

Editorial

Child and Youth Studies in Africa

This issue of the CODESRIA Bulletin focuses on child and youth studies. All the articles, except the last one by Francis Nyamnjoh, were 'think pieces' first presented at an international conference on the theme: 'New Frontiers of Child and Youth Research in Africa', held in Douala, Cameroon, on the 26 and 27 August 2009, and attended by scholars actively engaged in research on issues that affect or concern children and youth in Africa.

Child and youth studies have, in the last two decades, experienced significant advances in theory and this has led to remarkable growth in knowledge in this field. Major research has been done in the areas of children's rights, the characterisation and contexts of child and youth labour, the socio-cultural environment of child and youth socialisation, and the social, political and economic constraints challenging children's self-development.

The 2009 conference was convened to assess the state of research on child and youth studies in Africa. This meeting was a follow-up to two earlier ones. The first one was a CODESRIA-African Studies Centre (Leiden) conference on the theme: 'Children in Global South: Religion, Politics and the Future of the Youth in Asia, Africa and the Middle East' held in Dakar in October 2006. At this meeting, it was made clear that despite the advances recorded in child and youth studies in the last two decades, more still needed to be done to get a better understanding of childhoods and youth-hoods in the global South in the context of a globalisation process driven by neo-liberalism. The worldviews of children and young people are being shaped by phenomena in ways that often make them look for role models or aspire to things outside their own societies. With far broader horizons than the youth of previous generations, their aspirations can easily go beyond what the material conditions of the societies where they live in can allow. A strong urge, and in some instances desperate attempts to migrate to the industrialised countries are among the consequences. What this means is a potential lack of faith in the capability of the leaders of African societies to steer our countries towards a better and brighter future, and a reluctance to fully 'invest' their energies locally, and contribute to the transformation of our economies and societies: that is postponed until after the hypothetical journey to the industrialised countries, for one purpose or another. Many more young people are leaving the countryside for the towns and cities of Africa, and part of this is happening in organised networks.

It would however be misleading to portray African youth in only one colour. The role of the youth in the struggles for democracy and development has been very well documented. A countless number of young people are also engaged in productive activities and family sustenance.

In November of the same year, CODESRIA, in collaboration with Childwatch International (CWI), organised another conference on the theme 'Child Research in Africa', which was held

in Dakar, Senegal. This second meeting identified a number of bottlenecks in researching children and youth issues in Africa, such as the ones just mentioned above. More specifically, this other conference however turned out to be an opportunity for CODESRIA and CWI to engage in an assessment of the research potential on the theme, creating a permanent network of researchers, and devising means of measuring the capacities of research organisations focused on children and the youth in Africa. The conference also provided an opportunity to critically examine the challenges of funding.

The 2009 Douala conference was intended to deepen reflections on the debates and issues raised in the earlier meetings. It was therefore intended to motivate and stimulate discussions on the contributions of research to the improvement of the status of the children on the continent. The emphasis was therefore on the content and quality of research being undertaken in child and youth studies in Africa. The conference was another opportunity for scholars to identify new research themes and the various challenges that need to be overcome in order to expand the frontiers of child and youth research in Africa. It was therefore essential, not only to revisit themes dealt with at earlier meetings, but also to identify new ones. This is part of what Guy Massart deals with in his article 'CODESRIA Planning Workshop: Children and Youth Programme – A few Reflections and Suggestions.'

The 20th century has known significant changes in areas of mass production, mass communication and major advances in technology generally. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have had an overwhelming impact on relations between different generations and socio-professional categories. For instance, it has been established that the web and cellular telephones have greater influence on the lifestyle of the younger than the older generation. The sociability of the youth in a globalised world cannot be fully grasped without referring to the influence of these ICTs. They are perceived as a symbolic element of youth culture in contrast to other technologies. This phenomenon is, among others, examined by Silue Oumar and Joseph Lah Lo-oh. Oumar discusses Youth's Game-playing in Ivorian Public Space: Involving the Youth of Street Dialogue Spaces in Politics. Joseph Lah Lo-oh's 'Youth Transition to Adulthood: Changes, Trends, and Implications for Preparing the next Generation of Africa' and Guguleti Siziba's 'Redefining the Production and Reproduction of Culture in Zimbabwe's Urban Space: The Case of Urban Grooves' also discuss similar phenomena.

There are several pertinent questions that need to be answered: What is the impact of these technologies on the new generation and how do they affect their traditional and local ties? How do social standards influence the use of the new technologies? How does one's location or theoretical orientation influence one's comprehension of different aspects of the social condi-

tions of children and youth? What challenges do social changes pose to social research in general, and child and youth research in particular? To what extent can the new generation create new life styles as they respond to and negotiate the new social realities of Africa? How important are the influence of global social change processes in understanding the reality of childhood?

These are questions to which research must try to find answers, as it is important to go beyond the description of the characteristics of education, labour and family to focus on issues that touch on the subjectivity of the youth. The construction of such subjectivity and the individualisation processes characterising the behaviour of the new generation has an impact on the relations that the youth have with conventional political institutions. Instead of stigmatising the new generation for their loss of interest in conventional political life, it is important to deepen research work on the new forms of the youth's adhesion to non-institutionalised domains, in order to comprehend better the active participation of the youth in their respective societies. In "'It is not Normal but it is Common": Elopement Marriage and the Mediated Recognition of Youth Identity in Harare, Zimbabwe', Jeremy Jones partly examines what happens when a society is under great stress, using marriage in Harare as a case study.

The conference also provided an opportunity to revisit some key issues linked to the various approaches, concepts and tools of child and youth research, such as 'agent' and 'voice', 'social generation' and 'generational scheduling'. Finally, it probed the relations of power that exist between the researcher and youth in order to improve the theorisation of the power relations in youth research. In 'Poetry Slam – A new Form of the Youth's Expression: Half-way Between Rap and Traditional Poetry' Mamadou Drame demonstrates one of the ways through which the youth have been able to achieve unequalled freedom of speech because, in Slam, they are able to do whatever they wish without restriction.

The last article, by Francis Nyamnjoh, focuses on what needs to be done, not only to revitalise CODESRIA journals, but also our research agendas. It discusses the role of CODESRIA journals in general and demands that they occupy the forefront in the promotion of scholarly debates as informed by the African research community. These journals were founded to support social research and knowledge production and consumption in Africa. They will not be able to perform that role effectively and creditably unless they are based on a scholarship that is both theoretically and methodologically creative.

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