

## Media Statement on the Launch of the World Social Science Forum (WSSF) 2015\*

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### Introduction

The third World Social Science Forum (WSSF) is scheduled to be held at the International Convention Centre, Durban, South Africa, from 13 to 16 September 2015. The forum is a flagship activity of the International Social Science Council (ISSC) and the 2015 forum will be hosted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA). The Forum is the most significant gathering of scholars and policy-oriented intellectuals drawn from all the regions of the world and across different disciplinary interests in the social sciences and humanities. It serves as a platform for presenting new knowledge and insights, re-thinking received wisdom, charting new directions, promoting innovation in the research-policy-action nexus, and nurturing new international partnerships.

The 2015 WSSF is being convened under the theme: *'Transforming Global Relations for a Just World'*. The theme builds on critical issues that permeated debates during both the 2009 and 2013 editions of the Forum which focused respectively on the themes "One Planet - Worlds Apart" (2009) and "Social Transformations and the Digital Age" (2013) and addressed issues of power asymmetries, injustices, disparities, disjunctions and the divide that pervaded contemporary global realities. The 2015 WSSF will now focus on issues of inequality and justice as core concerns around which discussions about global relations must be structured. The 2015 Forum will contextualise the debates within the framework of a global order that is in the throes of multiple transitions (such as global economic crises, economic growth in the South, and changes in global governance) which in turn offer possibilities for multiple transformations. Below are statements on the launch of the upcoming Forum.

### Quality of Life Issues Main Drivers of World Social Science Forum 2015

Durban, South Africa – Over four days, policy makers and shapers comprising scientists, politicians, activists, civil society organisations, activists, labour and business leaders will gather at the Durban International Conference Centre (ICC) for the 2015 World Social Sciences Forum (WSSF), to be held from 13 – 16 September.

The forum is a flagship activity of the International Social Science Council (ISSC) and is hosted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and the Dakar-based Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA). These host organisations have partnered with a consortium of over 13 interested parties, comprising national government departments, leading South African universities, science academies, research institutes, research foundations, local and international research councils and prominent non-governmental organisations.

The forum, which takes place every three years, will focus on real-life issues that citizens all around the world grapple with – inequality and injustice, hence the theme: *Transforming Global Relations for a Just World*.

Speaking at the launch of the forum, 22 October 2014, Professor Olive Shisana, chair of the WSSF 2015 and CEO of the HSRC said the theme is informed by "growing inequalities at global, regional, national and local levels and its impact on the quality of life of populations as well as on the sustainability of resources necessary to support quality of life.

"Participants will address trends in inequality and the measurement, nature, manifestations and drivers of this injustice. The forum promises to provide a platform for exciting, informative and insightful discourse".

The WSS Forum 2015 takes place against the backdrop of major transitions– transitions that affect global governance, the

use of resources, and the quality of life of people. It will shine the spotlight on the nature and dimensions of inequality, including:

- The extent and consequences of income and asset inequalities;
- The impact of inequality in terms of patterns of production and consumption on sustainability;
- The impact of gender inequalities, as manifested in unequal access to resources, employment and other social benefits;
- Generational inequalities, with a focus on the youth; and
- Wage inequalities and labour unrest.

"It is now very clear to all that a world in which power and resources are concentrated in the hands of a small minority while the vast majority are having problems getting their basic needs for food, shelter, security and freedom met is neither just nor sustainable", said Ebrima Sall, Executive Secretary of CODESRIA.

"What the global social science community will be doing in Durban in 2015 will build on the debates in WSSF I (Bergen 2009) and II (Montreal 2013) and will, in many ways, be similar to what the World Social Forum has been doing for the past two decades or so: highlighting the problems with global relations as they currently are, as well as the various ways in which social movements and many other actors are trying to transform them.

"We are also aware that the sites of the struggles to transform global relations include the knowledge production world itself where the asymmetries of the global order tend to be mirrored. For those of us in Africa and in other parts of the Global South, the 2015 WSSF provides an opportunity to showcase the best of our research and publications, and demonstrate that another world is not only possible: it is a necessity," Sall said.

