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Cultural and religious dimensions of sustainability in Africa taking the examples of Ghana and Cameroon

Report on a delegation journey
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Key messages rather than an executive summary

Tradition, culture and religion are **central values on which individuals and societies draw** – especially in Africa.

They are crucial to understanding how people live together within society and to correctly assessing the opportunities for economic development.

The different situations in individual countries and regions, right down to local level or the level of individual chiefs must be seen separately and evaluated accordingly.

It is, however, generally true to say that today poverty is seen from a European vantage point as an almost exclusively material phenomenon, in spite of the fact that as far back as 1984 EEC ministers noted **a cultural and social poverty that was essentially every bit as important as material poverty**.¹ To reduce poverty sustainably, rather than merely tackling the surface of the problem with pragmatic approaches and economic strategies, the underlying dimensions that are of existential importance for individuals and local communities must be perceived and respected.

Almost everywhere in African tradition, **an event in the material world is held to have a spiritual meaning and analogy**. The path taken by Europe, with the Enlightenment and the process of secularisation is an anomaly on a global scale, and requires us to be particularly circumspect when we look at the dimensions of cultural tradition and sacredness.

The delegation has elaborated **four recommendations for action** for future development cooperation with African countries. These are summed up below and explained in more detail in the main body of the report:

- Development programmes should be more **sensitive to spiritual and culture-specific contexts**, with pertinent training modules for diplomats and project staff. Knowledge should be communicated, attitudes practised, and stakeholders enabled to recognise their own beliefs and to take the beliefs of others seriously.
- In the economic sector, the **‘strong and fit’** should be supported at local level, and small and medium entrepreneurial initiatives driven forward. By strengthening individual structures and enterprises, endogenous potentials can be used and jobs and value chains created.
- **Local communities should be stabilised by building common property** – in line with the cultural rules that do not allow individuals to make profit without the community benefiting from this – for instance 50% of the company’s profits go to the community and 50% to the individual or the entrepreneur’s family.
- A **major exhibition on Cameroon should be organised to promote cultural self-assurance** – within the scope of a multi-annual, broad-based process involving non-state actors it should integrate African diversity and offer an appropriate narrative, under European observation.

Section three of the following report contains **statements made by stakeholders**, which are well worth reading; we would like to thank the individuals quoted for their trust and their goodwill. Please note that the quotes have been reconstructed/translated from the records of the delegation members and have not subsequently been authenticated.

¹ ‘For the purposes of this Decision ‘the poor’ shall be taken to mean persons, families and groups of persons whose resources (material, cultural and social) are so limited as to exclude them from the minimum acceptable way of life in the Member States in which they live.’ Article 1 (2) 85/8/EEC: *Council Decision of 19 December 1984 on specific Community action to combat poverty*. Official Journal of the European Communities No. L 2/24 dated 3.1.85. Cf. *Final Report from the Commission to the Council on the first programme of pilot schemes and studies to combat poverty*, Brussels 1983.

1. Introduction

In his capacity as the German Chancellor's Personal Representative for Africa, Günter Nooke undertook a journey to Ghana and Cameroon from 10 to 19 February 2018 with a delegation comprising academics and representatives of civil society with a view to better identifying and understanding the interplay between tradition, culture, religion, and endogenous development potentials. The theme of the journey was 'Cultural and religious dimensions of sustainability'. The aim was to place these contexts and the significance thereof more firmly in a broader and changed paradigm of development cooperation and pertinent practice, and thus generate impetus for the new priority area of BMZ and the GIZ sector programme Values, Religion and Development.

Tradition, culture and religion are key **values on which individuals and societies draw** in Africa, making them crucial to understanding economic development and social coexistence. Parallel to this, however, they represent major power and influence. The feedback given by some interlocutors, that this was the first time for over 20 years that anyone had come to them merely to listen to what they had to say – without cash and without any agenda of their own – might be an indication of a fundamental flaw in development cooperation in its present form.

The **high rate of fertility** in both countries² means that an annual increase of 2% in the number of jobs available translates as zero growth per capita. Two-thirds of Ghana's increased tax revenue from the nominal rise in GDP of 3.6% (2016) and one half of Cameroon's rising tax receipts from its nominal increase of 4.5% in GDP (2016) are absorbed by the rising costs of the countries' school systems, etc.. Endogenous development potentials and endogenous risk minimisation potentials are thus crucially important.³

In both countries our interlocutors were primarily traditional authorities, who refer to themselves as kings/chiefs and queenmothers/reines mères, and leading personalities from religious communities. The delegation also spoke with the presidents of the two countries, political office bearers at national, district and local levels (Minister of Chieftaincy and Religious Affairs in Ghana and the Minister of Economy, Planning and Regional Development in Cameroon, governors, a mayor and a local gender officer) and high-ranking representatives of civil society, from the ranks of industry, the academic and research community and non-governmental organisations.

2 Ghana's population of 27.5 million (July 2017) is currently growing at a rate of **2.17% per annum**, which means that the population will double in 33 years. Cameroon's population of 24.9 million (July 2017) is currently growing at a rate of **2.56% per annum**, meaning that the population will double in 28 years. Over 55-year-olds account for only 9.2% of the population in Ghana and only 7.2% of the population in Cameroon. Ghana's **poverty rate** was dramatically reduced from 56.5% in 1992 to 24.2% in 2013, but poverty is still widespread in the north of the country and is leading to massive internal migration, especially among the country's Muslims, to the slums of Accra (UNICEF: The Ghana Poverty and Inequality Report 2016). The decline in poverty in Cameroon, from 53.3% in 1996 to 37.5% in 2014 has been less pronounced than in Ghana. The figure quoted by the World Bank, of 24% (2014) of Cameroonians surviving on less than USD 1.90 a day is not an adequate reflection of the actual poverty in the country.

3 'The population of the areas in which malaria is endemic do not represent a market that would justify investment in priority research and development activities on the part of pharmaceutical firms.' (Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute). According to a medical specialist in Douala, in some parts of Cameroon the incidence of malaria among primary school children is 80%. According to the WHO's World Malaria Report 2016, the incidence of the disease in Cameroon dropped by about 30% between 2010 and 2015. The level of spending on malaria monitoring and control is constant in both Ghana and Cameroon at almost zero dollars per capita; international funding is rising slightly. (WHO World Malaria Report 2016, p. 84).

2. Ghana and Cameroon

In **Ghana**, it emerged from the discussions held that the country's remarkable political stability, with several peaceful changes in government is due primarily to a **separation of powers, with horizontal parallel structures embracing several poles or actors in whom power is vested.**

Pole 1: In comparison to Germany, the levels of government are comparatively weak, but they are still strong when compared to other poles and are not questioned by the latter.

