

## Gender, Migration and Social Policy

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The 21st century opened with renewed attention and focus on intellectuals and knowledge production in Africa, after more than two decades of neglect of institutions and a massive exodus of academics from the continent. The epistemic communities which had developed after African independences and formed self-referential groups in several countries had largely dissipated, to be replaced by academics engaged in churning out graduates at the same time as many were pursuing livelihoods in several enterprises, often in the private universities that have sprung up over the continent, or in the centres outside the institutions. Beginning with the 1980s, a consultancy culture has blossomed across Africa, with dire consequences for a sustained culture of basic and long term research, whether in the social or natural sciences. The rapid appraisal of African issues and problems also resulted in short-term policy measures which have largely failed to stem the tide of African drift and increased dependence.

To some extent, attention has been devoted in the first decade of this century to fixing some of the technical problems – whether of space, infrastructure, staffing, conditions of service and governance of institutions. The forced merger of institutions in South Africa to address bantustanization of higher education, increased attention by donors who had

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stayed away from the continent over two decades, and internal debates across Africa about higher education and the public good or the production of the next generation of scholars (the Association of African Universities, CODESRIA), have succeeded in focusing some attention on these problems. In a few institutions, some attention is also beginning to be focused on the content of education and on knowledge production generally, and on increasing both the intake of graduate students as well as ensuring the timely completion of their programmes.

CODESRIA has an enviable record of sustaining a small but influential epistemic community that provides African viewpoints, explanations and perspectives on Africa. It has sought to bring scholars isolated by decades of conflict and war into this community. Its increasing publication catalogue is helping to highlight African intellectual production which is often neglected in indexes of global knowledge production.

In the next decade, it should aim at strengthening and expanding this community, and popularizing and increasing its pub-

lication output. It should aim at strengthening its links with continental and other organizations of scholars across the global South. In that connection, CODESRIA's ongoing collaboration with CLASCO should be extended to the Indian sub-continent and to Asia generally. Links with scholars in the Caribbean should also be deepened and mutual exchanges developed.

Specifically, in terms of research, CODESRIA has developed several mechanisms for initiating and supporting research, often on topics that few other organizations are interested in. Its documentation of ongoing democratization efforts in Africa, through its publications series, provides a counter-weight to the journalistic and often sensationalist accounts that pervade discussions of Africa. But CODESRIA could do more in popularizing its outputs and engaging with policy makers at both the continental and national levels, in collaboration with national associations of researchers,

Undoubtedly, there are several directions in which CODESRIA and African research, more generally, could focus on over the next five to ten years. While there is a danger of a shopping list approach, I would like to lay emphasis on three areas that should be focused on and strengthened over the next decade. These areas are as follows:



1. Gender Research in Africa and its Diaspora
2. African Migrations
3. Social Policies in Africa

To my mind, there are several synergies among these areas, in addition to their salience and policy relevance; both social policy and migrations are deeply gendered, although this is usually ignored in scholarly research and policy. While CODESRIA has fostered gender research in Africa, understanding and ongoing debates as well as teaching on gender in

several institutions needs to move away from an instrumentalist, under-theorized and uncomplicated narrations to confront its ambiguities, nuances and contestations. A fruitful area of collaboration with our South American colleagues in CLASCO and elsewhere would be research on understanding recent developments and social policy in South America, a continent which bore striking similarity to Africa in the 1960s and 1970s. The area of migration offers several sub-topics for exploration, as well as bearing directly on new and old African Diasporas.

CODESRIA should also aim at finding answers to the following questions:

- How should research agendas be developed?
- What is the role of the private sector in developing research?
- Which actors are involved in knowledge production and utilization?
- How can the dialogue between researchers and decision-makers be improved?