



LETTER FROM THE SEPHIS CHAIR

MOVING SOUTH

Claudio Pinheiro *

Sephis Programme was established in 1994 as an initiative of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the mandate of encouraging researchers located in the South to expand their scholarly horizons and cultivate links with their colleagues in other parts of the South. Its main objective has always been to support dialogue and collaboration between researchers and institutions, to encourage comparative research, and to strengthen research capacity in the South. Over almost 20 years, Sephis has developed several initiatives that made this mandate achievable — a Ph.D. and postdoctoral grant program; a small grants program (to preserve alternative historical sources, preferably linked to social movements); workshops (for Ph.D. students, mid-career and senior scholars); policy dialogue seminars between academics, activists, and policy makers; lecture tours and faculty exchanges; publications and translations; and an electronic journal. The Programme has also established several collaborative programs with different institutions in the North and South.

Throughout these two decades, the Sephis Programme has evolved into a brand name for South-South intellectual cooperation and policy dialogue between academics, NGOs, governments, and social movements. The most sustainable emphasis of Sephis Programme has been on intellectual capacity-building initiatives, helping to create and maintain an active network of scholars and policy makers with more than five thousand interlocutors around the globe. Several important scholars and institutions point out that Sephis is considered today as one of the most important programs for promoting South-South academic cooperation in the world.

The Sephis Programme has been most successful in addressing cooperation between prominent Southern countries concerning knowledge production outside the South-North framework. But there is still much to be done. There is a huge change in world geopolitics, which also affected the geography of this North-South division and the concept of South. To face this changing situation, Sephis also needs to be reshaped.



If the world has changed into a more multipolar orientation, the idea of academic cooperation should correspondingly be revisited. The debate of international cooperation on knowledge production should be addressed as an essential aspect of the sustainable development agenda in the contemporary world. Talking about the Global South claims for a decentered international initiative, naturally inviting gatekeeping institutions that can think and work across borders. However, especially in the South, this agenda depends heavily on merging efforts with structures of nation-state that work on financing and organising this initiative at local and regional levels. In countries of the South, intellectuals cannot help but have a voice in nation-state politics concerning knowledge production, funding agendas and the demands and problems of under-representation of diversity that affect and structure the South globally.

In those spaces, Sephis has a very important role to play. The Programme needs to foresee the promotion of South-North-South cooperation for development in knowledge production in order to continue to be a synonym to 'Global South' in academics. At this challenging moment, Sephis aims at playing a role in helping to considering South-North-South dialogues to be a key strategy to promote intellectual development in a renewed global geopolitical scenario redefine the structure of international cooperation in knowledge production.

For Sephis, the current geopolitical scenario is, still, more challenging, because Sephis itself moved South. Since 1994, Sephis Programme existed in Holland, in its late period in Amsterdam, settled at IISG. In late December 2012, the Steering Committee decided to move Sephis Programme to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Now, hosted at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Sephis has a new and enthusiastic team. Transferring to Brazil did not only mean moving an address for correspondence, but actually the big challenge of finding new paths and new partnerships to continue with the tradition of Sephis Programme.

I am proud to introduce Global South, the Sephis e-magazine, under its new format, and I would personally like to invite scholars, policy makers, students, journalist and artists to contact the new editorial staff to collaborate with the journal in its new era

* Claudio Pinheiro is Chairman of the Sephis Programme since December 2012. For the last ten years, he has been investing in South-South connections in academics and politics, especially around India and Brazil. His research interests include colonial and post-colonialism, sociology of knowledge, history of knowledge circulation, politics of language and epistemology.