Editorial

Reclaiming Our Future

Every new century comes with its own challenges. Although the rapid changes in virtually all spheres of life make it difficult to clearly identify all the challenges that Africa will face this century, the fact remains that Africa has a lot to contend with, there are many global issues that are craving for attention – emerging world powers, neoliberalism, interculturalism, climate change, poverty, rapid urbanization, and many others.

Some pertinent questions arise from these challenges, and these are essentially what the 13th CODESRIA General Assembly, taking place after the celebration of the 50th independence anniversary of most African countries, will tackle during its conference through lectures and round-table discussions as the Council hosts scholars on Africa from the continent and the outside world between 5 and 9 December, 2011, Rabat, Morocco. The communication that announced the forthcoming General Assembly raised two questions: "How does all this affect Africa? And how prepared is the continent to face these challenges as well as those that will arise in the future?"

Some of the major disadvantages that Africa is faced with at the beginning of the 21st century include low level of education of many Africans, lack of modern techniques of production, transport, a fragmented political space and the extrovert structure of the majority of the economies among others. Institutions of higher education and cultures of the elites are strongly marked, not by a philosophy and development strategies guided by the interests of African peoples, but by influences coming from the North, influences that are more alienating than liberating.

Some of the "remedies" to the economic crisis and, more generally, to the problems of underdevelopment and widespread poverty that have been proposed or imposed on Africa have, in some cases contributed to the worsening of problems that they were supposed to solve. Special attention should be paid to higher education, given the importance, and the uniqueness of the role that knowledge plays in development, and its ability to influence the whole system. Isn't the "vulnerability" of Africa the result of its marginal position in the world of knowledge? With the ongoing changes in higher education around the world and the weakening of many African universities as a result of both deep crises and twenty years of structural adjustment, brain drain and sheer negligence on the part of the State, African research has encountered considerable difficulties in its attempts to study and interpret these events and more.

The question we need to ask is: How can Africa take charge of its future and make this century the one of its renaissance? How could the social sciences and humanities address the challenges that we already know, and what type of improvements are required in the African higher education and research systems in order for them to better prepare Africa to face the challenges of the coming decades of this century?

We seek to understand the role of intellectuals in general and CODESRIA in particular in addressing these challenges. The theoretical issues are very important. The production of knowledge informed by and is relevant to the social realities of Africa has always been the ambition of CODESRIA and of all the great intellectuals of this continent. The intellectual struggles of Africa and the Global South against the consequences of Western domination are far from having been won. The scientific division of labour in which Africa is still mainly seen as a purveyor of raw materials of little use to the transformation of African societies is still in force.

CODESRIA has decided to revamp the Economic Research Programme (ERP) as part of the Council's continued efforts toward analyzing the dynamics of economic processes and policies on the African continent through multidisciplinary teams comprising economists and researchers from other disciplines of the social sciences. The motivation for this multidisciplinary approach is based on the assumption that African economies cannot be studied in isolation from the prevailing social and political conditions on the continent. The programme therefore features critical reflections on the economy, politics and development challenges in Africa that are capable of laying the groundwork for further research. This edition of the Bulletin contains three of the presentations from the planning meeting. They include "Africa's Recent Growth Performance and Development Challenges" by

Mike Obadan; "Africa's Economies and Relevant Economic Analysis: A Heterodox Approach to Economic Research in Africa" by Alemayehu Geda; and "Pertinent Economic Issues and Challenges Facing Africa" by Demba Moussa Dembele.

On the role of higher education, we have reflections from Adam Habib in "Managing Higher Education in Contemporary South Africa: Advancing Progressive Agendas in a Neo-Liberal and Technicist World". He decries the present situation whereby higher educational systems are victims of eloquent and flowery policies which do not translate into tangible physical improvements, as discussions about cogent management issues have been grossly neglected. This article underscores the importance of experience-sharing among higher institutions in order to achieve the required effective balancing in the educational sector.

Continuing with the challenges of higher education we have Mahmood Mamdani with "The Importance of Research in a University" in which he shares his experience at the Makerere Institute of Social Research at Makerere University. He stresses the need to train future African researchers on the continent, preferably in their prospective employer-institutions, rather than overseas. He decries the market driven model and its resultant corrosive consultancy culture that presently dominates African universities while advocating a re-direction of commitment towards local knowledge production as the basis for understanding global phenomena.

In this issue, we return to Sudan with a piece on post-referendum Sudan in which the author, Peter Nyaba, makes a case for self-determination. In his article entitled "Peace is Better than Unity – Post-referendum Sudan", he argues that 'breaking apart and having peace' is better that 'living together in continued animosity under the guise of maintaining territorial integrity. Blaming the secession of South Sudan on the ruling political elite in Khartoum that was insensitive to the yearnings of the people, he concludes that the people made a right choice in deciding to break away and form a new nation. He offers some some key suggestions that will help South Sudan succeed.

The media has changed so much to the extent that it is currently the biggest tool that shapes public opinion and thus determines how majority of issues are understood and interpreted. This role is likely to expand even more in the coming decades. At this year's CODESRIA Gender Symposium, researchers focused on the implications of media liberalization in Africa. We have reflections on media representation of women. Ly Ossome in "Feminism in the African Media: Possibilities for Diversification of Gender Representation" presents some new perspectives on gender representation, highlighting the potentials of women's media for feminist liberation struggles against economic, political and cultural marginalization. Along the same lines, Abdoulaye Sounaye in "Gendered Religion: Female Preachers, Audiovisual Media and the Construction of Religious Authority in Niamey" discusses the role of gendered media in promoting female voices in religious arenas, placing them in a space that has hitherto been monopolized by the male folk and liberating them from the traditional confines dictated by religion. Illustrating with two women preachers from Niamey in Niger, this article advocates a gendered Islam, one in which women can take their rightful place beside men in religious activities, through creative rather than conservative media

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