13th Codesria General Assembly Announcement

Rabat, Morocco, 5-9 December 2011

Africa and The Challenges of The Twenty First Century

The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, CODESRIA, will hold its 13th General Assembly on 5-9 December 2011, in Rabat, Morocco. The triennial General Assembly is one of the most important scientific events of the African continent. It provides the African social science research community with a unique opportunity to reflect on some of the key issues facing the social sciences in particular, and Africa and the world at large. The theme of the scientific conference of the 13th CODESRIA General Assembly is: ***Africa and the Challenges of the Twenty-First Century.***

The 21st century, like the preceding one does not seem capable of breaking from the paradigm of the complex and the uncertain. Instead, it is confirming that hastily and carelessly proclaiming ''the end of history'', as Fukuyama did, was not enough to legitimately dispose of issues and challenges such as those of how to understand the presence of Africa in a world where emerging powers (South Africa, Brazil, Russia, India and China) are increasingly upsetting traditional global geopolitics. The financial crisis and its social implications in some countries of the North and the increasingly global nature of many problems have raised awareness about the vital and imperious need for Africans to theoretically tackle the issue of Africa's future in this new century. This underscores the legitimacy of an approach that is founded on a rupture: a clean break with Afropessimism from outside and from within to show that the new global political and economic order is not a fatality but one that calls for a breaking off with a theoretical construction of Africa which led to the posing of questions like that asked by the World Bank in 2000: ''Can Africa claim its place in the 21st century?" It is about understanding why and how Africa is still at the heart of the new global political and economic strategies, and what opportunities there are for our continent to reposition itself in the world, and reposition the world with regard to its own objectives, perhaps the most important of which still remains that of bringing development (also to be understood as freedom, as Amartya Sen has argued) to its people. It is also a question of deconstructing what some have called "the confinement of Africa in a rent economy" in order to more critically understand the opportunities available to the continent but also the constraints facing it, because the basic question is how, in the course of this 21st century, to oppose to the "invention of Africa" an "invention of the world" by Africa.

Global Issues, Global Challenges

Increasingly complex neoliberal globalisation, changes in intercultural relations at the global level, climate change, poverty, rapid urbanisation, the ICTs revolution, the emergence of knowledge societies, the evolution of gender and intergenerational relations, the evolution of spirituality and of the status and the role of religion in modern societies, the emergence of a multi-polar world and the phenomenon of emerging powers of the South are some of the realities of our world that are widely and extensively discussed by both academics and policy-makers. Some of these challenges have been identified in the 2010 edition of the International Social Sciences Council's *World Social Sciences Report*, as major challenges of the 21st century.

Discussions on climate change, like those on the so-called emerging powers, are much more important today than they were 30 to 40 years ago. If the Rio Summit on global environmental change was a key moment in the mobilisation of the international community to face the challenges arising from global warming, such summits were rare. However, in less than two years, two summits – the Copenhagen Summit and the Cancun Summit on Climate Change – have been organised, and another summit will be held soon on the same issues in Durban (South Africa). Major international programmes on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, such as REDD and REDD+, have also been launched. Furthermore, the creation of the Euro Zone as well as the rise of countries like China and India, have had repercussions worldwide.

The questions one must ask are: 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? It is nowadays rather difficult to keep pace with advances in science and technology, including among others, in the areas of biotechnology and nanotechnology, genetic engineering. The challenge that Africa is facing is not only that of understanding how new scientific discoveries may have an impact on our societies, but also that of how to become a "continent of science" itself.

The rapidity of the pace of change in virtually all spheres of social life at the local, national, continental, and global levels make it difficult to identify the challenges that Africa will be facing in the coming century beyond a few decades. Science itself is changing as a result of changes occurring in nature and in society. Moreover, science and technology, far from being neutral, have become key players in the evolutions that occur in production systems, trade, and intercultural relations, as well as in research and the formulation of responses to environmental change. The ability of science to anticipate, read and interpret the processes of change has increased over the years. The ability of humanity to follow developments taking place in nature, and to capture the major trends taking place within society, is likely to increase as science itself develops. Therefore, the list of questions that can be considered as major challenges for the 21st century is likely to change over time.

