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)

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 poverty.

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 international organisations like NGOs.

Research Objectives

The research focuses on the sociological and sociolinguistic analyses 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 concerning the asymmetric relationships.

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 expressing 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 relationship between state and civil society, the rural populations, national stakeholders and international cooperation agencies in the process of decentralisation.

Link to the goals four (4), eight (8), ten (10), and seventeen (17) of the Swiss Sub-agenda

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

Goal three (3), four (4), eight (8), ten (10), seventeen (17) concerning specific topics such as education, inclusivity, climate change, and economic growth.

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Research Context

The 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.

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