Editorial

On CODESRIA and the African Public Sphere

December 2008 will go down in history as a month of triple significance in the life of CODESRIA: First, as the month of the Council's 12th General Assembly; second, as the month when the Council celebrated its 35th anniversary; and third, as the month marking a smooth and orderly transition between an incoming and an outgoing Executive Secretary.

From 7- 11 December, Yaounde, Cameroon, played host to over 400 participants, drawn from within and without Africa, and comprising scholars, students, donors, officials of NGOs and policymakers, to make presentations, discuss and debate around the theme 'Governing the Public Sphere in Africa'. Also visibly present at the occasion were 65 institutional partners and the deans of faculties of over 30 African universities. The choice of the General Assembly theme demonstrates not only CODESRIA's commitment to promoting critical scholarship of relevance to governance on the continent, but also the Council's mission of spearheading social research shaped and projected by an African value-added in theory and practice. Much too often, discussions of the African public sphere have tended to transpose, rather than critically engage with Eurocentric indicators *à la Jurgen Habermas*, thus failing to capture the myriad ways in which African creativity, experiences and processes have enriched the idea of the public sphere.

The General Assembly conference was thus a singular opportunity to discuss and debate competing and complementary understandings of the public sphere, drawing heavily on how Africans have, through their scholarship, literary and philosophical works theorized the public sphere. With a focus on various phenomena and aspects of social communication that ranged from rumour to political participation, through popular culture, virtual publics and public policy, *inter alia*, the presentations and discussions showed that some of Jurgen Habermas' ideas are relevant to the African context and some are not. State imposition of limits to public sphere and public space, particularly in politics, results in imaginative popular ways – using metaphor, songs, rumours, humour, irony, satire and derision to broaden and articulate political views. African writers have employed their creative literary abilities using symbolism and representation to deal with social, political and religious issues of the public sphere. While religion is said to belong to the private sphere or the sphere in-between, the religious establishment has great influence in Africa to the extent that it could draw religion in the public sphere. Public sphere could broaden from below through mobilization and pressure, especially through ICT, on those in power to give more room for it to operate for the public good.

The papers presented evidenced the wide employment of the concept of public sphere to capture the multiplicity of shared, deliberative, interlocking and contested spaces and structures that characterise the African society. They further underlined the historical specificity of the African public sphere, its various dimensions, contradictions and transformation. Most importantly, they reinforced the appropriateness of CODESRIA's emphasis on the marshalling of multi-disciplinary insights, as the key to rescuing the study of Africa from faulty analogies drawn from a narrow reading of the history of Europe and the United States. The innovative work presented showed that much has been done, and continues to be done, by Africans to build concepts, theories and methods that capture the general and specific attributes of the African public sphere as it has evolved over time.

Through the presentations and discussions, participants had occasion to revisit various debates on democracy and development, and especially as these relate to the question of citizenship in Africa and globally. The need for a state that is both democratic and developmental, as the best guarantor of citizenship and its entitlements, has always been at the heart of CODESRIA's critical distance vis-à-vis the neo-liberal market philosophy and assumptions. The need for a judicious balance between individual agency and collective aspirations, and between the state and the market (for long underplayed by market fundamentalism) is now back on the agenda, even at the centre of neo-liberalism where the current global financial crisis has forced the governments of the United States and Europe to seek a greater regulatory role and involvement for the state beyond merely guaranteeing a conducive environment for greed as creed. CODESRIA's achievements in critical scholarship notwithstanding, the need for CODESRIA to continue research on the political experiences of African countries, in relation to the public sphere, cannot be over-emphasised. Equally, CODESRIA must not relent in challenging the marginalisation of African and other non-western scholarship in Africa and globally, and in daring the African social research community to do research and project scholarship that questions prevalent afro-pessimism beyond rhetoric. While it is critical for us to marry scientific enquiry with social and political action, the case for Africa's contribution to global knowledge production and consumption is best made by quality science.

CODESRIA's mission has been, and still remains, to challenge a global disequilibrium in knowledge production and consumption where it is commonplace for Africa to occupy the margins even in matters that are African. Its call for a new politics in this regard, one that privileges the African value-added in theory and practice was central to Adebayo Olukoshi's eight years of stewardship as the Executive Secretary of the Council. Adebayo Olukoshi is largely credited with turning CODESRIA around from the serious financial, administrative and reputation crises in which he found the Council when he took over as Executive Secretary in February 2001. His contributions ranged from his steering it from the serious crises he found it in to a vibrant, strong and multi-generational institution, to reactivating partnerships across the Global South and ensuring that the Council

occupies its rightful place in international scholarly organisations such as the International Social Science Council. The General Assembly acknowledged his unique leadership qualities and his initiatives in institution building, which were manifested in maintaining a strong, dynamic and united secretariat; integrating young researchers into CODESRIA's programmes, activities and membership, and establishing links between the different generations of African scholars. These clearly marked him out as an unparalleled and remarkable Pan-Africanist whose vision, thoughts, deeds, public relations and solid achievements spoke for themselves.

