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A New Model for a Global Knowledge Community

Philippe Peycam

Four months have passed since the question of the existence of the institute has been settled. With a renewed sense of purpose, IIAS will continue its journey. The past year was challenging, but it offered an opportunity to rediscover the core priorities, and strengths, of the institute, and to reconceptualize our mission as a facilitator of connections between diverse regions, institutions, stakeholders, and sectors of knowledge.

The difficult patch found another conclusion with the unprecedented success of the third edition of the Africa-Asia Conference-Festival, or ConFest, held in Dakar, Senegal (pp. 50-51). The build-up to the event proved extremely trying on account of numerous logistical difficulties against a background of uncertainty over the fate of our own organization. In the end, however, the achievement was highly significant and widely recognized. With the Dakar ConFest, occurring at a highly geopolitically charged time, IIAS gained international visibility and legitimacy beyond traditional academic circles. The consecration was revealed through a unique collection of events and performances, and also through the expressed support of major institutions and organizations: the EU Parliament and the EU's

representative in Dakar; the Dutch Embassy and its counterparts from Japan, Indonesia, India, South Korea and elsewhere in Asia, Africa, and Europe; the Japan Foundation, the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, amongst other prestigious institutions; and numerous African and international media outlets. After Dakar, IIAS was invited to Brussels to report on the event.

In the last year or so, since the other major success of the ICAS ConFest in Surabaya, Indonesia, what has emerged is a general recognition that the institute's multifaceted engagement with 'Asia in the World', in particular through its 'South-South-North' orientation, is bound to play an increasingly meaningful role to help shape a more conscious intra- and inter-regional, multi-stakeholder, multilateral knowledge community. This is being achieved through a more coherent, synchronized combination of initiatives. This includes a revamped Fellowship Programme designed to be more collaborative and itinerant (p. 53), large-scale 'ConFests' as event-platforms that bring together multiple networks and social sectors, the signature in-situ workshop format like the most recent event held earlier this month in Nairobi under the River Cities Network (p. 49), and a more interactive suite of communication and dissemination interfaces.

Through existing and emergent networks, IIAS continues to facilitate the development of new institutions or geographic knowledge hubs around the world. In so doing, we aim to constitute a multilateral knowledge community that represents an antidote to the increasingly fragmented and even hostile geopolitical configuration. This is what attracts the interest of a growing number of institutions, including knowledge policy agencies.

IIAS is thus emerging from a turbulent period to embrace a new phase of accelerated transformation. This will include galvanizing our current initiatives and deepening our role as an influential incubator of knowledge, all of which yields closer inter-cultural and regional understandings and collaborations, with Asia-in-the-world as its entry point.

We look forward to continuing to serve these objectives with you, thanks to your support.

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Fig. 1: "Drawing Connections" workshop at the IFAN Museum of African Arts during the Africa-Asia Conference-Festival in Dakar, Senegal. (Photo courtesy of Pierre Deperouges, 2025)

