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 sociopolitical 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 fair 2016

(KFPE/SDC)

Language and

Equity – a Key

to Sustainable

Development?

Link to the

goals four (4),

eight (8), ten

(10) and

seventeen (17)

of the Swiss

Sub-agenda

Focus on the

relationship

between

language

diversity and

central issues

development

Demonstration

of intrinsic and

extrinsic

functions of

local languages in key

development

processes

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?

3 GOOD HEALTH
4 QUALITY
4 EDUCATION
5 EQUALITY

1 OUT TO BE THE STATE OF THE STATE

- 8 DECENT WORK AND 9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION 10 REDUCED 11 SUSTAINABLE AND COMMUN.
- 14 LIFE 15 ON LAND 16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

(Breu et al. 2017) by examining the communication gap mirroring the asymmetric relationships

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

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

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

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.

Research Framework



Goal 17 of Swiss sub-agenda enlightening the communication gap in the asymmetric relationship in an international landscape (Mali / Cameroon vs. International Community, stakeholders, national actors)

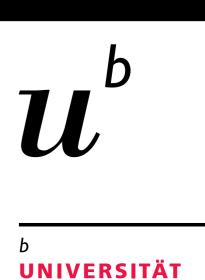
Goals three (3), four (4), eight (8), ten (10), thirteen (13) concerning specific topics such as education, inclusivity, climate change, and economic growth, (in) equality in national and international settings

"[T]he conceptual link with sustainability follows from (i) the pre-eminence of human agency as a prerequisite to the attainment of sustainability goals, (ii) communication as a prerequisite to human cooperation indispensable for such agency to become effective, and (iii) language-dependency of communication"

(Bearth 2013: 20).

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.



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