

# Being pan-African: A continental research agenda<sup>1</sup>

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It has been a rare pleasure and an inspiration to participate in this event, not just as a researcher on pan-Africanism, but as a committed pan-Africanist, and in my capacity as vice president of Africa's premier, pan-African social science research organisation, the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA). CODESRIA, which is also 40 this year, has been consciously pan-African in its philosophy, politics and practice from the very start. Its commitment to research which promotes the self-determination and development of Africa's peoples; its vast network of African scholars of many social science disciplines; its support for the academic freedom of African intellectuals and African universities; its instruments, such as the multinational working groups and comparative research networks; its promotion of African philosophies, knowledge systems, arts and cultural artifacts; its longstanding and growing relations with African scholars around the world; its relationship with pan-African political institutions all reflect CODESRIA's brand of pan-Africanism.

In agreeing to participate in the present endeavour, CODESRIA was in full agreement with the view expressed in the concept note for this event: that reflection on the roots, evolution, achievements and challenges produced and faced by pan-Africanism was long overdue. Such reflection falls squarely within CODESRIA's mandate, and could generate a new research agenda for CODESRIA and other research organisations in Africa and its diasporas. It pleases me immensely to say that the event did indeed allow reflection and the generation of many interesting insights. It has also offered questions and areas for enquiry which should form the basis of a future research agenda. All of us here are witnesses and contributors to this, and even those not here, whose knowledge and insights we have invoked, have made their

contribution. As Ebrima Sall noted at the beginning of the event, “we need to produce knowledge and develop knowledge systems which are up to the development challenges Africa faces in the next fifty years.” This means that we need to pay attention to the history and historiography of pan-Africanism, but also address current challenges and also think about the future and how we can realise the goals of pan-Africanism.

Our deliberations over the past two days have drawn attention to the multi-dimensional character of pan-Africanism and its multiplicity of concerns and interests. These lie in politics, ideas, institutions, culture, and in the social and economic realms. While there has justifiably been criticism of economic approaches to pan-Africanism, one lesson I would draw from our deliberations is that if the project of pan-Africanism wants to be relevant to the lived experiences and priorities of Africa’s people, it has to attend to all the foregoing dimensions.

Also important is the insight that the pan-Africanist project does not only concern political leaders, but involves intellectuals, civil society organisations, working people, artists, men and women, the youth, rural and urban dwellers, indeed all the peoples of Africa, wherever they may find themselves today.

What can the research community contribute to this long standing and liberatory project? As researchers, our role is to develop interdisciplinary frameworks and methodologies which will enable us to include all aspects of pan-Africanism in our research projects. Such methodologies should enable us to focus on the priorities of Africa’s people and to generate solutions which promote a united and prosperous Africa, and one that delivers meaningful development and lives to its peoples. It is also important that pan-African institutions understand the critical role of knowledge production in different sites and at different levels, and offer unequivocal support. As Pinkie Mekgwe notes in an interesting article on the humanities, gender and the pan-African ideal:

knowledge and skill are intricately linked to global power play. Knowledge and skill are at the core of societal development. History has amply shown how social change has been influenced by the accumulation of ideas, and their application and diffusion (n.d.: 4).

The knowledge base that will support the progressive agenda of pan-Africanism must be inclusive, flexible and offer multiple perspectives, and it must support the aspirations of the oppressed.

I would like to offer to you my personal take on the priority areas which we can consider in thinking about a future research agenda. A possible theme for our research could be “Pan-Africanism and the Priorities for the Development and Emancipation of Africa’s Peoples in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” I see four broad areas: political questions, socio-cultural questions, economic agendas, and Africa’s peoples and communities.

### **Political questions**

- Developing and disseminating pan-Africanist thought for the 21<sup>st</sup> century – history and current trends.
- What role for federalism and regional integration in the realisation of the pan-Africanist agenda?
- Political liberalisation: peoples participation and the pan-Africanist agenda
- Promoting inclusive and substantive citizenship in the pan-Africanist agenda
- Understanding the roots and manifestations of xenophobia
- Strengthening human rights within pan-African thought and practice
- Militarisation, militarism, foreign interventions in Africa and the pan-Africanist project

### **Socio-cultural questions**

- The arts and cultural artefacts and pan-Africanism
- Language policies and pan-Africanism
- Education and pan-Africanism
- The cultural basis of pan-Africanism

### **Economic questions**

- Globalisation, economic liberalisation and pan-Africanism
- Pan-Africanism and Africa’s survival in the global financial crisis
- Extractive industries, resource control, land grabbing and Africa’s survival
- Towards sustainable livelihoods, equitable production systems and labour relations in Africa and African diasporas

## The people and Pan-Africanism

- Gender and inter-generational relations and the realisation of the pan-Africanist project
- Social movements, including women's movements, and the pan-Africanist project
- The diaspora within pan-Africanism

These are just preliminary ideas, and time does not permit me to expand or justify my proposals. However, please allow me to flag one of these areas as especially important. This is in respect of gender relations in the realisation of the pan-Africanist project.

Gender biases against women and their marginalisation in the historiography, the intellectual outputs and the political practice of pan-Africanism is something that several speakers mentioned over the past two days. We have to move on from lamentations to substantively redress the gender-distortions and gaps in knowledge production. It is well known that women were active in the pan-African movement and in the anti-colonial struggle, that we made substantial contributions and faced many challenges working in male-dominated movements. We have been able to do this in spite of having to survive all the constraints of our male-dominated societies. We need to restore women – those on the continent of Africa as well as the better-known women of the African diaspora – to their rightful place in the pantheon of pan-African leaders. Even more important, we should ensure that our future research agenda promotes gender equity in the knowledge it produces and disseminates. If we fail to do so, all the action we take based on this future knowledge will only reinforce gender injustice, the most intractable of injustices of our times.

I thank you and wish us continued fruitful deliberations.

## Endnotes

1. This is the closing statement presented by Dzodzi Tsikata, Vice President of CODESRIA, and FA Contributor and Advisory Board Member, on behalf of the Council for the Development of Social research in Africa (CODESRIA) at an official side event to the African Union Special Summit, Addis Ababa, 18th May 2013.