Pole 2: The traditional level of kings (who have been known as 'chiefs' since the country was colonised by the British) autonomously administer 80% of the territory of the country and are not subsidised by the state. At national level, the chiefs, many of them highly educated and successful entrepreneurs, are represented in the National House of Chiefs. There are similar structures at regional level. The leading female individuals, alongside the chiefs, in the traditional system are known as queenmothers. They are neither the wife nor the mother of the chief, but rule alongside the chief and come from the same royal family. Queenmothers are the leading females in the royal families and are responsible, in particular, for all matters relating to women and children. They play a major part in determining the succession.

Pole 3: The religious communities work together within the framework of Ghana's National Peace Council in a mediatory capacity, as they do in the regional and local peace councils. Everyone the delegation talked to agreed that all people in Ghana are religious. ('You do not have to tell our children who God is – they know it.'). The 2010 census recorded 5% of the population as believers in traditional local faiths, while almost 20% described themselves as Muslims and 70% as Christians (13% Catholics, 18% Protestants, 28 % Pentecostal and charismatic movements, 11% other Christian churches – the membership of the charismatic churches in particular is expanding rapidly). What is not apparent from these statistics is that there is marked syncretisation at the individual level; a significant section of the population combines fundamental traditional beliefs with Christian or Islamic teachings, or indeed in some cases with both of the latter.

The faiths that have come to West Africa from outside that context have been incorporated in many ways into the context of traditional African spirituality. This can be demonstrated for the Pentecostal churches too, which are critical of tradition and attractive to large numbers of the younger generation of Ghanaians. Some observers say that this is where the future leaders of many African countries are being moulded. The Pentecostal churches take traditional African cosmology (always with a God the Creator similar to the Abrahamic faiths, far from the anthropological construct of 'animism') and transform it into a theology of the Holy Spirit and personal empowerment. This motivates people to cast off the mantle of the victim both at a personal level and in terms of making efforts to advance economically, and to strive for success in life through spiritual fulfilment (rather than doing so without regard to spiritual fulfilment as we see in the materialistic societies of the western world!). Sustainable development cooperation should take into account this specific, omnipresent essential spirituality, if it does not want to have a unintentional disintegrating impact on society.

Pole 4: The local level exists, but in a less developed form.

Pole 5: The historical Kingdom of the Ashanti forms the over-arching narrative of the Ghanaian nation with several hundred ethnic and linguistic groups. The Ashanti King played an important part in the peaceful hand-over of power in 2016, pushing the defeated NDC, the party of former President John Dramani Mahama, to accept defeat and not contest the outcome of the election. Equally, the public appeal of Ghana's National Chief Imam for a non-violent

reconciliation of interests within the country has defused several critical situations, paving the way for peaceful conflict resolution.

The model of western democracy is based on the assumption that politically mature individuals are ready to accept responsibility for themselves and others. The neoliberal economic model is also built on the premise of decisions based on individual preferences. Neither is particularly compatible with the forms of spirituality found in Ghana, which tend to be anchored in the community, via the traditional and religious levels. One key problem with development cooperation approaches to date in terms of economic policy and political theory is the difficulty of western stakeholders to understand that in Ghana, as in many other African states, every material event always has a spiritual dimension and that this spiritual dimension can often take precedence. This point of view has not hitherto been sufficiently well understood and recognised, far less adequately taken into account in project planning. Projects thus do not always manage to put in place sustainable structures: within the framework of projects, activities generally remain at a superficial level with no connection to the deeper layers of the local culture, or even in contradiction to these. The purely material and economic focus of project logic violates these deeper layers.

The result is that even after long-standing support from Germany and other donors, and from international organisations, Ghana's economy has not grown sufficiently to offer young people in particular genuine prospects. This in turn generates frustration, discontent and the readiness to accept the very real dangers and high costs involved in migration.

*

In **Cameroon** the delegation discovered what was essentially a parallel situation, although the prevailing framework is another. Rather than the several peaceful changes of government that Ghana has seen, Cameroon has been ruled by President Paul Biyas since 1982. His political system favours **power structures resembling a vertical pyramid** that attempts to integrate and draw together all elements. This is becoming increasingly difficult.

Cameroon is often described as *Afrique en miniature*, since every type of African vegetation zone can be found within its borders, from tropical rainforest to hills and mountains (up to 4,095 m) and savannah. It is home to about 250 ethnic and linguistic groups, within borders drawn as a result of an agreement between the French and British colonial powers, which replaced Germany. (From 1884 to 1916 Cameroon was a protectorate of the German Reich although very few Germans were ever in the country [181 in 1897, rising to only 1,000 in 1911] and the protectorate was actually a drain on the budget of the Reich rather than contributing to it).

The two English-speaking regions of the ten regions that today make up Cameroon voted in a plebiscite conducted by the UN in 1961 to join the Cameroon Republic on the basis of a pledge that this would then become a federal republic. (The northern regions of what had been the British Cameroons voted in favour of joining the Federation of Nigeria). In 1972 the Federal Republic of Cameroon became the United Republic of Cameroon. In 1984 the state reinstated the original name *République du Cameroun* (Republic of Cameroon) against the will of many English-speakers. Their perception that they are not sufficiently represented at political level has long been the cause of tensions, which exploded into open conflicts in autumn 2016 (with lawyers' demonstrations). Since autumn 2017 the country has even seen some armed clashes. There is no appropriate dialogue with the state side, said at least some of the people the delegation talked with. Many villages have been torched, allegedly by state security forces. Shortly after the delegation left Buea on 18 February, hostilities left the next dead only a few kilometres away. In other regions, a latent discontent with the inadequate integration into

the unitarian system has led to riots. It is improbable that peace can be restored before the presidential election scheduled for autumn 2018. The closing of the Nigerian border from October 2017 to January 2018 drew attention to the economic and political threat to the whole of Central Africa should the state of Cameroon implode. It was not the focus of this journey to investigate whether or not vested interests play a part in this conflict, and if so which interests. Nor was it possible to clarify this within the scope of the journey.