In his farewell address titled 'Thus Far We Have Come', Adebayo Olukoshi explained how his childhood and background had prepared him for the job of CODESRIA's Executive Secretary. If he had successfully steered the ship of the Council for eight challenging years, it was largely thanks to the socio-political circumstances in which he had grown, studied, acted in student movements, lived and worked. Notable among these was the radically Pan-African Ahmadu Bello University where he did his undergraduate studies, its Pan-Africanist staff and the student movements in which he engaged repressive forces. Others included his activism during his student days in Britain and the persistent, endemic insecurity from the incessant and notorious coups in Nigeria that precluded free and independent intellectual work. Running a programme on the Social and Political Contexts of Structural Adjustment as a Senior Fellow of the Nordic Africa Institute in Sweden, and being the director of the Africa Programme of the South Centre in Geneva also turned out to be valuable experiences. These were instrumental to the development of his Pan-Africanist vision, which proved vital when he became the Executive Secretary of CODESRIA. Turning CODESRIA around has included raising the level of resilience and inclusiveness of the Council; that has witnessed greater respect for CODESRIA Charter's commitment to fair and balanced representation along gender, regional, linguistic, disciplinary and generational lines.

If CODESRIA has come thus far, it is also thanks to the hard work and sacrifices of hundreds of people, who, over the years, worked tirelessly to set it up, nurture, protect and promote it in many different ways. Olukoshi was the fifth executive secretary of CODESRIA, after Samir Amin, Abdallah Bujra, Thandika Mkandawire, and Achille Mbembe. He worked with executive committees led by Mahmood Mamdani, Zenebewerke Tadesse, and Teresa Cruz e Silva, and the extremely dedicated staff of the CODESRIA Secretariat. Many other great African scholars have worked hard towards making CODESRIA what it has become. They include Claude Ake, Archie Mafeje, Joseph Ki-Zerbo, CSL Chachage, Haroub Othman, Memel Fote, Guy Mhone, Aron Gana, Semou Pathe Gueye and Tajudeen AbdulRaheem, all of late, and many other giants of the African social research community. Among those who are still fighting the cause of science and of Africa are people like Jacques Kazadi, Amady Aly Dieng, Taladidia Thiombiano, Akilagpa Sawyerr, Bernard Founou, Maktarr Diouf, Souleymane Bachir Diagne, Peter Anyang' Nyongo', Amina Mama, Ayesha Imam, Wamba Dia Wamba, Tade Aina, Mamadou Diouf, Fatou Sow, Carlos Lopez, Momar Coumba Diop, Boubacarr Barry, Abdoulaye Bathily, Maréma Touré, Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, Kwesi Prah, Bernard Magubane, Iba Der Thiam and Eboe Hutchful. These are just indicative. The list is long.

It is also important to acknowledge the key roles that CODESRIA's many friends have played in the recent history of the Council. , Among those whose names must be mentioned are:

Berit Olsson (former director of Sida/SAREC), Lennart Wohlgemuth (former director of the Nordic Africa Institute, NAI), Bjorn Beckman (Stockholm University), Reydon Sandvold (NORAD), Akwasi Aidoo (TrustAfrica), Joyce Moock (formerly of Rockefeller Foundation), Jomo Kwame Sundaram (UN DESA & the University of Malaysia), Leo de Haan (African Studies Centre, Leiden), the late Geerti Hessling (African Studies Centre, Leiden), Carin Norberg (Director of NAI), Katri Pohjolainen Yap (Sida/SAREC), Tekalign Godana (Sida/SAREC), Carl Gustav Gutberg (Enst & Young, Stockholm), Nana Tanko (OSIWA), Hari Singh (Asian Political and International Studies Association), Atilio Boron (CLACSO), Richard Joseph (Northwestern University), and Emir Sader (CLACSO).

The years ahead will be marked by '*Continuity'*, and '*Change'*. CODESRIA's main mandate is to promote high quality social science research in Africa. The creative interpretation of this mandate led the Council to prioritise basic research, defend and promote academic freedom and, more generally, the independence of thought, provide publishing outlets, disseminate the results of research, and participate in the search for appropriate ways of addressing the major challenges facing Africa. In fulfilling that mandate, CODESRIA will continue to seek to work in harmony with, and complement the work of African universities, and the diverse range of knowledge producing institutions on the continent. Existing programmes will be improved and new ones developed in order to continue to address the challenges and concerns of the different generations of scholars.

The Council also needs to preserve and strengthen the traditions of openness, transparency, accountability, and integrity in administrative and scholarly work, and as well as heighten the degree of professionalism of staff.

