

Equitable Higher Education, Inclusive Development and the Commercial Academic Publishing Industry

Annual Conference of CODESRIA Journal Editors, 2011

The 2011 Annual Conference of CODESRIA Journal Editors was held as part of the 13th General Assembly of CODESRIA which had as its theme “Africa and the Challenges of the 21st Century”. The venue was the Mohammed V University, Rabat, Morocco.

The main objectives of this conference were to: deliberate on how to further enhance the quality and visibility of CODESRIA journals to enable them rank among the best international social science journals; brainstorm on effective distribution channels that will take the journals to scholars who need them, particularly in Africa; and use the opportunity of the CODESRIA General Assembly to network with current and prospective contributors to the various journals, and share challenges and experiences.

The Keynote Address at the conference, entitled “Equitable Higher Education, Inclusive Development and the Commercial Academic Publishing Industry” was delivered by Adam Habib, Professor of Political Science and Deputy Vice Chancellor (research, innovation and advancement), University of Johannesburg, South Africa. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam_Habib - cite_note-CenterForCivilSociety-0

Dr Ebrima Sall, CODESRIA’s Executive Secretary, explained in his opening remarks that the meeting was being held as part of the General Assembly to give the editors the opportunity to meet potential contributors to their respective journals. According to him, the editors’ meeting is extremely important because the journals are the face of both CODESRIA and the African social science community as a whole. He identified journal publishing and control as a burning issue which needed to be discussed in CODESRIA, most especially by the people in charge of the journals. Dr Sall pointed out that the editors’ forum is an extremely important and strategic group which CODESRIA holds in high esteem.

The keynote speaker, Professor Habib, described the current journal industry, involving the multinationals, as a bizarre one ‘in which the workers who laboriously manufacture the product are paid by the public purse, those that painstakingly review the quality of the product are also paid by the public purse, and then the product is sold by a private European or North American company back to public institutions at a huge profit...’ reminiscent of ‘feudal relations established in the colonies at the height of imperialism’. This has made journal publishing so attractive that newspaper organisations are closing down to embark on journal publishing. The effect of this is that poor universities ‘do not have access to a quality academic journal base which is an absolute necessity for quality higher education to be delivered’.

Professor Habib highlighted the three core priorities of higher education systems: producing highly qualified human resource base which is needed for development, building a new generation

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of academics to sustain the system, and producing high quality research and innovation that can enhance our global competitiveness – all of which are dependent on access to widely used publications. But many of us have been

denied this access, as ‘an international commercial industry of academic publishing has been allowed to undermine the public good of higher education for massive profits’. However, the keynote speaker enunciated the various moves to address this situation, with particular reference to South Africa. The main obstacle to real improvement in the scholarly performance of African researchers, according to the keynote speaker, is ‘access to high impact “international literature” from North America and Europe, which are needed if African scholars and researchers are to ‘get to the cutting edge of global knowledge in their respective fields’. But this literature is ‘published by multinational companies on highly commercial platforms, and represent most of the more important scientific journals of the planet’.

In terms of solutions, Professor Habib observed that there is a need to consider open access seriously, as well as the possibility of bringing together a group of disciplinary associations to produce journals, bring the price down and make them accessible to all. Also, our universities as a group or groups should buy access to these international journals. He also suggested the establishment of consolidated and highly subsidized academic publishing houses, reforms capable of challenging the commercial model of academic publishing in North America and Western Europe through appropriate legislation, more flexibility in the World Trade negotiations on copyright laws, especially in favour of upcoming scholars in our higher education institutions, and the forging of a collective protest against the excessive profits of the corporate academic publishing industry. All these are necessary if we are to succeed in developing an equitable, diverse human resource base on which to build a knowledge economy in Africa.

In the discussion that followed, the editors noted the unfairness in the system in which the same multinational companies that produce the journals are also the ones which also lead journal citation and run indexations. For CODESRIA in particular, the editors advised that the Council should keep all its journals, in terms of accessibility and visibility.

The meeting underscored the need to ensure that the journals are produced promptly without any backlog. The various associations that co-publish the journals with CODESRIA were asked to re-visit their constitutional provisions, and ensure that their autonomy and control over the journals are not tampered with in any way.

The meeting welcomed the establishment of a new CODESRIA journal: *African Journal of Social Science Methodology*.



As usual, the journal editors discussed the achievements, weaknesses, and challenges in respect of each journal since the previous conference, and presented new ways towards greater achievement and better outputs. The following are some of the observations and suggestions put forward for better performances of the journals:

- Panels on “Publishing in CODESRIA” should be part of the CODESRIA General Assembly;
- Editors should use opportunities offered by gatherings such as the General Assembly to network, gather manuscripts, and build new contacts in the African social science community;
- Journals should send out regular calls for papers to feed their journals;
- The gestation period for a reviewed article was fixed at six months;
- All journals were encouraged to consider publication of a special issues at least once in every four issues;

- Surveys would be conducted to ascertain the current quality, visibility and use of the journals;
- Journals should be marketed to the African Union and its agencies, sub-regional organizations and African governments, especially the ministries of foreign affairs;
- Members of the editorial advisory boards should be encouraged to serve as guest and editors, peer-reviewers;
- The new *African Journal of Social Science Methodology* will welcome abstracts in English, French, Arabic, Portuguese and Spanish, but it will carry articles in French and English;
- CODESRIA should consider sending copies of each journal to the editors of the other journals.

Generally, the 2011 Conference of CODESRIA Journal Editors was a very fruitful meeting. The editors were particularly pleased with the opportunity to hold this meeting as part of the General Assembly given the opportunities it accorded them.