

## CODESRIA 2011 Child and Youth Institute

Theme: *Children's Agency and Development in African Societies*

Date: 5 – 23 September, 2011

Venue: Dakar, Senegal

The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) is pleased to announce its 2011 Child and Youth Institute that will be held for three (3) weeks, from 5th to 23rd September, 2011. The institute is one of the components of the Child and Youth Studies Programme and is aimed at strengthening the analytic capacities of young African researchers on issues affecting children and youth in Africa and elsewhere in the world. The institute is designed as an annual interdisciplinary forum in which participants can reflect together on a specific aspect of the conditions of children and youth, especially in Africa.

### Objectives

The main objectives of the Child and Youth Institute are to:

1. encourage the sharing of experiences among researchers, civil society activists and policy makers from different disciplines, methodological and conceptual orientations and geographical/linguistic areas;
2. Promote and enhance a culture of democratic values that allows to effectively identify issues facing youth and children on the African continent; and
3. foster the participation of scholars and researchers in discussions and debates on the processes of child and youth development in Africa.

### Organization

The activities of all CODESRIA Institutes centre on presentations made by African researchers, resource persons from the continent and the Diaspora and participants whose applications for admission as laureates have been successful. The sessions are led by a scientific director who, with the support of resource persons, ensures that the laureates are exposed to a wide range of research and policy issues. Each laureate is required to prepare a research paper to be presented during the session. The revised versions of such papers will undergo a peer review to ensure that they meet the required standard for publication by CODESRIA. The CODESRIA Documentation and Information Centre (CODICE) will provide participants with a comprehensive bibliography on the theme of the institute. Access to a number of documentation centres in and around Dakar will also be facilitated. The CODESRIA Child and Youth Institute will be held in French and English through simultaneous translation.

### Theme for 2011

The theme for the 2011 edition of the Child and Youth Institute is **Children's Agency and Development in African Societies**. The study of children has, traditionally, drawn heavily upon models of childhood much influenced by the twin themes of socialization and development. Sociologists and anthropologists, for instance, hold the view that children required socialization, primarily by families and kin but later by schools and community organizations, through which they would acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for full adult life. This complements the core premises of developmental psychology, the primary discipline within which childhood has been studied, which sees childhood as a series of stages through which children progressively accumulated the psychological and emotional skills

necessary for well-adjusted adults. In recent times, however, both paradigms have come in for sustained critical discussion. The 'new social studies of childhood' has, in particular, placed considerable emphasis upon children as 'beings' rather than 'becomings'; and that children's lives need to be studied in the here and now, rather than in terms of what they may or may not become in the future.

One important consequence of this has been a growing concern with the agency of children. The traditional African perception of childhood has been one in which children are held as passive bearers of the imperatives of psychological development or the requirements of participation in civil society as well as the accumulation of those cultural and social norms that govern social life. This perception and practice is supported by the ethos of tightly-knit traditional societies where children's inherent capacities regarding thought processes and initiatives are deeply subsumed in the demands and aspirations of adults. But this has been changing considerably as a result of the global social and economic transformations in a world increasingly shaped by globalization.

Indeed, the contemporary history of Africa provides an illustration of the participation of children and youth in the struggles for liberation from the yoke of colonialism, apartheid or dictatorship. Modernization, arising from internal social dynamics and exogenous pressures, has affected traditional beliefs and practices. However, this development has created palpable tensions between 'traditionalists' and 'modernizers', governments and NGOs (often at the forefront of social change) adults and children, etc. For instance, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) formally provides considerable scope to childhood and positions children to be involved in the determination of vital aspects of their lives. In spite of the subservient position of children in society, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child which is supposed to be more consistent with our African culture, concedes social change and the resultant capacity of children to be self-determining in many regards.

In reality, however, many of the grounds ceded to children in both the CRC and African Charter are still in contention. The ubiquitous worldwide web has expanded the mental reach and virtual boundaries of African children. All these have expanded children's capacity to be more assertive and proactive in homes and communities as well as invigorated their survival and self-preservation instincts. The consequent emphasis therefore is on the competencies, skills and creativity that children possess, and how they engage with and manipulate the worlds around them.

Yet, are the growing competencies of African children solely attributable to local and global efforts to expand the frontiers of individual power? Or is it the unwitting outcome of the pervasive poverty that has thrust many children in that role of having to make decisions and choices for themselves, even if they do not possess sufficient capacity to do so? After all, the social and economic reality of many African societies is one of extreme poverty and deprivation that drive everybody to be creative and to evolve additional capacities for survival.

The Institute will therefore provide participants with the opportunity to discuss theoretical and empirical studies on children's agency in relation to their engagement in the educational process, access to and negotiation of work, development of survival strategies in extreme conditions of poverty and deprivation, as well as the moral and economic dimensions informing children's engagement in African conflicts. Greater attention will be given to

children's perspectives in this regard, while an interdisciplinary approach will be adopted to promote divergent theoretical backgrounds, and the analysis of sub-themes such as Children's Engagement in African Conflicts; Children's Survival Strategies and Resilience; Children's Engagement in Paid Labor and Negotiation of the Work Environment; and Children's Engagement with the Educational Systems.

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