CODESRIA Reports

Conference of Deans of Faculties of Social Sciences and Humanities of African Public Universities
7 & 8 December, 2011

The Conference of Deans of Faculties of Social Sciences and Humanities was held in the afternoons of 7 and 8 December, 2011, as part of the activities of the 13th General Assembly of CODESRIA, at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Mohamed V/Agdal University, Rabat, Morocco. The theme of the conference was "The Place of the African University in the Building of a Global Higher Education Space". The opening session, chaired by Professor Wail Benjelloun, President of Mohamed V/Agdal University, was attended also by of Professor Fatima Harrak, then Vice-chairperson of the Executive Committee of CODESRIA; Professor Abderrahim Benhadda, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of Mohamed V/Agdal University, and Professor Aminata Diaw, Head of CODESRIA Training, Fellowship and Grants Program. Others present at the conference were Professor Sam Moyo, Chairman of the Executive Committee of CODESRIA, Dr Ebrima Sall, Executive Secretary of CODESRIA and Professor Mahmood Mamdani, the keynote speaker.

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In the wake of the opening ceremony, Professor Benhadda empahsiszd that the Conference of Deans was an opportunity to promote cooperation between faculties of social sciences in Africa. The chairperson, Professor Wail Benjelloun highlighted a number of challenges facing the African university as a result of the extreme youthfulness of the population (+64% in Morocco), and the multiple consequences of such a pheno-menon for the African university: massification, the issue of quality of education that enables trained students to cope with the labor market, the brain drain of people trained by African universities, etc. Professor Fatima Harrak noted that the readjustments of the African university system by the policies of international institutions finally afflicted the 'soft belly' of the system, that is, the social sciences. Professor Aminata Diaw reiterated the mandate and objectives of CODESRIA within such a context.

Keynote Address: How to Break with the "Culture of Consultancy" in African Universities

The position of the keynote speaker, Professor Mahmood Mamdani, was that the neoliberal reform introduced by the World Bank at Makerere University in Uganda, a case which is not unique in Africa, precipitated the emergence of a 'culture of consultancy' in the academia. For him, the way to restore research in the Africa academia is to introduce doctoral programs that will help renew our community of social sciences and humanities researchers since the students who will be enrolled in such programs will be initiated into real research. The problem today in our universities is that social science researchers are relegated to the role of collectors of raw data. They often participate in answering questions already formulated in projects designed elsewhere and particularly by researchers from the North who give to themselves primacy in the theorization work. Unfortunately, such theories come back later as ready-to-use by our African researchers. For Mamdani, the most important thing for a researcher is less in responding to a question to whose development he/she did not contribute, than in formulating the research problem that leads to the research issue. Under such conditions, we must no longer content ourselves with this posture of raw data collector, if we want to do research in our African universities.

The various papers presented by the deans at the conference were organized around three sessions:

- African Universities and Globalization
- African Universities and the Implementation of the BMD Reform
- Rethinking Humanities and Social Sciences in a Global Higher Education Space

The African University and Globalization

The first session, chaired by Mohamed Salhi (Vice-Dean for Scientific Research and Cooperation at Mohamed V/Agdal University), analyzed the place of the African university in a globalized space. From this perspective and starting from the etymological meaning of the word 'university', Willy Bongo-Pasi Moke Sangol of the University of Kinshasa in the DRC, was of the view that African academic institutions must serve the community insofar as they are perceived by their communities, not only as centers of excellence, but also as tools for creating initiatives, although African universities are facing a number of difficulties (massification, dilapidated facilities, etc.) which affect the supervision of students and research. All this ultimately affects the universities negatively, make them less competitive and take them far away from the goals assigned to them by society. Nevertheless, the university is bound to survive one way or the other. To do this, according to Jean Marie Katubadi-Bakenge of the University of Lake Tanganyika in Burundi, the African university must transcend local realities. According to her, the mandates of the African university to train the youth and develop research within the African space, inculcate democratic culture among trained youth and open the continent to the universal world, and contribute to the African renaissance in a globalized world, can only be achieved if the African university is organized around a number of rationalities: techno-scientific, reflective, ethical and teleological; through a constant questioning of each of them, to avoid falling into unnecessary fundamentalism. However, Saidah Mbooge Najjuma of Ndejje Uni-

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versity in Uganda believes that globalization affects the operation of African Universities on a daily basis. This is symbolized through words such as 'deregulation', 'liberalization' and 'privatization'. Thus, social policies established by international institutions such as the World Bank drastically affect sectors like higher education in Africa. Yet, she added, it is possible for the African university to enroll in the global village without losing its identity. In his own contribution, Bertrand Sogbossi Bocco of Abomey-Calavy University in Benin stress the need to understand that the African university systems are now in a space that has become highly competitive. Therefore, the deans of faculties of social sciences and humanities must now acquire basic knowledge in management to be better prepared to face the attendant challenges. Finally, Deogradius Massawe from the University of Dar Es Salaam in Tanzania noted that it is impossible to get rid of globalization. We must rather look out for the opportunities it has to offer, and make the best use of them.

