

Research to Empower Political, Social and Economic Actors*

The World Social Science Forum (WSSF), the World Social Science Report (WSSR) and the International Social Science Council (ISSC) are three pillars of a vigorous initiative of the world social science community, which I have had the privilege of supporting in my capacity as Assistant Director General of UNESCO in charge of the social sciences (2001-2010). I am delighted to see that these initiatives are coming to maturity now.

The social sciences serve a fundamental human concern: the need to understand the forces driving society/societies, the reasons behind them and to propose remedies. In this undertaking, Africa has to construct its own distinct voice and theoretical paradigms to address social trans-

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formations on the continent, accompany and empower the bearers of progress and positive change through knowledge and help to open up the policy space through participation

The Human Science Research Council of South Africa and CODESRIA ought to be congratulated for taking up the challenge of organising the 3rd edition of the World Social Science Forum (WSSF) in Africa and for the theme selected: *Transforming global relations for a just world*. The operative word here of course is 'transforming' in other words 'altering

radically' in order to produce the desired effect.

For us in Africa, this can only be achieved by a transformation of Africa's social relations and modes of production. The historical mission of the African social scientist in this undertaking cannot be limited to the production of knowledge, however important that may be. The public resources we are directing at research have to feed into the empowerment of political, social and economic actors, making the researcher a conscious and active agent of the desired transformation. I met many of those researchers in apartheid South Africa in the late 80s when I was directing the IDRC programme of support to post-apartheid policy research. If we do not want to see Africa locked into a new global apartheid regime we need to mobilise energies, knowledge and actors to prevent it from happening.

* Solidarity Message on the occasion of the launch of the 3rd World Social Science Forum, presented by Pierre Sané, President of Imagine Africa Institute