Any implosion of this sort with further-reaching military action would entail enormous costs for EU member states. Partly in view of these collateral costs, it is in Germany's interests to reinforce non-state structures. This would indeed appear to be an urgent necessary. Non-state structures include:

- The *chefferies/ chieftaincies* with their traditional roles and community institutions (Chiefs receive remuneration from the state, in line with their status as 1st, 2nd or 3rd class chiefs, meaning that these structures are integrated into formal structures),
- The religious communities (21% of the population are Muslim, mostly in the north of the country, Christians live mostly in the south: 38% Roman Catholics and 26% Protestants, mostly found in the English-speaking regions in historical mission churches, and the expanding new Pentecostal churches and charismatic movements). The historical mission churches in the Protestant tradition are linked in many ways to the European churches whose missionary work originally spawned them (vibrant church twinning arrangements with Switzerland, Baden-Württemberg and Norway); Roman Catholic communities have links to French- and German-speaking partners.
- The urban intellectuals in civil society, especially in the major conurbations of Douala and Yaoundé (each of which are home to around 3 million people).
- Employers' associations and trade unions.
- Cameroonians who have been educated and trained abroad and expats, some of whom have strong links to Germany (the Goethe-Institut records the world's fourth highest number of language diplomas awarded, in spite of the fact that Cameroon has a population of only 25 million), and the influence of the diaspora in the form of remittances and intellectual input.

Violence against women perpetrated by other women in the form of female genital mutilation in the north and what is known as breast-ironing in the southern Littoral Region (a practice that still affected 24% of Cameroonian women in 2006 according to a study conducted by GTZ) is socially induced – there is no religious motivation to conduct the practices. Some of our interlocutors pointed to a possible correlation between the current decline in rates of breast-ironing and changing beauty ideals (as illustrated for instance by Meiway's 2002 hit 'Miss Lolo'; using artistic channels to change cultural patterns).

The over-arching narrative of the nation is the cult surrounding the president; many times we experienced people praying for his well-being as part of saying grace before meals. This is certainly an indication that the president enjoys a degree of respect among wide sections of the population. The 'Système Biya' which revolves around the president himself, and is mirrored in other African states, does not, however, appear to be sustainable, since Biya has so far failed to groom a successor. Nor is there any other narrative within the scope of which a dynamic balance of powers would be possible.

3. Key statements made during meetings and discussions

‘People are born into a system of knowledge. They do not need to throw it away. They can enlarge it. Development projects must be based on cultural wisdom, on the indigenous knowledge of people.’ (Center for Indigenous Knowledge and Organizational Development, Ghana)

In response to the question as to the greatest challenge facing a chief in his kingdom: ‘The biggest challenge is to change attitudes.’ (House of Chiefs, Ghana)

‘Nothing just happens. Everything is interpreted from the religious angle. Nothing happens without a sacred meaning.’ (National Peace Council, Ghana)

‘The wisdom of African traditional religions with their perception of the environment as being alive and sacred and with their close connection of past, present and future generations has to be kept up and strengthened. It is a decisive resource for the protection of nature and for lasting and sustainable development.’ (National Peace Council, Ghana)

‘The young people of Ghana today would go to ships in shackles voluntarily to get away – to go somewhere where they can find perspectives for skills and jobs.’ (Manager of a culture café in the Jamestown district of Accra, Ghana)

‘Western civilisation is killing our tradition. The principle ‘We are all equal’ is harmful to our social tradition and destroys respect and polite behaviour. Elderly people are not greeted and respected properly any more.’ (Queenmother, Sunyani House of Chiefs, Ghana)

‘We need to educate parents – they allow their children to walk through the desert.’ (Queenmother, Ghana)

‘It is not clear whether this approach, working against globalisation, can be won in the long term through our traditional structures.’ (Queenmother, Ghana)

‘The spiritual wisdom of people must not be threatened or put under pressure by a foreign way of thinking. Spiritual traditions need to be respected and strengthened and not be put under pressure – then they remain strong enough to be able to change in some parts.’ (Gender officer, Brong Ahafo Region, Ghana)

‘Traditional practices are in contradiction with the law. Keeping up and installing traditional practices is against international obligations and against national law.’ (Project Manager of an NGO in Sunyani, Brong Ahafo Region, Ghana)

‘Spiritual authorities bring people together with their history and identify. Their authority comes from God. The spiritual tradition gives people recognition and self-respect. Sacred places are always connected with ancestors. Today the balance between the community and the individual is disturbed. The individual and the community are no longer in a state of equilibrium, or balance.’ (Discussion with tradition chiefs at the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Yaoundé, Cameroon)

‘We need religious education to enable us to engage in discussion and dialogue, and discuss in peace our traditions and faiths. On this basis of our own traditions thus explained we can negotiate how change can be interpreted and integrated. The spiritual traditions must not be severed, but they can be integrated.’ (ACADIR – Inter-faith dialogue forum in Cameroon)

‘Everything is spiritual and has a spiritual meaning.’ (Discussion with chiefs from Cameroon’s Grassland)

‘The worst of it is that we are your beggars.’ (Discussion with chiefs from Cameroon’s Grassland)

‘Do you believe in curses? And do you believe in blessings?’ (Discussion with chiefs from Cameroon’s Grassland)

‘Somebody has listened to us for the first time in over 20 years.’ (Discussion with chiefs from Cameroon’s Grassland)

‘A great deal of time is needed to change a community, while respecting its values.’ (GIZ/KfW project in Mount Cameroon National Park)

‘You cannot develop people without their personality. If people feel that you want to destroy their personality, they will resist. Develop people together with their personality. Don’t make them lose their personality.’ (Chief from the Littoral Region)

‘The local religions which impose a rhythm on life (with taboo periods when fishing or tilling the land is banned) and which see nature as being alive and sacred offer a strong force for protecting the environment.’ (GIZ/KfW project in Mount Cameroon National Park)

‘A businessman can be successful if he integrates the spiritual dimension in his business and if he is himself a spiritual authority. We use the chief system as a network.’ (Cameroonian businessman who studied in Germany)

‘Traditional religious authorities are by their very nature preservers rather than innovators. But development and innovation also need preservation and conservation and must be in balance with these.’ (Cameroonian businessman who studied in Germany)

4. Consequences for a wider and modified development cooperation paradigm and for pertinent practical activities

Processes of cultural self-assurance and steps to strengthen the cultural memory of a people, to preserve their wealth of traditions, and the significance of these, can help the heterogeneous states of West Africa, which emerged as a result of the arbitrary borders drawn by colonial powers, to forge an identity and a ‘national’ narrative, which balances diversity and a shared identity. Strengthening processes of this sort on as broad and participatory a basis as possible, is in the interests of development cooperation assuming that it aims to help stabilise societies and prevent the disintegration of states. If local traditions are treated with respect and interest, and seen and treated as being real (rather than merely worthy of a place in a museum), relevant and worth preserving, people, especially those living in isolated and rural areas, will have the impression that they are actually being listened to. This will strengthen their cultural identity.

