority of African States to create national funds for social science research (as they do for STEM) put African social scientists and social science research institutions, public and private, in a situation of dependence vis-à-vis international donors and funding agencies. This dependence keeps a tight rein on African knowledge production since these sources are neither reliable, particularly during these uncertain times, nor are they always adapted to the local research priorities.

External Funding and Research in African Social Science

Until now the external funding destined to African social science research in Africa has been: demand driven, problem-solving oriented and developmentally focused.

Demand-driven and problem solving oriented

Because it is dependent on direct or indirect external funding from international donors, foreign governments and foundations much of the research going on in Africa is demand-driven, with a heavy bias for policy and problem solving research. This leaves little room for the development of research programmes that are not able to demonstrate the potential for producing immediately usable findings or those seeking to engage in basic and longitudinal studies. A more serious consequence of the 'problem solving' bias and demand driven research is the tendency to confuse and conflate consultancy with research.

The research supported by both the funders from the North and from the BRICS countries tends to be driven by priorities of the funders. For some bilateral funding agencies of the North and the East, foreign policy interests of their governments tend to take precedence over what African researchers and governments consider as their priorities.

In that context, individuals and research institutions and centres have even less room for defining the agenda for research, or for framing the good research questions. The best illustration in this regard is the scarcity in Africa, of good research programmes focusing on other regions of the world, because the African governments and private African foundations are not providing the financial support and incentives for African scholars to engage in such research, and because the external funders are, naturally, interested in research that helps find answers to their own questions.

Developmentally focused

A large part of the funding for social research in Africa comes from development cooperation budgets of the governments and multilateral agencies supporting research; 'development

research' is therefore the dominant kind of research. This puts a limit to the kinds of issues that research in the humanities and social sciences can explore.

So, there is no doubt that the kind of funding made available to African social science research determines to a large extent, the kind of research that can be carried out.

However, one must admit that funders' support for research on governance, civil society, gender etc. have contributed considerably towards the advancement of democracy, the promotion of gender equality and the promotion of academic freedom.

More generally, support from bilateral cooperation agencies (the Scandinavian countries in particular) and some private foundations to CODESRIA has helped keep independent research in the humanities and social sciences going at a time when it was very difficult to get any research of a slightly critical nature carried out in most African countries; and that has also been a major factor in the building of an African research community that transcends various barriers.

Where should external funding go? I would modestly suggest that it should go to African research universities, for the exploration of issues fundamental to Africa, for the core funding of independent research institutions and for credible research institutions seeking to establish endowment funds.

In Africa most of the social science research is undertaken by universities and strong research universities are needed. The research budgets of the African universities are insignificant and neither the alumni networks nor industry are strong enough to fill in the gap while government funding for most universities goes to the running costs. Funding of research universities will go towards research, capacity building and enhancement (at doctoral, post-doctoral levels, and for senior scholars/training trainers), for the reinvigoration of research traditions and for the cultivation of excellence.

Funding should be directed towards the exploration of issues fundamental to Africa, among which comparative research on the development experiences of other countries of the North and South, longitudinal studies, as well as emerging

issues, such as climate change, but from the perspectives of the humanities and social sciences.

External funding should also go towards the core funding of independent research institutions and NGOs which, unlike African universities, do not rely on African governments for their running costs.

At a time of economic crisis which has affected and will continue to affect funding levels, independent NGOs must establish a secure base for their finances and Endowment Funds represent one way of doing this.

In recent years, external research funds have not only become limited but securing them has become a veritable hurdle. I am not disclosing a secret when I say that the funding world has become extremely complex. Competition, the management of scarcity in highly fragile and uncertain conditions, on the one hand, and on the other hand preoccupation with integrity, quality assurance, priority-setting and strategic decision-making, has turned the operation of securing research funds into a major hurdle for scholars and research institutions.

I think I can speak for African researchers and research institutions when I affirm that there are very few among us who really know how to produce a proposal or a report for funding institutions such as the European Union, the Department for International Development in the United Kingdom, the German Research Foundation or other big funding institutions and agencies. Writing an application or reporting to funders has become a difficult task; it is not only time consuming, considering the increased frequency of reporting, but also ever more technical. The procedures and modalities for accessing grants/programmes are unfathomable, sometimes even esoteric! I am sure that I am not telling you something you don't already know!

How can funding institutions help fund-solicitors deal with these complicated and ever-changing rules and modalities? They can help by allowing time for adaptation, by providing the institutions with the professional training needed, by investing in mid-term to long-term projects instead of short-term programmes, even if this entails a more rigorous selection process, and mostly by introducing a dose of TRUST in relations between funders and fund-solicitors.

Cooperative Research and Capacity Building

I would like to conclude this presentation by speaking, always from CODESRIA's perspective, to two questions which are of interest to our hosts – cooperative research and capacity building.

Cooperative Research

As part of its mandate – “to promote and facilitate multidisciplinary research and knowledge production in Africa, promote the publication and dissemination of the results of research undertaken by African scholars and to strengthen the institutional basis of knowledge production in Africa by proactively engaging and supporting other research institutions and their networks of scholars within its programmes of activities” – CODESRIA actively encourages cooperation and collaboration among African universities, and among/with research organizations as well as other training institutions. Thus if research and training are the heart of CODESRIA's strategy, cooperation is the leg on which it stands and the agency for the application of this strategy.

Therefore, all the research undertaken in CODESRIA is collaborative, in the sense that it attempts to break all the barriers (disciplinary, linguistic, generational, national, gender...). In addition to this strategic choice the Council has also devised a special international collaborative programme which aims at ensuring the presence and representation of African researchers in major debates on Africa, and at the same time bringing African scholarly voices and perspectives to bear on global scholarly and policy debates, thus contributing to the universalisation of social science knowledge, strengthening scientific collaboration with partner institutions and creating an environment conducive to information and experience sharing.

