

ABDALLA BUJRA: A Life of Unparalleled Service

It was late 2023 when, after several weeks of consultation among colleagues in Dakar, Nairobi, Addis Ababa and Johannesburg, a group of us decided to pay a visit to the second Executive Secretary of CODESRIA, Professor Abdalla Bujra, in his retirement home in Malindi, Kenya. It is difficult to say exactly what it was that brought about the meeting of minds across the continent, that a visit to him was not only long overdue but had become an urgent imperative. My guess, though, is that among us – mentees, younger colleagues, friends and admirers – there was a shared feeling that, several years after his retirement, there was a very good case for going to Malindi to spend a day with him and reminiscing about the times we had spent together under his guidance and leadership. I am glad the trip to Malindi took place, and I am grateful to have been part of the mission. As it would turn out, it was the last time we would see him.

At the time my generation of social scientists became active in CODESRIA activities, Abdalla Bujra had completed his mandate as right-hand associate of Samir Amin and second Executive Secretary of the Council. However, well before we got to meet him

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in person, his impact and legacy were very strongly imprinted on the programmes, publications and administration of the organisation. The responsibility from very early in the history of the Council of establishing its core institutional foundations fell on Bujra and the team of pioneering staff and volunteers he assembled. Listening to him tell the story of the early years of CODESRIA left no doubt about the admixture of pains, uncertainties, triumphs, pleasures and sacrifices that characterised those pioneering years. Out of that host of experiences emanated one of the cardinal principles that have underpinned CODESRIA from generation to generation, and one which Bujra reiterated to us at every opportunity: CODESRIA is a labour of love. And all through his life, even decades after he left the direct management of the Council, Bujra's constant and abiding love for the Council and its mission never flagged.

I first had the privilege of meeting Bujra in person in Addis Ababa in 1989 at a meeting he convened through the DPMF, the development management forum he had founded and which was embedded within the headquarters buildings of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). It marked the beginning of a long and much-cherished association. Amidst the intellectual conversations and exchanges he shared with us, no meeting with him ever ended without an invitation to his home for a sumptuous dinner.

Bujra, a scholar and an administrator, was also above all a kind gentleman with great humanitarian principles. His sense of humour, perhaps unknown to most, was very lively. But amidst the jokes he shared with friends and associates there were also key messages that he provided us as guides for our work. He will be sorely missed. We are comforted by the fact that he left a beautiful legacy that will serve successive generations of Africans for years to come. May he find well-earned eternal rest.

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