Development cooperation must endeavour to understand and respect the traditional cultural and religious structures and certainties in partner countries, as well as the importance these have for individuals and communities. It must shape its work actively within the scope of an open dialogue with these other dimensions of reality if it is to integrate individuals and communities, and stabilise their endogenous resilience. The ignorance about traditional cultural and religious structures (which is all too frequently predominant in practical development cooperation) causes individuals and communities to disintegrate, and harms the identity of both individuals and of groups. A necessary dialogue of this sort often produces no outcome, but it can even contribute to the dissolution of identities and break down the cement that holds societies together, thus fostering negative trends, as endogenous resilience declines. This should not, however, blind us to the positive examples that do already exist in bilateral development cooperation. The delegation witnessed in Cameroon, for instance how traditional structures are being taken into account in forest protection and local development programmes.

Development cooperation in West and Central Africa (but not only there) should be aware of the fact that it is operating in an area in which the material and spiritual levels are inextricably

interwoven in every aspect of life, and are genuinely considered to be equally relevant. For successful development cooperation it is not enough to agree on measures only with the responsible government. These links between the material and spiritual levels must be incorporated in all considerations, and the full spectrum of stakeholders must be involved. Projects that are designed purely to improve material living conditions and/or operate in the economic or political arena, should be examined in terms of their spiritual relevance (which initially tends to be invisible for western eyes). This relevance should then be accepted and a suitable way of addressing it found with partners on the ground.

Job profiles in development cooperation (Embassies, GIZ, KfW, political foundations, international organisations, NGOs etc.) ought to be expanded to include basic training and sensitisation in the field of religious literacy and cultural literacy. This would involve firstly communicating relevant knowledge, but even more importantly working on appropriate attitudes when dealing with the dimensions of sacredness and divine hiddenness. This attitude also includes the ability and the readiness to explain one's own values and interpretative patterns, to bring these to dialogue and to allow them to be questioned. It is obvious what problem then arises for a modern individual from Germany, most of whom are 'tone deaf to religion' ("religiös unmusikalisch", Max Weber).

Conversely, part of 'governance literacy' is an awareness of the – from a German perspective – at best formal statehood of national legal structures in West Africa. Statehood in this form is not compatible with the German experience that the prevailing cultural vision and model are internalized by the overwhelming majority of the population.⁴ The sign on a building proclaiming that it houses a 'Ministry' should not blind us to the lack of a state that is 'built from within' (Richard Wagner, 1872).

With a view to the promotion of good governance and democratisation projects, it cannot be sustainable to establish a democratic structure with a secular underpinning of power in a cultural and religious environment in which authority, the exercise of power and leadership always have religious connotations. The model of western democracy, based on the politically mature individual who takes his or her own decisions independently on the basis of pragmatic preferences within the immanent framework, is not particularly compatible with the forms of spirituality found in Ghana and Cameroon, in which the society always takes precedence over the individual.

The implementation of formal democratic processes (elections etc.) in the partner countries of development cooperation should be accompanied by a gradual contextualisation of democratic principles in and with the existing traditions and ways of thinking. Within the scope of a dialogue, it can be negotiated in each individual case how to define good governance, the articulation of the concerns of minorities and how these can be taken into account, the guaranteeing of human rights and legal certainty, a system of checks on the exercise of power and financial control, and a system of decision-making that involves as many citizens as possible, as well as ascertaining what form these could take. This must always take place in conjunction with the cultural and religious perceptions of the individual and society, and the forms of authority and leadership that are in place and accepted by society.

The dialogue with traditional cultural and religious structures and certainties must not be based on tactical or strategic considerations in an effort to push through one's own agenda and insert it as effectively as possible into the existing structures in the partner countries to maximise output. Any instrumentalisation of this sort fails to appreciate the absolute importance of the cultural

4 Vogt, Matthias Theodor; Fritzsche, Erik; Meißelbach, Christoph: *Ankommen in der deutschen Lebenswelt. Migranten-Enkulturation und regionale Resilienz in der Einen Welt*. Europäisches Journal für Minderheitenfragen Vol. 9 No. 1-2 2016. Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag 2016, p. 66.

and religious dimension for our partners – as reflected in the concepts of sacredness and divine hiddenness; these must be appreciated and respected in a very special way.

Formats are needed that hone awareness, within which the focus on both sides is on getting to know the other side in depth, listening to one another, and circumspectly negotiating shared values and objectives. These can then be integrated in development cooperation in a rules-based manner before attention turns to funding and also as funds flow. This is all the more important in view of the fact that even within any one country we frequently encounter different positions and power structures. On completion of a project it should be evaluated independently and with the groups whose lives have been affected by the project in question, whether their traditional cultural and religious structures and certainties have been strengthened or damaged by this cooperation. Ideally there should be movement, a transformation that will make it easier to master future changes and challenges.

It is not a question of slapping a ‘preservation order’ on traditional structures and spiritual certainties of the target group and declaring them a no-go zone. It is a question of perceiving these with respect. We should learn to engage in a genuine dialogue with these people, and to try to clarify how they interpret change in various areas of society and how they can support this change. Where this dialogue does not take place, and where there is thus no contextualisation of development measures, both sides (tradition and change) sacrifice their plausibility and leave the people without guidance or orientation.

5. Recommendations for action

5.1. Recommendation I: Awareness of spiritual and culture-specific contexts in development programmes.

‘The illusion of the West was its naïve materialism, which assumed that an improvement in economic circumstances would automatically engender a democratic culture and with it immediate pluralism, tolerance and enlightened religion. The West believed that culture was the soft factor that would follow on from hard economic factors. Today we know that the reverse is true. It is culture that is the hard factor.’ (J. Jessen, Afghanistan ist verloren. (*Afghanistan is lost*) In: DIE ZEIT, 8.3.2012.)

‘The one-eyed giant had science without wisdom, and he broke in upon ancient civilizations which (like the medieval West) had wisdom without science.’ (D. Goulet, *The One-Eyed-Giants*. In: Gaspar / St Clair, *Development Ethics* 2010.)

