

Fifty Golden Cheers to a Venerable African Institution

It is almost unbelievable, but it is true that the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) turned fifty in 2023! Considering the mass turnover of similar scientific organisations in Africa, as elsewhere in the world, it is a significant feat worth chronicling and celebrating that CODESRIA has not only survived but actually thrived over the years since it was founded in 1973 to qualify as an embedded and venerable institution in the higher education terrain and policy context of the continent. That the Council has been successful in weathering hard times, including the tough days that characterised its foundational years, and navigating good times, especially as external funders began to grow more interested in its work, to achieve steady growth, redress mid-life challenges, nurture its independence, advance critical scholarship and defend the academic freedom of scholars under various conditions is not, by any measure, a small achievement. For this reason, as we celebrate this milestone in the life of the Council, we must renew our debt of immeasurable and eternal gratitude to the founding generation of members, leaders and staff who established the solid foundation of engagement, sacrifice and service on which subsequent generations have strived to build.

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Looking back on the last fifty years, and with the singular honour and privilege of having led the CODESRIA Secretariat from 2001 to 2009, I can affirm with confidence that there are no other continental and sub-regional institutions that have matched the Council in the promotion of basic social research, support for inter/multi/transdisciplinary studies, encouragement of intergenerational conversations, advancement of gender studies, investments in next-generation scholars and documentation and dissemination of knowledge, among other domains of active programming and network-building that respond to the changing context of advanced scholarship across the continent. The agility that the Council has displayed even as it has adapted itself to changing times over the past half-century will, undoubtedly, see it through the next fifty years and beyond.

Gazing into the future, and with the ongoing shifts in the global order in mind, the next generation of CODESRIA members will face the dual challenge of keeping the flag of

scholarly excellence and integrity hoisted high whilst simultaneously exploring new avenues and strategies for consolidating institutional autonomy. I am particularly keen on the task of ensuring that the funding base of the Council is deliberately developed to significantly cut back on the proportion of external, extra-African support that, among some long-standing partners previously known for their understanding of the role of global solidarity, has become increasingly burdensome to the point of being regressive. CODESRIA members must wake up to the threat posed to the long-term future of their cherished organisation by a new regime of cooperation anchored on managerial authoritarianism or weaponised to serve narrow geopolitical objectives. It is a regime that does not see the *raison d'être* of associations, networks and agencies such as CODESRIA. It deserves to be exposed for what it is and resisted accordingly.

Happy Golden Jubilee to CODESRIA staff and members! I earnestly look forward to the celebration of the Council's Diamond Jubilee as a proud child of the organisation in its yesteryears, an emerging elder of the community today and a permanent militant for the cause of independent African scholarship that the Council so eminently embodies. May the Council flourish into its centennial and beyond!