

26 May 2009

ABSTRACT

Looking back while moving forward

Lennart Wohlgemuth

Many institutions and now also lately CODESRIA have embarked on initiatives aimed at achieving the triple objective of promoting the study of the history of Africa, mobilising support for the discipline of history in African higher education, and networking African historians both for these purposes and also as a worthy cause in its own right. Packaged under the label 'SOS African History', the initiative is motivated by the strongly held view of the CODESRIA membership that the current conjuncture in the development of Africa marks a moment when the continent is, more than ever before, in need of history and historians. Given the fact that across Africa, engagement with the history of the continent, the financing of historical research, and the teaching of History are severely limited, the CODESRIA SOS African History initiative is designed to galvanise local and continental responses that could add up to stem and reverse the tide of decline that has been underway for at least two decades.

The liberation project implemented by the Nordic Africa Institute in the last decade is a case in point.

A thorough reading of these and other historical works confirms how important learning about progress and failures in the past is in order to move forward. There is so much valuable information to be found in scrutinizing what has been said and done in the past. Most issues, which seem to be new and so important today, have already been discussed in detail and decided upon many years back.

Based on the importance I allocate this question of looking back in moving forward I will develop a think piece elaborating on what practical consequences this will have on the documentation of African recent history in general and on the work of the Nordic African Institute in particular.