In planning, implementing and evaluating development programmes, greater attention should be paid to culture-specific contexts, to values that are relevant for individuals in their specific situation, and to their religion and their spirituality. A fundamental strategy should be elaborated that embraces respect for the dimension of sacredness and divine hiddenness, which today still shapes the people in Ghana and Cameroon and forges strong bonds that hold them together; BMZ’s paper ‘Religious Communities as Partners for Development Cooperation’ points in this direction, and must now be incorporated in country-specific strategies. For successful programmes and concrete projects the specific African balance of powers (spiritual authorities and those vested with power of any sort) must be taken into account in all its intricacy and complexity.

It is time to recognise our own blind spot and the destructive impact it has in development cooperation – and to re-open our eyes to wisdom, spirituality and the sacred at least in the lives of many people in our partner countries, without closing our eyes to corruption, kleptocracy and nepotism. This demands that we are ready to re-examine our own worldview, which traditionally relegates religion and spirituality to the private sphere. We must not simplify and universalise

the European way (which is valid for only a tiny percentage of the world's people) with its Enlightenment and secularisation. This challenge is made all the greater as, for instance, the idea of universal human rights should not be relinquished (Nooke 2008).⁵ We thus find ourselves directly facing the conflict between individual rights and the destabilising influence these are often held to have on a certain (indigenous) group identity; the problem becomes particularly interesting and complex in terms of the right to freedom of religion, which all stakeholders (ought to be able to) demand for themselves (Nooke 2016).⁶

The 'do no harm' approach should also apply to the cultural and religious dimensions of sustainable development. Fundamental respect in this context demands that projects and working patterns developed on the basis of western thinking be reviewed. We cannot say that NGOs and human rights initiatives have the exclusive claim to be doing good. Nor is it true to say that private-sector initiatives are always a problem – quite the reverse is true. Government initiatives and staff are perfectly able to act in a competent and context-sensitive manner, and to achieve results that are better incorporated in social structures on the ground than organisations established with external assistance that attempt to enforce a donor-driven agenda. New and strongly growing Pentecostal churches strengthen people's subjectivity and motivate them to engage in a professional and societal context and to advance within society. But there are, in this area, other groups that seek to make individuals dependent on spiritual leaders who are manipulative and run their servile 'congregations' as a business model. In development cooperation we should not identify the 'goodies and 'baddies' on the basis of our own world view, and assist those that best correspond to our own values. Rather, we should endeavour to become familiar with a broad spectrum of groups within society and become familiar with their narratives that strengthen cultural identities, in spite of the frequently encountered difficulties with respect to the representativeness of these groups. We should engage with them in a genuine dialogue examining values and objectives, and thus enable people to develop sustainably in a way that is not in contradiction to their overall identity. Neither must their own faith (whether Christian, Muslim or local faiths and traditions) be ignored, nor should an effort be made to favour 'value neutrality', which simply does not exist. Education work, which takes the existing religious and cultural foundations and the meaningful narrative of the people, and integrates this, can support holistic development in its full depth. No matter what their primary focus, all projects and programmes are committed to protecting the elementary human rights of all individuals. This basis, and the consequences thereof should, however, be openly addressed and verbalised, to avoid pragmatic cooperation that remains superficial and overlooks the implicit logic of our own that we bring to these measures, and the impacts thereof.

Development cooperation of this sort, based on state-of-the-art didactic approaches, will have to rethink the subject status of the partner side, and will have to learn to understand participation in a different way. 'We' do not allow the target group to participate in the project – it is the other way round.⁷

5 Günter Nooke: *Universalität der Menschenrechte – Zur Rettung einer Idee*, in: Günter Nooke, Georg Lohmann and Gerhard Wahlers (Ed.), *Gelten Menschenrechte universal?*, Freiburg 2008, p. 16 - 46.

6 Günter Nooke: *Religionsfreiheit – ein Menschenrecht im Widerspruch. Anmerkungen aus politischer Perspektive*, in: Thomas Brose und Philipp W. Hildmann (Ed.), *Umstrittene Religionsfreiheit, Zur Diskussion um ein Menschenrecht*, Frankfurt a. M. 2016, p.169-182.

7 'The transformational development story belongs to the community. It was the community's story before we came, and it will be the community's story long after we leave. While our story has something to offer to the community's story, we must never forget that, at the end of the day, the program is not our story. (...) Forgetting whose story it is means that we further mar the identity of the poor. When we usurp their story, we add to their poverty.' The spiritual level is crucially important in this. 'Helping the community tell its own story is critical to understanding its present and its identity as well as getting a glimpse of a possible future. When we take time to listen to its story, we are signaling the community that we think its story is valuable. There is also a need to help the community and us to recognize the activity of God in the story of the community. (...) Recognizing and naming God's activity in the story is (...) a spiritual act. It is also an act of healing. Asking the community to locate God in its history is a way of helping its members to discover that they are not god-forsaken.' (B. Myers, *Walking with the Poor* 2011, 207.) (B. Myers, *Walking with the Poor. Principles and Practices of transformational development*. Maryknoll 2011, 174.)

It was already apparent when the topic of religion and development was introduced at BMZ and the GIZ sector programme Values, Religion and Development initiated, that it is not easy to move away from the mainstream tenets of the late Enlightenment (GIZ 2016).⁸

5.2. Recommendation II: Strengthening the strong

‘Development thrives on the fact that some people are willing and able to make more of an effort. How else would innovations emerge? So if the new focus of economic cooperation is a self-financing, sustainable economic development, can it not be reasonable or even necessary to help private businesses, also using tax-payers’ money, irrespective of where the companies and the funding come from, until the business can stand on its own feet?’ (Nooke 2018)⁹

In countries in which the state is de facto weak, social stability and development opportunities depend largely on a developed private sector outside the state and parastatal system of preferential treatment. It must be able to establish local and regional value chains and must be strong enough to hold its own against cheap western and Asian products (e.g. the French soap and butter found in hotels).

By strengthening individual structures and companies, endogenous potentials in the country can be used to create jobs and value chains. It would seem reasonable to invest in small and medium businesses and entrepreneurial initiatives at local level, i.e. to strengthen the strong at local level. This should not be seen as a tactical measure, but as a way of stabilising the structures at local level and in the country in general, which is in the interests of Germany and Europe.

