

Multilingualism, Governance and Institutionalization in Sub-Saharan Africa as Key to Sustainability?

Contrastive case studies from southern Mali and western Cameroon

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Background

“Auch Entwicklungshilfe, deutsche wie europäische, investiert nun gern in Dezentralisierung: Die örtliche Bevölkerung stärken [...], das verspricht mehr Nachhaltigkeit als Brunnenbauen” (Wiedemann 2007)



Best tax payers, Fishermen village of Sama, Municipality of Dioro in Segou (Mali). Photo: Charlotte Wiedemann 2007.

Decentralisation is the result of a paradigm change occurred in Africa in the wave of democratisation sweeping across the continent during the early nineties. It implies inclusion, which means interactions of socio-political actors in the fields of communication. Using multilingual settings, communicating in Malian and Cameroonian contexts relies on the interplay of the official languages *French* in both countries and *English* in western Cameroon with local languages in the spheres of *policy, politics and polity*.

Since 1992, over 600 newly decentralised rural communities such as Dioro (Segou) have been created in Mali whose representatives are democratically elected. In Dioro, local politicians and citizens, in interaction with the different stakeholders, make commitments for more direct participation in local political issues. In this context, the multilingual setting French-Bambara is a key factor in formal and informal situations of communication involving the different stakeholders, such as the representatives of the government, civil society and institutions of international cooperation like NGOs.

Research Objectives

Answers to the following questions are expected to result from the research:

- What are the relations between new institutions, e.g. decentralised rural communities, and governments of Mali and Cameroon, and the local populations?
- What are mechanisms of communication, procedures etc. between involved actors, partners and institutions?
- How do multilingual settings interrelate with the communicative *modus operandi* in this process?
- How relevant are issues of territory, climate change and transitional justice in this process?



The research focuses on the sociological and sociolinguistic analysis of the contribution of international stakeholders and groups of social actors, local partners, and the governmental agencies in the process of decentralisation. It proposes to reframe the definitions of Goal 17 as proposed by the Swiss sub-agenda of the SDGs (Breu et al. 2017) by examining the communication gap mirroring the asymmetric relationships

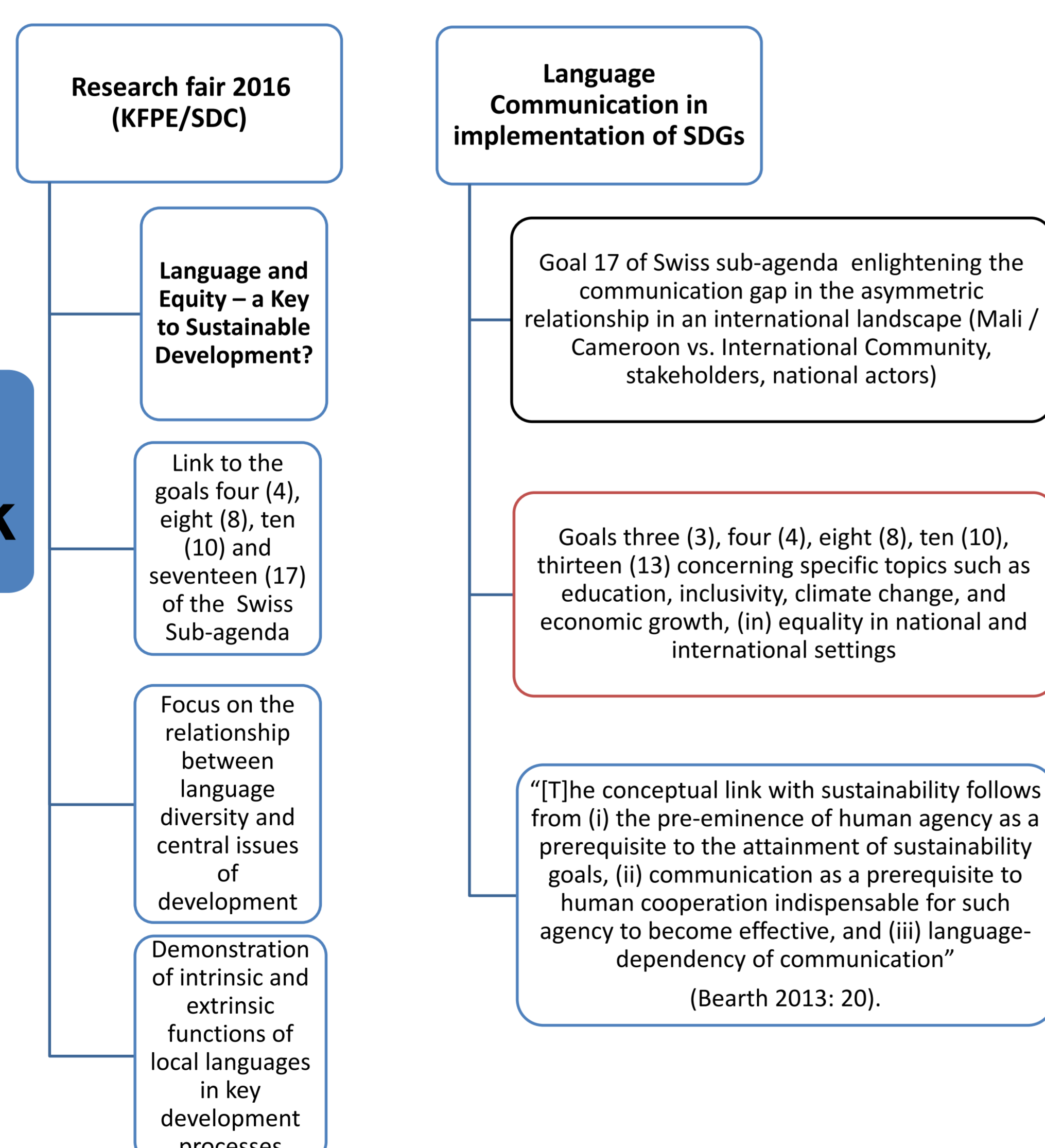
It links this inquiry to the goals three (3), four (4), eight (8), ten (10), thirteen (13) and applies them to specific topics such as education, inclusivity, climate change, and economic growth.

(iii) in the local interplay between representatives of these governments and rural communities, as well as international partners and local institutions in development projects.

(i) in international relations from the African perspective (Mali / Cameroon vs. International Community),

(ii) in national contexts committed to a policy of decentralisation (Governments of Mali and Cameroon vs. rural communities), and,

Research Framework



Research Context

In Mali, the Revolution of March 1991 symbolized a twofold political turnabout: the end of the military regime of Général Moussa Traoré and the birth of a pluralistic political system. In this double move, all social classes expressed expectations amounting to devise a new social contract. Decentralisation seen as the result of a threefold expression of expectations: a strong momentum seeking an equilibrium in the asymmetric relationship between state and civil society, the rural populations expressed the need for reduction of their tax burden, decentralisation was used by the Malian government as a political instrument to oppose the demands of autonomy from the Touareg Rebellion (1990-1996) in the Northern part of the country (Coulibaly / Lima 2013). Seen as the hallmark of democratisation in this dynamic context, decentralisation should fulfil a key function in the overall process of democratisation and reconciliation, in keeping a balance within the new power structure in the country: consolidating and reinforcing an asymmetric *bottom-up* process. Subsequently reversing the asymmetric top-down processes in governmental institutions and capacity-building, while providing suitable answers to the daily needs of the local populations, foster economic development in the rural areas as well as level the capacity gaps in the administration.