

**African Studies Association of Africa (ASAA): message of support to
CODESRIA at 40 years**

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Good morning colleagues.

Let me join the chorus started yesterday and unreservedly express my gratitude to Ebrima and his colleagues for this invitation. I truly feel honoured to be associated with CODESRIA.

I'm also humbled by being given this opportunity to pass a message of support on behalf of our recently established Association, the African Studies Association of Africa (ASAA), which, I suspect, is not known by many in this room.

ASAA was launched on the 25th of October last year, 2013 at the International Conference on African Studies that was hosted by the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana. The move was preceded by extensive discussions, initially amongst directors of the few centres and institutes of African Studies that are based on the continent. The discussions led to a colloquium that we, at the Centre for African Studies at UCT hosted at the beginning of October in 2012. The colloquium was attended by representatives from most of the existing centres and institutions of African Studies based on the continent, as well as the South African based Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and African based scholars with an interest in the topic.

An invitation had been sent to CODESRIA, but visa problems prevented Ebrima from attending the colloquium. He ended up sending a message of support.

There was broad consensus amongst those attending the colloquium for the need for an institutional forum based on the Continent. While not opposed to the existence of African Studies Associations outside our Continent, we felt that the need for the establishment of our own Association was long overdue. ASSA is thus the product of these discussions.

The Mission of the Association, as laid out in its Bye Laws, is: To promote Africa's own specific contributions to the advancement of knowledge about the peoples and cultures of Africa and the Diaspora.

We realised from the outset that CODESRIA should be centrally involved in the discussions leading to the establishment of ASSA. There was always the danger that our initiative could be seen as competing with CODESRIA and we wanted to dispel this misconception. We see CODESRIA as the torch bearer and there is no doubt in our mind that there is a lot that we can draw from its experiences.

But we also are of the view that we are bringing in new energy and insights to the table. Further, whereas CODESRIA focuses primarily on the Social Sciences, the scope of our Association is broader and involves other disciplines, including the health sciences and engineering. Engaging colleagues in these disciplines can only enrich our understanding of our continent and ourselves.

A question that is often raised is why establish Centres and Institutes of African Studies when the goal should be the insertion of an African perspective in every research that is conducted and every course taught? This is a good question, but it begs another question about who is going to bell the cat?

My well considered view is that this is a task that CODESRIA and ASAA should take a leading role in addressing. There is a need for clarity as what it means to have "an African perspective". In this endeavour, we can draw inspiration from Archie Mafeje and his view that "the best antidote to Eurocentrism is for African researchers (and scholars) to develop their own

independent scientific perspectives, without denying the possibility of learning from others which is different from imitating them slavishly” (1994:17).

There is ample scope for collaboration between CODESRIA and ASAA on topics such as:

Universities in Africa and the kinds of problems they encounter and how these could be addressed. We talked a lot about publications yesterday, but we should link these discussions with issues around the decolonisation of the curriculum, post-graduate teaching, particularly the production of PhDs and assisting them with publishing their theses through various programmes, including post-docs fellowships.

Long live CODESRIA, long live!