At the same time care should be taken to ensure that competition is not distorted, disadvantaging emerging small and medium enterprises. Options for dialogue on successful business models that are in line with traditional values should thus be promoted. An important aspect of this is involving women. Speaking on the occasion of International Women’s Day 2018, Volker Seitz, former German Ambassador in Yaoundé and author of ‘Afrika wird armregiert’, declared, ‘German development policy should not only affirm its commitment to empowering women. It should practice it. Africa’s male elite are honouring pledges to donor countries half-heartedly, inadequately, or not at all. [...] Women in Africa are significantly more productive than men. If they were better educated and had property they could generate an enormous leap forward in terms of development. Their lack of equal legal status makes it difficult for them to access social and economic resources. Cultural and practical equality between women and men would have a major impact on the economic development of Africa as a whole, because according to the World Bank, women are significantly less susceptible to corruption than men.’¹⁰

8 On the first sentence of page 1, the GIZ sector programme’s short publication *Werte, Religion und Entwicklung: Zahlen, Daten, Fakten* establishes the following connection. ‘Historical evidence exists of religiously inspired humanitarian activities in western societies as far back as the 15th century.’ But even the oldest parts of the Old Testament speak of protecting the poor and strangers as being God’s will. In Judaism, we find the following written about the *tzedakah*, ‘The poor do more for the rich than the rich man does for the poor.’ Zakat, a very strong form of ‘religiously inspired humanitarian activities’ is one of the constituent pillars of Islam. It would then be more correct to say that in the three Abrahamic religions, charity towards the poor has always from the outset been inextricably linked to serving God. Also on page 1, we find, ‘In the western discourse religion was an integral part of the concept of civil society in the 18th and 19th century, and shaped the values debate.’ This sentence too raises problems, even if we merely look at Rousseau (1772) and his *religion civile*. It would be more correct to say that even in the 18th century a society constituted without religion did not appear conceivable; this was to change nominally but not structurally in the 19th century with the mythical and non-secular elevating of the nation, in the sense of the national people, to the status of a substitute religion. Here we see the emergence of the Böckenförde Dilemma, which plays a pivotal role in development cooperation too, although this role is not yet widely understood.

9 Nooke, Günter, *Migration und Flucht als Herausforderung der Entwicklungspolitik*, published in 2018 by Schöningh, Sammelband Fluchtursachen.

10 Volker Seitz, 08.03.2018, http://www.achgut.com/artikel/ohne_frauen_bricht_afrikas_wirtschaft_zusammen.

5.3. Recommendation III: A 50-50 split between local communities and the individual (corresponding to public spending equivalent to 50% of GDP in Germany)

Youth unemployment is often above 60 % in rural parts of Cameroon, especially in peripheral regions. The school system is surprisingly well developed, and manages by and large to meet the increased annual spending requirements for schools, teachers and materials, that often amounts to an increase of several percentage points. The system aims, however, to equip school leavers for white collar jobs, which are scarce throughout the country and particularly scarce in rural areas. The lack of prospects for young people in their home regions makes for a high rate of migration to the country's cities and to Europe; it is estimated that the figure for 20 year-olds is about 50 %. While in the pre-colonial era, and in peripheral areas even after the colonial period ended, community-based subsistence farming was predominant, there has since been a shift towards an individual-based monetary economy without communally owned property. The local communities in Cameroon are a long way off the Central European model in which state spending is equivalent to 50 % of GDP, with individual spending making up the other 50 %. Many people in fact perceive the share of the public sector to be closer to 0 % (since benefits are not apparent and there is practically no public infrastructure) and feel that other players, often themselves, are required to cover almost 100 % of spending (in particular with respect to individual and family care, partly because of the lack of a developed health and pension system).

In spite of this general statement, the KfW's Programme for the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in the South West Region of Cameroon beside Mount Cameroon is exemplary.¹¹ It has strengthened traditional structures, which are now being used by the people of the community along with their traditional authorities to devise their own projects independently of development activities. Before communal ownership of infrastructure (water, sewage, electricity, roads, solid waste management, etc.) is introduced and in particular communal companies established that in the long term could aim to achieve 50 % coverage, the requisite mindset must be achieved. On this basis of trust and also as a result of the internal pressure of chiefs and communities, local and regional value chains can be developed by the actors themselves. Tontines or programmes such as the der Bank Afriland First's MC² programme provide a good basis for financing projects using microloans in villages and communities, which often have high repayment rates.

It would be helpful to support concepts that are considered to be culturally acceptable in the respective communities, and which work at an economic level. This could, for instance be a concept according to which about 50 % of the services and earnings go to the community in question while the other 50 % go to the individual. One member of Cameroon's employers' federation made a proposal of this sort. In return he expected to be included in the group of elders who advise the chief/king of his hometown or village. It would also be thinkable, in dialogue with other models developed in other parts of the world, and using modern information and communication technology to strike out along new paths towards ensuring the corruption-free production and distribution of goods and services. It is important, especially in rural areas, that the company form is accepted by the community and that it is economically viable. Solutions of this sort seem best suited to limited local groups (village communities). Here it would be particularly helpful if more research were conducted both at faculties of economics in partner countries and within the framework of scientific cooperation projects in Germany.

11 cf. <http://psmnr-swr.org/resources/psmnr-swr-videos> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rp-myBQLXMc>

5.4. Recommendation IV: Elaboration of a major exhibition on Cameroon (to be shown firstly in Germany)

German troops stationed in Mali are a daily reminder of the high collateral costs of the instability of African states. Germany's contribution to MINUSMA in Mali alone costs German tax-payers EUR 163 million per annum. The United Nations calculates US\$ 944 million per annum for MINUSMA.¹² Cameroon, as an economic area, is far larger and would be much more costly to defend than Mali, should it implode.

Would it not make more sense to engage in cultural preventive work, which would also be ten times cheaper than trying to remedy the situation after the event with military action? If foreign policy seen in this light actually aims to stabilise endogenous forces, how can this be done in the least costly, least complex and least invasive manner? Who is in a better position to bring together the environmental, cultural, social and economic potential and problems of the country and produce a realistic image than the non-state forces? After all, the country and the region depend largely on the ability of these forces to live together in peace. Traditional authorities, religious communities, private businesses, the urban intellectual milieu, civil society in the widest sense? Could a major exhibition on Cameroon, with which all of these forces can identify, not bring together these non-state forces, and motivate them with the prospects of showing the exhibition in Germany? The journey itself would effectively become the destination. UNESCO's Constitution says that since wars begin 'in the minds of men', it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed. Working with the 'minds of men' goes far beyond the 'socioeconomic factors' that are currently taken into account in development cooperation.

The obvious narrative for a country like Cameroon, which embraces about 250 different ethnic and linguistic groups would be the strength of diversity, on which the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity builds. When the National Museum in Yaoundé was redesigned recently, however, no space was dedicated to academic and scientific endeavours within Cameroon (such as anthropology, museology, history, colonial history and modern history, the arts including music, dance, performing arts and fine art, media, political and social sciences, linguists, lawyers).