Africa of the 21st Century

Africa has entered the 21st century with huge unresolved issues, such as poverty, rapid urbanisation, the national question, regional integration, gender inequality, food insecurity, violent conflict, political fragmentation, and the fact that it occupies a subaltern position in the global community, and in global governance. The weight of the past is a major handicap for Africa. The effects of the slave trade, colonisation and neocolonialism that Africa has suffered from are still being felt, as they have each and together resulted in the suppression of freedoms, the violation of human rights and dignity of the peoples of the continent, as well as the looting of human, natural and intellectual resources and what the pan-Africanist historian Walter Rodney called the "underdevelopment" of Africa. Among the major disadvantages of the continent at the dawn of the twenty-first century are also the low level of education of many Africans, the lack of modern techniques of production, transport, etc.., a fragmented political space and the extrovert structure of the economies. The 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.

Nevertheless, the Africa of the end of the first decade of the 21st century is not exactly the same as the Africa of the early sixties which had just got freedom from colonial rule. The challenges the continent faces today are not exactly the same as those of the sixties. Although there still are issues dating back to the early years of independence, these are of a different order, and are today discussed with a particular focus and a sense of urgency. This is particularly true of the issues of governance and development, most of which are yet to be resolved.

Yet by all indications, these issues have gained particular relevance and magnitude. The celebration of the 50th anniversary of the independence of many countries in 2010 has provided an opportunity for African researchers to review the continent's performance in 50 years of independence, a mixed record after all. There have been many achievements in terms of social and economic development. Enormous progress has been made in education and health, and some countries have managed to establish democratic governance systems, especially after the wave of national conferences (in West and Central Africa) at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s. The fall of authoritarian regimes, the end of apartheid, the change of ruling parties in countries like Senegal, and the recent profound changes in Tunisia (the Jasmine Revolution), Egypt and elsewhere in North Africa have made the promise of democratisation and development of Africa much more real. Yet even with the recent political transformations, governance issues are still part of the great challenges facing our continent. Africa is still beset by the paradox of poverty in plenty: most people of the continent are poor despite the fact that the countries they live in are rich in human and natural resources.

Poverty is still massive and deeply rooted, and the processes that lead to exclusion and marginalization of large segments of African societies are still ongoing. Exclusion and political marginalization of individuals, groups and entire social classes are, as we know, among the root causes of many of the violent conflicts that have ravaged several African countries, while aggravating underdevelopment and international dependence. 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. Others, like the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) as an antidote to food insecurity, or large scale land alienation in favour of multinational companies producing food crops or crops to obtain bio-fuels, raise significant political, ethical and health concerns, making the land question more complex. Commodification, and attempts to subject almost all spheres of nature and society, including human organs, forest resources, and the social sciences themselves, to a market logic pose enormous challenges for science and for society, even if in some respects, the process has directed the flow of precious financial and human resources to some key issues and led to major discoveries that could enhance social progress. However, by all indications, with the exception of a few, the countries of the South are still at the level of receivers / consumers in the overall relationship that is behind these processes, or at best in the role of "passengers" rather than "drivers" of the process of globalisation.

Reflections should also focus on issues such as the high mobility of African people, both within and outside of the continent, and its consequences in terms of citizenship rights, and its impacts on gender relations; the issues of climate change, natural resource management and food security; the recurrent problem of African integration with a focus on the issue of a common currency and common borders; or yet again the governance of African cities, since a number of prospective studies have identified urbanization as a major trend in the evolution of the continent. These issues are likely to continue to determine the evolution of the continent.

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.

New technologies, especially ICTs play one of the most crucial roles in social, economic and political developments of the continent. For instance, the mobile phone and FM radio stations played an important role in the political and social movements in Senegal at the turn of the Millennium. Faced with restrictions on political debates in many countries such as Tunisia, we saw the importance of the Internet, including social media and Internet-based sites such as Facebook and Twitter as spaces for democratic struggles involving thousands of highly educated but unemployed urban youth. Meanwhile, the governance of the Internet, a space managed mainly by private multinational companies of a new type (Facebook, Twitter, Google, YouTube, etc...), remains an unresolved issue.

Therefore the question is: Will this be Africa's century, as it is sometimes claimed? A better way to put more or less the same question is to ask: How can Africa take charge of its future and make this century the one of its renaissance? But what does it mean to make the 21st century the century of Africa and what

does that imply? How could the social sciences and humanities address the challenges that we already know, and what types 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?