This programme associates CODESRIA with strategic partners around long-term initiatives. These are mostly South-South collaborative programmes.

However, a multitude of short-term and narrowly focused cooperative projects link CODESRIA to universities, international and regional organisations and funding agencies, both individually and in cluster.

CODESRIA's experience in managing this last category of cooperative projects,

mostly funded by northern partners and international organisations, poses numerous challenges which are in fact inherent in unequal partnerships: the prioritisation of the interests and agendas of the northern funding partners, the difficulties of finding partners from the funding country, the requirement of co-funding by the African partner, and the tendency to build international consortia to approach funders. This has many good sides to it – initiatives taken by the researchers, strong relationships being built across continents, good research questions etc – but it also presents challenges; the consortia tend to be large, thus limiting the resources that can be made available to the African partners. In some cases, one has the feeling that African partners are used to get the funding.

Moreover, the calculation of the costs and funding requirements of the partners in the collaboration, and therefore the sharing of the funds, are often done in ways that favor the northern partners: the cost of the salaries and research time of the researchers is unequal, and the universities and research centres of the North have much higher administrative costs (sometimes up to 40% of the budget, which takes too large a proportion of the resources); whereas in Africa, there is a tendency for donors to refuse paying administrative costs, or to reduce these to as low as 7%)

This does not lessen in any way the importance of collaborative research because social science is universalistic in both its goals and methods. There are also aspects of research for which international collaboration is crucial, and training and capacity building is one of these. The solution then lies in moving towards more balanced – if not equal – partnerships.

Capacity Building

In the field of research-training, CODESRIA's main objective is to contribute to the nurturing of the younger generation of researchers in a culture of scientific excellence, respect for ethics, academic freedom, social responsibility, with a view to preparing the junior researchers to be the great African scholars of tomorrow.

For this purpose CODESRIA has a core programme called “Training, Grants and Fellowships”. This programme delivers

five types of activities: thematic institutes (gender, youth, governance...), methodology and writing workshops, fellowships and grants (small grants for thesis writing, advanced research grants for post-doctoral fellows, grants for textbook writing), a thesis award and an annual social science campus.

These are some of the most popular and highly demanded CODESRIA programmes. The recognition by the African community of researchers of these programmes indicates their efficacy, their correspondence to a need not fulfilled so far by African universities, and their value for the talented young African researchers who would otherwise be left without support in research training, a fundamental part of higher education.

Programmes like these which have been tried and tested, and whose impact on the research capacities and careers of hundreds of African junior researchers has been proven, constitute CODESRIA's core activities. However, CODESRIA is also collaborating with African univer-

sities in strengthening the new PhD/doctoral programmes and supporting all the initiatives aiming at enhancing the process of reform and renewal of African higher education and research systems. Beyond the numbers of PhDs produced by African universities, the issues at stake are the rehabilitation of academic research, the capacity to frame good research questions and the need to bridge the gaps between research and writing and between research and teaching.

In CODESRIA we consider these to be the most critical issues. Junior researchers need to be encouraged to focus on their doctoral programmes and build expertise in a few carefully chosen areas/fields, i.e. resist the temptation to engage excessively in consultancies, or to respond to all kinds of calls for proposals. For that purpose, programmes such as thesis and advanced research grants for young post-doctoral fellows that CODESRIA has been running since 1988, must be continued.

Junior researchers need also to be trained to write good funding proposals, apply

for funds, do more research and publish in the fields where they are trying to build expertise. For this purpose, they must be included in all research networks, not as assistants but, as full members, working on their own projects. In this way their academic mentoring is guaranteed as well as their access to research funds raised by the more experienced researchers.

There is no doubt that, building the research capabilities of our young researchers is an investment in the future. Junior researchers are a great asset for research and higher education; they carry novel views of the world and of our societies, and have ideas about change that can only enrich the research agendas of our institutions. We are all called upon to "Go to school to learn the future" (Robert Frost).

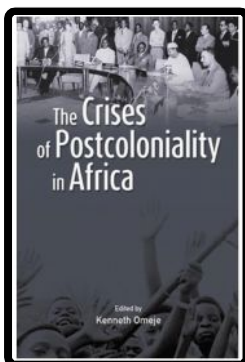
Note

* Keynote speech delivered at the Volkswagen Foundation Grantees Meeting held in Hanover, Germany, 14-15 October 2013.

The Crises of Postcoloniality in Africa

Edited by *Kennth Omeje*

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The Crises of Postcoloniality in Africa is an assemblage of transdisciplinary essays that offer a spirited reflection on the debate and phenomenon of postcoloniality in Africa, including the changing patterns and ramifications of problems, challenges and opportunities associated with it. A key conceptual rhythm that runs through the various chapters of the book is that, far from being demised, postcoloniality is still firmly embedded in Africa, manifesting itself in both blatant and insidious forms. Among the important themes covered in the book include the concepts of postcolonialism, postcoloniality, and neocolonialism; Africa's precolonial formations and the impact of colonialism; the enduring patterns of colonial legacies in Africa; the persistent contradictions between African indigenous institutions and western versions of modernity; the unravelling of the postcolonial state and issues of armed conflict, conflict intervention and peacebuilding; postcolonial imperialism in Africa and the US-led global war on terror, the historical and postcolonial contexts of gender relations in Africa, as well as pan-Africanism and regionalist approaches to redressing the crises of postcoloniality.

'In this book, the colonial trope of Africa is subjected to critical analyses from the points of view of postcoloniality. The result is a varied, complex, and interesting exposition of the contemporary challenges and dilemmas of Africa from the many standpoints of postcolonial theory. It makes a useful contribution to our understanding of modern African politics.'

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