A major Cameroon exhibition (to be shown firstly in Germany) could attempt to present the problems and potentials of the country for the generations living in Cameroon today in such a way that the core of a permanent exhibition could emerge that offers a new national narrative. This would be a major boon to bringing Cameroonian culture to foreign audiences. In particular it would reflect the imperatives of a country facing the risk of implosion. At the same time it can build on the unusually high level of appreciation within Cameroon for German culture, industry and politics, and can draw on the well educated German-Cameroonian diaspora.

The team would expressly like to point out that an exhibition produced/elaborated inside Cameroon would make a crucially important contribution to four separate discourses: to the discourses in Cameroon (1) about Cameroon and (2) about the way the country is seen from beyond the borders, and to the discourses in Germany (3) about Cameroon and (4) about ways of dealing with Cameroon. A dialogue based on mutual respect would offer significantly more progress on these four fronts than any exhibition devised in Europe.

12 Relating to military action and development cooperation in Afghanistan, see Wolfgang Bauer '*Wir sind besiegt*' (*We are defeated*) in *Die Zeit* 07.03.2018. Bauer concludes (translated freely from the original German), 'We need new, more flexible structures. In Germany we need training facilities for a new generation of emergency responders, that teach not only aid guidelines, but also language and culture. The GDR pointed the way forward. Germany's foreign policy plans for Afghanistan lie largely in tatters. We urgently need new plans – but first of all we need the courage to admit defeat.'

The German-African Centre for Scientific Cooperation, headed by David Simo, holder of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation's Reimar Lüst Award for International Scholarly and Cultural Exchange, and founding chairperson of the association of German alumni in Cameroon, offers an experienced contact within the local urban intellectual milieu. The 8 traditional Cameroonian leaders who visited Germany in 2017, and the 11 who will be visiting in 2018 on 'state visits', including the Chief of Batoufam, who was educated at a Jesuit school, represent a balanced group of representatives of traditional authority. The Germanophile head of the country's employers' federation is an important representative from the realms of industry. The German Federal Foreign Office could break new ground in the field of foreign cultural policy with these and other players, with a view to the need to stabilise endogenous forces in Central Africa (and in view of the costs that would be entailed by military intervention in the event of Cameroon imploding).

6. Individual points on the itinerary

Early on Saturday (10 February), the delegation flew from Berlin-Tegel via Brussels to Accra, and continued north the next morning (11 February) to Kumasi, where they had been invited by the Reverend Peter Kwasi Sarpong, former Archbishop of Kumasi and expert on inculturation issues, to attend a church service at St. Mary's Grotto, Suntreso, with an excellent organist and choir, drummers, song and dance, in which the congregation participated. Back in Accra, the delegation met with representatives of the National House of Chiefs, including Togbe Afede XIV, President of the National House of Chiefs, and Agbogbomefia of the Asogli State in the Volta Region.

On Monday 12 February the delegation met with

- Reverend Dr Thomas Oduro, theologian, representative of the African Independent Churches in West Africa
- A representative of the Center for Indigenous Knowledge and Organizational Development (CIKOD), a local NGO which endeavours to support endogenous development in the country, by drawing on local resources, institutions and knowledge. CIKOD works closely with traditional leaders in order to strengthen their institutions and leadership.
- Emmanuel Asante, Chairman of the National Peace Council. The National Peace Council aims to promote non-violence. Its 13 members represent the different religious, social and political groups within the country. It was particularly important during the election campaign and the elections.
- Hon. Kofi Dzamesi, Minister of Chieftaincy and Religious Affairs
- Jamestown Café, Joe Addo, architect. The café is in the heart of Jamestown, the oldest district of Accra, and is a place where architects, musicians and writers meet.
- President Nana Akufo-Addo and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration, at Flagstaff House
- Sheikh Dr Osmanu Nuhu Sharubutu, National Chief Imam of Ghana, whose peaceful interpretation of the Qu'ran is one that we would like to hear in Germany too.

The Ambassador invited us to dinner in the evening with

- Gabriel Charles Palmer-Buckle, Archbishop of Accra
- Nana Awindor, queenmother.

On Tuesday 13 February the delegation flew again to Kumasi and then travelled on to Sunyani. We were meeting with queenmothers from the Brong Ahafo Region (paramount queenmothers). Our facilitator was Dr Isaac Owusu-Mensah from the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS). The discussion gave the delegation insights into the realities and the challenges faced by traditional authorities in the 21st century. It explained how the traditional system works with, or sometimes against the 'modern state' and gave us information about the role that the traditional authorities should and will play in future. The project is being implemented cooperatively by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) and the Center for Indigenous Knowledge and Organizational Development (CIKOD). Queenmothers rule alongside the traditional chiefs as the main representatives of the traditional pre-colonial system in Ghana, which, according to the 1992 constitution continues to have an important status to this day. Traditional authorities, however, deal not only with cultural co-existence. They are important players in ensuring the peaceful co-existence of the peoples of Ghana, and the development of the country.

On Wednesday 14 February the delegation flew via Lomé and Libreville to Yaoundé, the capital city of Cameroon, where the evening saw an in-depth briefing session conducted by the German Ambassador with the military attaché, the political and cultural attachés, the economic cooperation officer, and representatives of GIZ, KfW, the German Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources (BGR), the Civil Peace Service (ZFD), KAS and the Goethe-Institut.

On Thursday 15 February the German delegation, headed by Günter Nooke, had a number of appointments and discussions, including a meeting with President Paul Biya, a discussion with a large group of the country's religious leaders and a meeting with the Minister for Economy, Planning and Regional Development (MINEPAT). Early in the morning the first working session took place with some selected chiefs at the headquarters of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Yaoundé. On the agenda: the role of traditional chiefs in local development. Princess Espérance Fezeu from the Cameroonian association ESPERANZA-CADE gave an address that looked at traditional leadership in Cameroon. Traditional chiefs from different regions of Cameroon were invited, several of whom had been invited by KAS to visit Germany in 2017. The discussion that followed and the evening event at the residence of the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany, with musical entertainment provided by the dance group of Yaoundé's Baméka congregation, provided an opportunity to pursue discussions with traditional chiefs from the Adamaoua, West, Littoral und North-West Regions in a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere.

The delegation was left with a devastating impression of the apparent lack of a museum culture at state level, following its afternoon visit to the (newly redesigned) National Museum.

On Friday 16 February the delegation travelled north-west where they had been invited to meet the Mayor of Bangangté, Madame Celestine Ketcha Courtès. After a short talk with the sub-prefect, the delegation continued to meet the Chief of Bangangté.