What is 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 in Africa has always been the ambition of CODESRIA and of all the great intellectuals of the 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. The epistemological agenda of the continent must continue to include the transformation of the dominant epistemological order which favours the West and penalizes the South, and Africa in particular. The valorization of the intellectual heritage and contributions of great thinkers from Africa and its Diaspora, such as Ibn Khaldoun, Ibn Battuta, El-Bakri, Ali Idrissi, Ahmed Baba, Marcus Garvey, WEB Du Bois, Cheikh Anta Diop, Frantz Fanon, Aime Cesaire, Joseph Ki-Zerbo, Ruth First, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Wole Soyinka, CLR James, Abdul Rahman Babu, Sembene Ousmane, Fela Kuti, Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem, Archie Mafeje, Bernard Magubane, Samir Amin, Claude Ake, Ali El-Kenz, Fatima Mernisi, Mahmood Mamdani, Amina Mama, Souleymane Bachir Diagne, Paulin Hountondji, Jean-Marc Ela, Thandika Mkandawire, Fatou Sow, Issa Shivji, Ifi Amadiume, Oyeronke Oyewumi and Omafume Onoge (the list is long), must continue to be a part of our priorities. So must be the South-South and South-North dialogue.

The Casablanca Conference, 50 Years On

The 13th CODESRIA General Assembly takes place shortly after many African countries have celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of their independence. It is also being organised, 50 years after the holding of the 1961 Casablanca Conference that brought together Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana), Mwalimu Julius Nyerere (Tanzania), Gamal Abdel Nasser (Egypt), Ahmed Sekou Toure (Guinea), Modibo Keita (Mali), Ferhat Abbas (Algeria) and other leaders of newly independent African states and national liberation movements, to discuss the future of the Africa. The "Casablanca Group", as they were known, formed the progressive camp. The Casablanca Conference which was hosted by King Mohammed V of Morocco, was a very important milestone in the process that led to the creation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1963. The holding of the 13th CODESRIA General Assembly in Morocco provides an opportunity for the African social science community to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of this conference, and to pay tribute to the founding fathers and mothers of the OAU that later became the African Union (AU) a few decades later, and ask the question as to how to reinvigorate the African integration process, as well as that of how to renew our collective commitment to realise the continental integration project.

The Organisation of the General Assembly

The General Assembly of CODESRIA will be organised in three parts: the first part is a scientific conference on the theme *Africa and the Challenges of the 21st Century*. This part will be organised in plenary and parallel sessions. A number of leading scholars from Africa, the Diaspora and other parts of the global South, as well as representatives of partner institutions in the North will also be invited to participate in the conference. Provision will be made for autonomous initiatives of individuals and research institutions who are interested in organising panels to do so if they are able to mobilise the resources required for that. The second part is the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Casablanca Conference, and the third and last part is the business session devoted to discussions on the institutional life of CODESRIA: presentation and discussion of the reports of the President, the President of the Scientific Committee, and the Executive Secretary of CODESRIA; the new strategic plan and research priorities for the coming years; amendments to the CODESRIA Charter; and election of a new Executive Committee as well as a new President and Vice President of CODESRIA.

Politics, Religion and Power in the Great Lakes Region

Murindwa Rutanga

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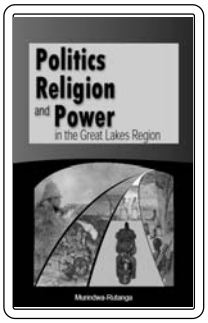

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Politics, Religion and Power in the Great Lakes Region covers the political, religious and power relations in the contemporary Great Lakes States: Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Tanzania, Kenya and the Sudan. The work is important because of the nexus between these countries' shared present and past - their political, socio-economic, cultural and historical aspirations. In terms of regional cooperation, they are the countries, save for the DRC and the Sudan, which form the current East African Community (EAC). The book reflects on the complex dynamics and strategies of the ensuing power struggle, bringing forth a unique set of fascinating revelations of patterns of primitive capital accumulation, resistance, human rights violations and the political compromises between traditional enemies when confronted by a common (foreign) enemy. A critical analysis of the political distortion the region suffered brings to light the relevance of these divisive tools on the current trends in the African countries, drawing inferences from the African Great Lakes Region (GLR). The study highlights how the conflicts were finally resolved to avert a serious war, thus bringing about new reforms. This history is instructive to the contemporary reader because of the frequent skirmishes caused by ethnic and religious differences, political and territorial conflicts as well as resource and leadership disputes in the GLR.