The African University and the Implantation of the BMD Reform

The second session of the conference, chaired by Rori Ryan (Executive Dean of the University of Johannesburg), analyzed the situation of the African university in the implementation of the BMD reform. For Olayemi Durotimi Akinwumi of Nassarawa State University in Nigeria, the BMD reform (or the Bologna Process) should be understood as a consequence of the funding deficit of public universities, which led to their social transformation into business firms. However, Michel Tchotsoua from Ngaoundere University in Cameroon, using the case of the Department of Geography of his university as an example, showed the BMD reform may be a good thing for African universities in the sense that it facilitates the mutualization of the training and enables students to reorientate themselves about the world. Willy Batenga Moussa of the University of Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso, drew attention to the fact 'conservative behavior' is not only on the part of teachers who refuse to adapt their courses to the new system, but also on the part of students who are resistant to change. Yet, he noted, 'everyone agrees on the usefulness of the new BMD system'. Therefore, the states should provide the necessary resources for its success. But, according to Jean Otemikongo Mandefu Yahsule of Kisangani University in the DRC, the negative behavior among some stakeholders around the reform could easily be understood, as the Bologna reform carries with it a rhetoric that is not always well understood by all stakeholders. Wondering whether the Bologna Process is based on mimicry or a necessity, he concluded that it poses key issues but also challenges which African universities must overcome. In support of the reform, however, Mohamed Boussetta explained the significant progress it has made in Morocco since 2003, based on the case of the Faculty of Economics and Management of Kenitra University.

Rethinking Humanities and Social Sciences in a Higher Education Space

During this last session of the conference, chaired by Amadou Abdoul Sow (Dean, Faculté de letters et sciences humaines, Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar, Senegal, Olabisi Idowu Aina of Obafemi Awolowo University in Nigeria stressed the centrality of the gender variable in the equation of development in Africa. According to her, African universities should attach great importance to studies on gender by increasing their number. However, according to Kenneth Inyani Simala from Masinde Muliro University in Kenya, to achieve a paradigm shift in teaching and research, the faculties of social sciences must transcend disciplinary boundaries. Frederick Hendricks of Rhodes University, South Africa, highlighted the major contribution of faculties of social sciences and humanities in the deconstruction of inequalities inherited from the apartheid system in South Africa since 1994. As for Carolyn Horton Harford of the University of Swaziland, the mandate of African universities in the early independence era was to develop education by participating in the renewal of elites. But the crisis that later befell the institutions affected this mandate and resulted in the reduction of university budgets by the World Bank. So, some communities in the academia believed that social sciences and humanities had no roles to play in development, and this has played down enormously on global attitude towards the disciplines in the social sciences.

Discussions on the Presentations

The discussions following the various presentations of the deans can be grouped together under the following three main points.

Massification and Commercialization of Higher Education in Africa

If massification was unanimously considered as one of the main causes of difficulties facing higher education in Africa and particularly the faculties of social sciences and humanities, its linkage with the commercialization, sometimes called privatization, was analyzed as useful by some deans and as problematic by others. Some were of the view that it is massification which causes the privatization of higher education. Therefore, private institutions are increasingly being opened within public institutions of higher education. In some countries, private education is especially useful because the number of high school leavers yearning for university education annually far exceeds the reception capacities of public higher education institutions. The commercialization of higher education leads to competition between disciplines. Thus, students are today more interested in vocational disciplines that enable them to be operational on the job market at the end of their training, than in other general disciplines such as humanities and social sciences. One should also note the heavy workload on teachers who spend more time in lecture halls and marking students' papers than in conducting their research, which affects the latter.

What Challenges for the Social Sciences and Humanities in Africa?

