



Third International Workshop

Germany's West Africa Policy: Taking (West) Africa seriously!

October 17th, 2020, Katholisches Militärbischofsamt, Berlin

Workshop Report 2020

Program

09:30-10:00 *Opening remarks*

Prof. Dr. Heinz-Gerhard Justenhoven, *Institute for Theology and Peace*, Hamburg

Prof. Dr. Michael Staack, *Helmut-Schmidt-University*, Hamburg

10:00-12:30 *Session I:*

Upgrading West African ownership, discussing and solving conflicting priorities

Input: Philipp Goldberg, *Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation, Peace and Security Centre of Competence Sub-Saharan Africa*, Dakar

Input: Prof. Dr. Djénéba Traoré, *West Africa Institute*, Praia

Chair: Prof. Dr. Michael Staack, *Helmut Schmidt University*, Hamburg

12:30-14:00 *Lunch break*

14:00-17:00 *Session II:*

Alternative or traditional forms of governance to Western statebuilding

Input: Prof. Dr. Heinz-Gerhard Justenhoven, *Institute for Theology and Peace*, Hamburg

Commentary I: Ronald Meyer, *Federal Ministry of Development Cooperation*, Bonn

Commentary II: Benjamin Akoutou, *Don Bosco Mission*, Bonn

Chair: Elizabeth Kaneza, *Potsdam University*, Potsdam

Concluding remarks

Participants list*

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Goldberg, Philipp, *Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation, Peace and Security Centre of Competence Sub-Saharan Africa*, Dakar
Justenhoven, Heinz-Gerhard Prof. Dr., *Institute for Theology and Peace*, Hamburg
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Klatte, Maria, *Misereor*, Aachen
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Traoré, Djénéba Prof. Dr., *West Africa Institute*, Praia

**Names are listed in alphabetical order.*

Abstract

A third international workshop on “Germany’s West Africa policy: Taking (West) Africa seriously!”, was held on October 17th 2020 in Berlin, Germany. In contrast to the first workshop in Berlin (2018), which particularly dealt with the European and German perspectives on the security situation in West Africa and the second workshop in Dakar, Senegal (February/March 2020), which placed special emphasis on West African perspectives and challenges with regard to security, human, and economic conflicts, this one day workshop brought both results together and paid special attention to West African ownership and alternative or traditional forms of governance. Coordination of the workshop were again carried out by the *Helmut Schmidt University* (HSU) (Prof. Dr. Michael Staack) and the *Institute for Theology and Peace* (ITHF) (Prof. Dr. Heinz-Gerhard Justenhoven), both situated in Hamburg, Germany. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the international workshop took place under difficult conditions and some experts participated online in the hybrid event.

Session I: Upgrading West African ownership, discussing and solving conflicting priorities

The first workshop session was chaired by Prof. Dr. Michael Staack (*Helmut Schmidt University, HSU*) and strongly influenced by what has been referred to in international media as the fourth coup in Mali since it gained independence from France in 1960. President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita's forced resignation on August 18th, 2020 came after months of a political crisis that stemmed from a disputed parliamentary election, the country's long-running jihadist conflict, economic woes and perceived government corruption. In June, thousands of anti-government protesters took the streets of the capital demanding Keita's step down. He remained largely defiant, but in early July attempted to appease the opposition. However, the movement's leaders insisted that he resign, and parliament be dissolved, as well as urged civil disobedience. After the seizure of power, Mali's new (military) political leaders have agreed to establish an 18-month transition government and pledged to restore stability.

In the first speech of the first session, Philipp Goldberg (*Director, Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation / Peace and Security Centre of Competence Sub-Saharan Africa FES/PSCC, Dakar/Senegal*) made clear that the current situation in Mali must be placed in the bigger picture of the wider Sahel region. Despite a strong international (military) presence in the region, the security situation in several countries has deteriorated especially due to extremist's killings in recent years. Together with other socio-economic and political challenges such as limited access to basic services, weak economic prospects, and the COVID-19 pandemic devastating impact, the military's seizure of power came as no surprise to him. However, in Goldberg's opinion, aforementioned challenges will not be solved by changing political elites alone. Within the new 25-strong interim government, four key cabinet positions are held by military colonels – defense, security, territorial administration and national reconciliation – and, as Prof. Dr. Djénéba Traoré added, only four women are appointed to the government. Nevertheless, it would be too early to say what this government composition means for the future of the country and the consideration of community and gender interests. For international actors, most recent events should be seen as a wake-up call to rethink foreign engagement in Mali and the broader region, he strongly underlined. External engagement is still highly recommended but needs to be refocused in his opinion. Therefore, it would be important to refrain from the securitization of the Sahel. Rather peacebuilding needed stronger cooperation with civil society and local communities, he concluded.

Prof. Dr. Djénéba Traoré (*Director General, West Africa Institute WAI, Praia/Cabo Verde* – since March 2020 stuck in Bamako/Mali), stated that the German Media widely covered the most recent uprising in Mali, however reported very little about its background and causes. According to her, one reason for the seizure of power is the dramatic escalation of the security situation in many parts of the country. As just one example, Prof. Traoré stressed that only about 25 percent of Mali's territory is currently controlled by the government. Furthermore, she agreed with Mr. Goldberg that the political replacement of President Keita was foreseeable. In her opinion, a number of questions about the future of Mali should now be openly discussed, including how to deal with crimes committed during the 2012/2013 rebellion, terrorist groups, issues of social cohesion, and the fight against institutionalized corruption. The new government has established a roadmap for the next 18 months, but in the eyes of Prof. Traoré, this short time span is probably not enough to bring about fundamental change and solve Mali's complex political and social problems. The most important measures to contribute to a stabilization of Mali and the broader Sahel region would be to fight against extreme poverty, improve the education and health services as well as the employment rate of young people. She further added

that negotiations with local terrorist groups could also be an option in order to reduce violence and to break the spiral of violence.

