

# RESEARCHING AFRICA IN DENMARK: REALITIES AND POTENTIALITIES

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Overall focus: 'the realities and potentialities of Africa-related research and research cooperation within Denmark'.

## INTRODUCTION: THE CHANGING CONTEXT

**Historically**, Danish-based research on and in Africa - covering a wide range of fields and themes - has been generally well supported from within the different national research funding agencies, both the main academic research councils and the Danish international development sector, as well as private foundations. At the same time, in recent years, the Building Stronger Universities initiative has enhanced support to collaborative research frameworks with African universities and researchers.

Consequently, Africa-related research (and related teaching), and various knowledge communities, have flourished, across a **broad spectrum of institutional contexts**. This includes:

- Different university departments across the country - with some key hubs such as: within Copenhagen University, departments of Anthropology, Geography, Public Health, Economics, Food and Resource Economics, and the Centre of African Studies; at Roskilde University, especially the Department of Society and Globalisation; the Copenhagen Business School; Anthropology at Århus; the Department of Culture and Global Studies at Aalborg University; the Royal Danish Defence College; and so on.
- Various research institutes: the Danish Institute for International Development (DIIS), the Danish Institute Against Torture, DIGNITY, the Danish Institute of Human Right, etc.

**Recent government changes** in Denmark at the last elections have introduced dramatic policy changes and consequent cuts in funding within the education sector overall, and simultaneously in relation to Denmark's international development sector. This is already altering the context for Africa-related research funding from important traditional sources. One example is the complete closure of the budget, from this current year onwards, of the fund for Danish Development Research, FFU. At the same time, there is

## 2: OPTIMISING TRANSLATABILITY

My second point relates to:

*Identifying and optimising the translatability of Danish-based research on/in/from Africa into key spheres of interest - and investment - in the wider public domain.*

Undoubtedly some researchers and research institutions in the Danish environment are more explicitly and consciously linked to the public domain (in its widest sense). Here, I would include such arenas as:

- Policy
- Business
- Activism
- The Arts

Nonetheless, I have a sense that this is still largely under-explored, and that there is much more room, and need, for active translation of our research in ways that makes it more visible and meaningful in these domains.

## 3: VALUE-ADDED OF CONNECTIVITY

Thirdly, linked to the previous point but going beyond it, I would like to underscore the need for:

*Enhancing the collective visibility of the researchers, projects, and institutions engaged of Africa-related research in Denmark.*

As already noted, there is much interesting and important work that has been done and is being done, and although much of the work is interdisciplinary within its own terms, in a sense these remain as fairly separate poles - perhaps even polarised - fields of knowledge.

I would argue for exploring more actively - as a research community - the value-added of increasing the visibility of and connectivity between our respective areas of research. Without knowing in advance what this might result in, I am certain it would be beneficial in many ways to open up the different boxes within which we have so far defined our respective fields.

## 4: BUILDING ON THE ORGANIC BASIS FOR COOPERATION

repeatedly talk of the importance of 'Africa', as a new frontier of growth, perhaps even of knowledge, among other things. This combination of trends demands reflective reorientation away from more traditional sources of research funding, and creative rethinking in terms of possible new forms of research collaboration.

In the short time available, I would like to address four main points.

#### FOUR MAIN POINTS

1. STRENGTH IN DIVERSITY
2. OPTIMISING TRANSLATABILITY
3. THE VALUE-ADDED OF CONNECTIVITY
4. THE ORGANIC BASIS FOR COOPERATION

#### 1: STRENGTH IN DIVERSITY

My first point concerns:

*Recognising the enormous breadth and diversity of research on, in and from Africa that constitutes the Danish research environment.*

While not yet being able to provide a comprehensive overview of the full range of Africa-related research within Denmark, it is possible to make the general claim that this is very diverse and far-reaching. I've already mentioned some of the relevant institutions in which research is taking place. The work being undertaken ranges from detailed ethnographic studies to large quantitative surveys in enormously varied fields of politics, culture, religion, business and economics, science, security, and so on.

Together this constitutes a rich knowledge resource not only for the Danish education environment, for Danish foreign policy, for industry and for Danish society in general but also internationally.

Paying attention to this rich resource and making its dimensions and potentialities more visible is important in itself, and in order to ensure ongoing support, which leads to my second point.

Fourthly, I would like to argue for:

*Ensuring an 'organic' basis for the networking, broad cooperation and specific collaborations amongst both national and Nordic researchers.*

This panel has a focus on Nordic research cooperation with particular reference to research on, in and from Africa. I have so far focused here on the national context of Denmark, but this is a particular spatial dimension that does not need to be bounded in any narrow sense. Clearly there are important and necessary links to be made, to build on further, within and across the wider Nordic context, as much as in relation to European, African and global research communities engaged with Africa-related research.

The main point I am wanting to make here, in conclusion, is that the **work of connectivity needs to be organically based:** meaning, grounded in a clear and realistic sense of the actual strengths, needs, potentialities and potential contributions of the rich and diverse range of researchers and research institutions that are located within different institutional and geographical spaces. But for us to optimise our connectivities, we need to do the work of making ourselves and our work more visible to one another.

This is clearly occurring already in many ways, but there are many more creative possibilities for us yet to explore and build on both within our national contexts and across the Nordic landscape.