"The state of the world is worrying", admits Alberto Martinelli, president of the International Social Science Council.

“Almost half of the world’s wealth is currently owned by the top one percent; vulnerable employment accounts for more than half of all employment in developing regions; about one eighth of the world’s population is suffering from chronic hunger; over 900 million people worldwide lack basic literacy skills, 60 per cent of which are women.

“Serious environmental changes interact in complex ways with these worrying trends, provoking natural and social disasters, illnesses, conflicts over resources, migrations. We need to look critically and creatively into these challenges drawing on the world’s best social science contributions, from all disciplines and all corners of the world. This is what the WSSF is about.”

These issues make the forum a timely initiative on crucial matters facing the world today. “I can only praise the *World Social Science Forum 2015* for bringing together key forces of change towards a just world: innovative social science researchers, dedicated policy shapers and active citizens from around the world. The problems we all face are increasingly complex, entangled, and global. Any news bulletin in any country will bear witness

to this”, said forum patron, George Monbiot, an English writer known for his work in environmental and political activism.

Going further to champion the cause of the focus of the WSSF 2015, he added that “we need more social science studies to help us understand these challenges and consciously shape our responses to them. We also need more spaces where researchers and society can openly debate the issues, influence each other, work out solutions and decide to act together. I am personally convinced of the transformative power of knowledge shaped in this spirit”.

The International Social Science Council (ISSC) is the primary body representing the social sciences worldwide, with the mission to strengthen social science research to help solve global priority problems.

“Our added value lies in our capacity to mobilise and support the full diversity of social science perspectives and approaches required to generate knowledge that can effectively contribute to solving the many urgent challenges facing societies today”, explains Heide Hackmann, Executive Director of the ISSC. “The ISSC’s World Social Science Forums aim

to shape global research agendas, energize the further development of innovative research, and assist with its effective application to society.”

The host country of the WSSF 2015 meeting illustrates the challenges to be discussed at the forum. “This forum will be held in South Africa, one of the most unequal nations of the world – a country marked by financial, spatial, material, and programmatic inequalities”, said Shisana.

“These differences are not academic. They define access to basic services such as water, sanitation, health, education, and housing. They also define relations among peoples. In the end, they define quality of life, determining who lives long and who dies early. The Forum will allow participants to tour geographical areas to experience for themselves the manifestations of inequality”.

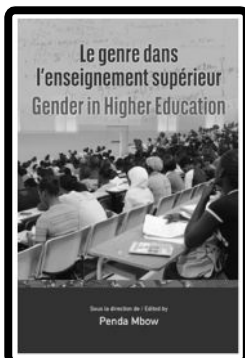
It’s now 329 days to go before the start of this very important Forum at the Durban ICC. “We trust that as we meet in Durban in 2015 to deliberate on global transformations for a just world we will have the wisdom to learn from our varied experiences as we examine social science for knowledge co-production, public policies and social intervention”, concluded Shisana.

\* [www.codesria.sn](http://www.codesria.sn)

## Le genre dans l’enseignement supérieur / Gender in Higher Education

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Les luttes pour l’égalité entre les hommes et les femmes se structurent aussi dans l’enseignement supérieur, puisque l’éducation de façon générale véhicule des disparités en dépit de tous les efforts. L’Université africaine reste dominée par les hommes, dans ses structures de représentation comme ses procédures de prise de décision, situation argumentée et renforcée par la culture patriarcale. Il relève d’un impératif de « niveler le terrain genre dans l’enseignement supérieur » par la mise en place de stratégies de réorganisation et de transformation des institutions de l’enseignement supérieur. Cette publication, ouvre des perspectives intéressantes sur le genre dans l’enseignement supérieur. La diversité des textes, reflet de la diversité culturelle et géographique des auteurs, constituent les meilleurs atouts pour ce travail qui va combler un vide. La situation évolue favorablement ; en effet, la prise

en compte de la question de l’égalité entre les sexes dans les programmes universitaires par la reconnaissance et le renforcement du rôle de l’université dans la société, devient une réalité.