Following these two inputs, an ensuing fruitful and open discussion further touched upon several issues. These include, among others, the fight against institutionalized corruption, the participation of women within the new government in Mali, the transition process in Mali and strengthening the voice of the civilian population in West African countries. Concerning the participation of the military in the interim Malian government, several participants doubted that an organization with particular interests was not the right one for this difficult task. Furthermore, in addition to the stronger consideration of multidimensional challenges in Mali and other countries of the region and various approaches by international actors should not be the sole focus of attention. Rather, a closer look should be taken at the potentials and strengths of African societies and traditions. This last point was discussed in more detail in the next panel.

Session II: Alternative or traditional forms of governance to Western statebuilding

The second session, chaired by Elisabeth Kaneza (*University of Potsdam*), stood under the premise “The Africa we want – (West) African needs and (West) African solutions for (West) African problems”.

Prof. Dr. Justenhoven (*Institute for Theology and Peace, ITHF*) started by stressing that attempts of liberal statebuilding by international actors since the 1990s have not met required standards or completely failed. He emphasized that the analysis usually points to prolonged violence, corruption, clientelism, nonfunctioning institutions and government mismanagement. The background folio of this analysis being the highly developed functioning western liberal democratic state. This might be the methodologically false approach as it reduces the means and way to achieve essential public goods to one (historical and cultural) model. Against this background he raised the question of what can be done to avoid the import of empty hulls instead of building up institutions that have grown out of the local society’s way of life. With regard to regions of limited statehood in West Africa where central government authorities do not reach out or are only in partial control, Prof. Justenhoven emphasized to look deeper into functional equivalents such as alternative or traditional ways of governance to achieve public goods like security, health, education, infrastructure, and subsidiary support from the extended social group. With regard to the following speakers and discussions he asked: “Who governs for whom, and how are governance services provided under conditions of weak statehood?”¹

In the following speech, Ronald Meyer (*Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, BMZ*) highlighted that international actors cannot simply transfer things – the western value model or institutions (i.a. law and administration). Therefore, the central question in his opinion is, how such processes can be accompanied by external actors. Answering this question, in his opinion, is complicated by the fact that there is not one common entity in West Africa, but many different ones. For example, Thomas Sankara had tried to push back traditional authorities in Burkina Faso – hence their role is different in Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad. The strengthening of decentralization measures has been passed by law in various West African countries, but de facto are not fully implemented. In many societies, traditional authorities play an important role in rural areas – but they are conditioned by certain external influences such as terrorism. Moreover, while some challenges can be solved by traditional

¹ Thomas Risse, Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood, Introduction and Overview, in: Governance without a State?, T. Risse (ed.), New York: Columbia UP, 2011, p. 4.

legal systems and conflict resolution mechanisms, others do not. In Meyer's view, it is important that there is an open dialogue between actors on the ground. Here, the focus of the international community should be less on financial resources and more on strengthening local democracy. However, the BMZ would not support certain structures if basic human rights are violated, for example concerning the rights of women and girls. While working together with traditional authorities would be highly recommended, different interests and goals need to be taken into account. That's why international actors have to differentiate very precisely who to work with – in his experience, this is sometimes not an easy task.

In the workshop's last talk, Benjamin Akoutou (*Don Bosco Mission*, Bonn) provided an insightful overview on traditional social dialogue processes (i.a. under the 'palaver tree') and conflict resolution measures in West African societies (i.a. concerning the role of elders). Disagreements within and between local communities could be openly discussed and addressed within these traditional frameworks. In recent years, conflicts and tensions have often been about the struggle for influence and "whether you get a job or not, but not about democracy", as Akoutou pointed out. In addition, the established 'nation state' ensures that the multi-ethnicity of West African societies leads to a self-understanding of demarcation between different social groups, which determines political debate. From his perspective, one of the main concerns for stabilizing the Sahel region should be the compatibility of state structures with local traditions. In order to strengthen this link, he recommended greater parallelism between formal and alternative forms of governance.

In the following some important points were discussed concerning the role of (formal) law as external system and possibilities of plurality including traditional informal law. However, further research and discussion is needed about how systems can be brought together and thus how policies can be shaped. One starting point could be to rethink what makes people identify with or feel committed to the larger community.

Concluding remarks

The third international workshop on "Germany's West Africa policy" created a framework for profound debate on several critical issues with special emphasis on current security, humanitarian and economic developments and local (traditional) solutions in West Africa. International engagement is still highly recommended, but at the same time needs to be partially refocused. Therefore, it is important to refrain from the securitization of the Sahel. Rather peacebuilding needs stronger cooperation with civil society, local communities and secure access to basic public services. All participants agreed that international actors must move away from the idea that *Western* solutions help to solve West African problems or contribute to their improvement. Instead, West African specifics and underlying causes of violence need to be considered and addressed in the mid to long term. West African societies are very proud of their traditional mechanisms through which disputes were prevented and resolved in the past. Today, these mechanisms have a lot of potential for contributing to the improvement of the Sahel's multidimensional crisis. In this vein, bringing together traditional and formal justice systems was highly recommended by several workshop participants. Due to the success of the three international workshops in Berlin and Dakar, a fourth (once more hybrid) workshop in Berlin with strong West African representation is already scheduled for March/April 2021. Dependent on the further development of the COVID-19 pandemic, a fifth workshop in Dakar (in December 2021 or in February 2022) should follow.

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Workshop impressions