The broad intellectual agenda of the Council for the next three years has already been laid out in the Strategic Plan for 2007-2011, under the umbrella theme: *"Re-thinking development and Reviving Development Thinking in Africa"*. The major challenge facing Africa, CODESRIA and the social sciences in Africa is the challenge of autonomy. African scholarship is competitive globally, and CODESRIA is proud to have contributed to the growing number of global scholars emanating from our community. However, there is always need to do more and better; we must create the conditions for more Samir Amins, and Mahmood Mamdanis, and Ali El-Kenzs, Amina Mamas, Ifi Amadiumes and Thandika Mkandawires to emerge and excel.

We need to reflect on the global crisis and the ongoing transformations at the global, regional and national levels. We need to reflect as well as on the economic and governance crises and widespread violence in Africa, and explore ways of re-inventing social bonds, as we seek to build an Africa of emancipated, fulfilled and respected citizens. This means researching issues such as the public sphere and its structural transformation, citizenship, regional integration and other critical issues of scholarly and policy relevance. We should encourage both the conduct of extensive field work and longitudinal studies, and theory building.

In this age of globalisation, African scholars ought to be studying other regions of the world, and the experiences of other countries and peoples outside of Africa, much more than we currently do. We know very little about Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the industrialized countries. We ought to know the Scandinavian experience better, given our partnership in the interest of knowledge production in and on Africa. Therefore we must develop research programmes, and encourage the opening of research centres specializing in the study of the other regions of the world; in the globalised world we live in, we shouldn't expect others to tell us what we need to know about the world around us in order to promote the interest and welfare of Africa. Part of the work we ought to be doing will also have to include prospective thinking.

We should seek to enhance not only the visibility of African research, but also the legitimacy of African scholarly voices: we often say that we were right in our all round critique of structural adjustment, decades before the World Bank came round to admit that SAP was a failure, and to underscore the importance of politics and governance, but nobody bothered to listen to what African scholars had to say about those issues, or read their works. Part of the explanation lies in the unequal global power relations that Africa is trapped in. The transformation of those relations has been a key concern for our community that the Council must continue to address.

The tasks that lie ahead also include the need to increase the membership of CODESRIA; there is room for both the institutional and the individual membership to expand far beyond what it currently is.

Last, but not least, as we celebrate the 35th anniversary of CODESRIA we should also remember that the times ahead are full of challenges. We are yet to understand the full implications of the recent global financial crisis for Africa, and for research funding in Africa. There are also many changes in the world of donors. The need to secure the funding base of the Council is therefore perhaps more pressing today than it has ever been. On the recommendation of the Executive Committee, the 12th General Assembly endorsed the Board of Trustees of the CODESRIA Endowment Fund, with Thandika Mkandawire as the Chair. Over the coming years, a vigorous fundraising campaign will be launched to consolidate the Fund.

These were some of the tasks ahead for the Council outlined by the new CODESRIA President, Professor Sam Moyo. Some of these tasks are from the General Assembly, such as the need for improving communication and other systems, consolidating and streamlining existing programmes, thinking about new initiatives and strategic plans, involving and broadening members' participation, interpreting goings-on in Africa and mapping out where the future. The President decried how African countries had not been living on the big issues. Other tasks of the Executive Committee would, according to him, involve ensuring sustainability through the Endowment Fund and continuity of CODESRIA activities, allocation of resources, mobilisation of researchers and guaranteeing an accountable CODESRIA financially, administratively and intellectually. He reaffirmed before the General Assembly that the incoming Executive Committee and the new Executive Secretary are both very energetic and highly committed to serve, promote and protect CODESRIA.

New Executive Committee

- **Professor Sam Moyo** (President)
  (African Institute of Agrarian Studies,
  Harare, Zimbabwe)
- **Professor Fatima Harrak** (Vice-President) -
  (Institut des Etudes Africaines, Rabat, Morocco)
- **Dr. Shahida El Baz**
  (Independent Consultant, Giza, Egypt)
- **Professor Kofi Anyidoho** -
  (University of Ghana Legon, Accra, Ghana)
- Professor Idrissa Kimba
  (University Abou Moumouni, Niamey, Niger)
- Dr. Gerard Tchouassi
  (University of Yaounde II , Yaoundé, Cameroun)
- **Professor Noel Obotela Rachidi**
  (Université de Kinshasa – Republic Democracy of Congo)
- **Dr Onalenna Selolwane**
  (University of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana)
- **Dr. Godwin Murunga**
  (Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya)
- **Professor FEMK Senkor**o
  (University of Dar es Salaam , Dar es Salaam, Tanzania)
- **Dr. Ebrima Sall,**
  Executive Secretary

Ebrima Sall
Executive Secretary

Francis B. Nyamnjoh
Head of Publications

Family photo of New Executive Committee

New President of CODESRIA

New Executive Secretary