



CODESRIA

CODESRIA ANNUAL SOCIAL SCIENCE CAMPUS 2006

THEME: *THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONS IN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT*

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) is pleased to announce the fifth session of its Annual Social Science Campus, and invites applications from African scholars for participation in the programme which, this year, is scheduled to hold at the end of November 2006, in Dakar, Senegal. The Campus is conceived as an *advanced research dialogue* that is both *multidisciplinary* and *intergenerational* in nature. It is organised around a specific theme and up to 15 scholars, drawn from different disciplines and reflecting the different generations of African social researchers, are elected to participate in the Campus. This mix of participants is designed to have the added value of promoting an intensive and critical dialogue among the disciplines, as well as among different generations of African scholars for the advancement of theory, methodology and practice. Each Campus is planned as an intensive interactive exercise to last a period of one week.

Participation in the Campus is based primarily on the submission of a draft research paper which contains ideas for fresh, innovative work or the substantive extension of work that is already in progress and linked to the theme of the Campus. The proceedings of the Campus are managed by a designated coordinator who also takes on the responsibility for elaborating the programme of presentations and debates among the participants. Furthermore, the coordinator, working with the CODESRIA Centre for Documentation (CODICE), will be responsible for identifying core literature for use by the participants in the Campus. Scholars whose proposals are selected would be required to participate in the Campus by presenting their own papers, responding to the papers of other participants, and undertaking a critical reading/re-reading of core texts as part of an intensive multidisciplinary and inter-generational dialogue. At the close of the Campus, participants will be encouraged to revise their presentations and submit these for consideration for publication in a new series known as *Annals of the CODESRIA Annual Social Science Campus*. Each publication in the series will be edited by the designated coordinator of the campus at which the papers were presented.

For the 2006 session of the Annual Social Science Campus, the theme that has been selected is: **The Role of Institutions in African Development**. In the period since the 1960s when African countries attained their independence, scholars have made direct or indirect references to the important role of institutions in development and suggested, in the context of the debates of the time, that the chief problem faced by the emergent countries of Africa in their quest to build democracy and development was the absence of "modern" institutions. This position was widely espoused but it was also equally robustly challenged on a variety of theoretical and empirical grounds. In part because of the widespread critique of the mainstream modernisation approaches, the accent on institutions in development as it emerged in the 1960s was to experience some decline during the 1980s. It was, however, given a new boost, that was also accompanied by a much more nuanced and sophisticated frame of analyses, following the renewed visibility which institutional economics enjoyed in the wake of the Nobel prize awarded to Douglas North. The works of Douglas North inspired a host of other studies, mostly set within the broader context of the development debate, that sought to assess the nature, role, and importance of institutions, understood in terms of rules, norms and values, in successful socio-economic transformation. Associated with this was the new lease of life enjoyed by competing notions of trust and social capital in the development process. The dominant perspective that emerged was that (formal) institutions matter for successful development and, in the light of Africa's persistent underdevelopment, the problem arising was the absence of appropriate (formal) institutions or their systematic perversion by the forces of neo-patrimonialism. There was, however, an influential, if less audible critique which drew on comparative historical research to argue that institu-

tional frameworks, useful as they may be, might not actually be as decisive as assumed and, in some cases, are outrightly agnostic to developmental outcomes. Others have been more radical in their challenge, point as they do to the ahistoricism that is rampant in the current discourse on institutions and the mystification of the institutional contexts and traditions of the West around which the narrative of much of New Institutional Economics is constructed. Furthermore, it has been argued that on-going institutional reforms in Africa, including particularly efforts at re-organising property rights, have become a shortcut to the widespread dispossession of the working poor and the erosion of democratic governance.

The African context of the debate on institutions has been marked by a relative absence of African voices and, among the Africanists who have considered the experiences presented by the continent, the temptation has been to resort to formulaic prescriptions that derive from and/or echo the one-size-fits-all approaches to market reform in the heyday of IMF/World Bank structural adjustment. Overall, the discussion has revived or generated a variety of essentialisms derived from a host of pathologies that are thought to underpin the supposed African malaise: The prevalence of economy of affection, moral economy, corruption, neo-patrimonialism, presidentialism, etc.. In the worst cases, it is suggested that Africa either has no history of (formal) institutions or is afflicted with a deficit of formal institutions which are overwhelmed by informal institutions that have proved to be as unyielding to change as they are obstructive of development. In all cases, this analytic frame suggests policy interventions aimed at inventing formal institutions. Across Africa, irrespective of local context and history, new and uniform institutional processes and structures are being planted from above. The 2006 Session of the Annual Social Science Campus is designed to serve as a first step in the effort to begin to remedy the silences, as seen from Africa, in the debate on institutions, and move from there to generate new perspectives that are adapted to the historical circumstances and experiences of the countries of the continent. Participants in the Campus will be invited to develop theoretically-grounded reflections on the issue of institutions in African development with the accent placed on critical thinking that can transcend the limitations of existing discourses and, in so doing, help advance the frontiers of the on-going debate. As may be necessary, they will be encouraged to employ assessments of new institutions introduced as part of the on-going donor reform agenda to inform their analyses.

Scholars who are already reflecting on the problematic of the institutions in African development and who have innovative perspectives to share with other researchers and the wider academy are invited to submit their applications to reach the CODESRIA Secretariat not later than **31 October, 2006**. In addition to a substantive proposal of not more than 10 pages reflecting on-going work on this theme or proposed new concerns that are to be pursued, interested participants should also send their current curriculum vitae. Applications should be sent to:

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