Although debates sometimes gave the impression that the legal sciences are of a different kind of discipline due to their approach which is more interested in 'what should be' while the social sciences and humanities, such as anthropology or sociology, work more on 'what exists', the challenges facing the social sciences and humanities, including legal sciences, in African universities remain intrinsically the same. Thus, it was noted that if we want our universities in Africa to better integrate into the global context, we must change the educational tool and avoid being influenced by the market. We must take into account, when developing our academic programs, our priorities and realities and not those of globalization. The curricula

should be rooted in our local context to make them more relevant. In terms of knowledge management in our, we must be critical of the managerial approach of the university that perceives students as consumers and certificates as products. The university system should be taken back to its original mandate which is 'knowledge production'. Hence, considering the university as a space where democratic culture, ideologies and politics must coexist seems contradictory. Continuity should be improved since few things are done in terms of mobility. South/South exchanges must be strengthened and cooperation between the various African universities enhanced. The differentiated approach in the various faculties of universities, which hampers the BMD system, should be harmonized for mutual and progressive co-existence. Attachment to Europe in its implementation of the BMD should be discarded, so that we can truly Africanize the content of our education. We must identify the causes of the problems of the African university, one of which is massification, and then consciously work towards establishing better cooperation between institutions. The historical perspective between social sciences and developments in Africa needs to be re-emphasised. Research should also be conducted to clearly identify the situation of social sciences in African universities, while the curricula must be refocused and tailored to the needs of countries and contexts. The integration of the gender paradigm in social sciences and humanities will be measured not only by the number of research conducted on gender issues but also, and especially, through 'generating' social science research.

Necessity of Networking Social Science Faculties in Africa

The idea of networking has lost momentum in Africa. Meetings are useful indeed but a network is also a very important element for the African university. The meeting should lead to a form of electronic newsletter, and enable interconnectivity among the different websites of the various African faculties of social sciences and humanities. This would give room to improved communication between the different institutions. Internet is now accessible to everyone and can play a very important role in the sharing of experiences between faculty deans. More than ever before, there is now a necessity of networking between the deans of various African faculties of social sciences and humanities. It is important to consider the added value that can be achieved by the sharing of experiences between the different faculties.

Establishment of a Steering Committee

There was a unanimous agreement on the need to re-structure the conference of deans and provide it with the necessary tools that would boost the results of this meeting. Given the temporary mandate of deans, there was a need to ensure the continuity of the Association of Deans in the different African universities. Since deans are also teacher-researchers, the modality through which they can combine their management responsibilities, with appropriate management techniques, needs to be worked out. It was therefore considered important to establish a think tank that could facilitate the proposed establishment of the Association of Deans of African Faculties of Social Sciences and Humanities, and a steering committee comprised of five members, each representing one of the five African regions. It would be the responsibility of the steering committee to work out the modalities for the establishment of the Association of Deans and fix a date for the next meeting of deans. Each member of the committee will be tasked, among others, to inform other deans of faculties of social sciences and humanities that are within his/her sub-region and sensitize them towards the establishment of the Association of Deans. To this end, an appeal was made to CODESRIA to assist in drafting the document for the proposed association, and funding sub-regional meetings to facilitate the work of the steering committee.

The members of the Steering Committee, by region, are as follows:

- Southern Africa: Professor Fred Hendricks, Rhodes University, Grahamstown

- Central Africa: Professor Michel Tchotsoua, Ngaoundéré University, Cameroon

- East Africa: Professor Abeje Berhanu, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia

- North Africa: Professor Abderrahim Benhadda, Mohammed V Agdal University, Rabat, Morocco

- West Africa: Professor Olabisi Idowu Aina, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Nigeria

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Como Fazer Ciências Sociais e Humanas em África
Questões Epistemológicas, Metodológicas, Teóricas e Políticas

Teresa Cruz e Silva, João Paulo Borges Coelho & Amélia Neves de Souto (Orgs.)

As crises de pensamento decorrentes das grandes mudanças verificadas no mundo durante a última metade do século XX e início deste século levaram as Ciências Sociais e Humanidades a acelerar a sua reconceptualização num esforço tendente a clarificar e redefinir o seu papel na sociedade. Hoje, mais do que nunca, se debate sobre a finalidade das Ciências Sociais. Questionamonos sobre o seu contributo para a formulação e resolução dos problemas contemporâneos, incluindo de que forma elas podem ajudar a uma maior eficácia na tomada de decisões políticas e administrativas. Questionamo-nos, inclusivamente, sobre o futuro das próprias Ciências Sociais e Humanidades, futuro esse que depende em grande medida da pertinência das visões do mundo que nos proporcionam. A procura de respostas para estes questionamentos não pode estar dissociada da discussão em torno da problemática referente à produção e apropriação do conhecimento. A cultura científica é actualmente encarada como uma dimensão fundamental das sociedades contemporâneas, na medida em que interfere com todos os domínios da vida social. Ela representa o vector decisivo da modernização e do desenvolvimento.