The highlight of the delegation's journey was undoubtedly the visit to the Batoufam Chief's Palace. Led by His Majesty Innocent Nayang Toukam, the Batoufam Chief, more than 2,000 villagers, schoolchildren and officials from the region's local authorities came to welcome the delegation. Representatives of German development cooperation in Cameroon, including staff from the German Embassy in Yaoundé, and representatives of GIZ, KfW and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung were also present.

The next day the delegation visited the Musée des Civilisations in Dschang, devised with the assistance of France, where the history of the area is impressively illustrated and recounted up to the birth of the current state. In Buea, at the foot of Mount Cameroon (4,095 m), the seat of German colonial administration until 1918, the delegation had the opportunity to find out

more about the Sustainable Management in Mount Cameroon National Park project under the aegis of KfW and through a discussion with the traditional authorities in the region ("Traditional structures and the importance of German development cooperation in the green sector"). Over a long period of ten years the project managed to sustainably integrate the local population in the measure. The delegation then visited the Governor of South-West Province, Mr Bernard Okalia Bilai and the Mayor of Buea, winding up their visit to the town of Buea with a dinner hosted by Mr Jan Fröhlich, who heads the KfW's Cameroon Office. Professor Dr Léopold Lehman (specialist in parasitology), Professor Dr Savage Njikam (social anthropologist) and Dr Mbea Mbea (development scientist, consultant) had come from Douala, specially to meet with the delegation.

On Sunday 18 February the delegation had the opportunity to attend a Presbyterian church service and thereafter to speak with the Bishop, who runs a large number of schools and hospitals. At a meeting in the port city of Douala, the delegation from Germany made the most of the chance to discuss the human rights situation in English-speaking parts of Cameroon with representatives of the human rights organisation REDHAC. The delegation wound up its stay in Cameroon with a dinner hosted by Mr Celestin Tawamba, President of the employers' federation GICAM. Günter Nooke and the other delegation members landed in Brussels and Berlin on Monday 19 February.

The excellent in-country organisation of the Embassies in Accra and Yaoundé played a very major part in the success of the delegation's journey. Our special thanks go to them and to our interlocutors.

7. Post scriptum

Two members of the delegation remained in Cameroon for lectures and additional discussions, but the fighting that broke out between poachers from Sudan and the military in the Bouba Ndjida National Park in the North East of the country – which boasts an abundance of game almost unparalleled in Africa's protected areas – forced them to abandon their planned excursion in this area. The north of the country is effectively off limits as a result of the terrorist activities of Boko Haram. As reported above, shortly after the delegation left Buea on Sunday, only a few kilometres away the next fatal incident occurred in the conflict shaking the country's English-speaking regions. In view of this, it is easy to understand why only 5,000 genuine tourists visit Cameroon every year. There is a real risk that the country might implode; this is not merely a rumour.

Berlin, 27 March 2018

signed

Fred-Eric Essam, Christine Gühne, Brigitta Herrmann, Günter Nooke, Matthias Theodor Vogt

Imprint

Cover: Old and young tree intertwined with each other. Cameroon, Centre Region, Méfou-et-Akono District, 3°41'55.1 N 11°21'26.9 E. Photo: Matthias Theodor Vogt, 2018.

Back cover: Ancestor figure in the Museum of the Monastère Notre Dame des Bénédictins du Mont-Febe. Provenance and date of origin unknown, dehors catalogue. Photo: Matthias Theodor Vogt, 2018.

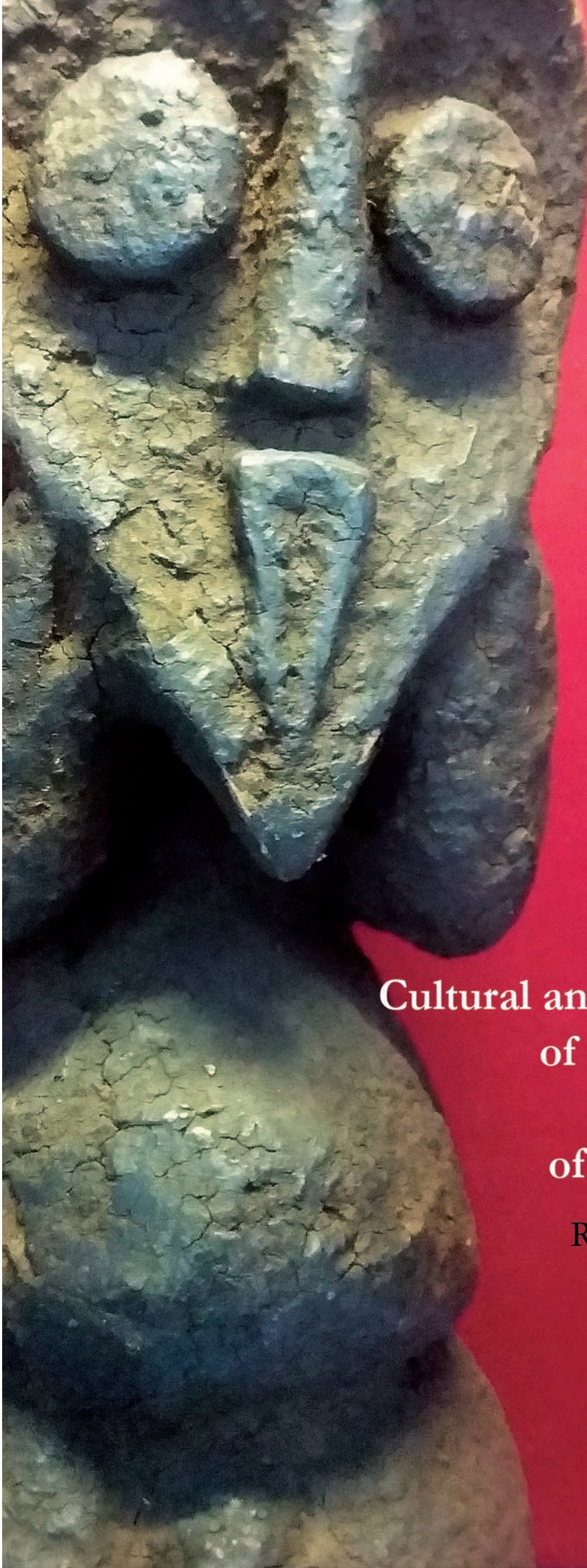
Translation into English: BMZ, Lynne Jagau, Bremen

Translation into French: BMZ

Layout and design: Frank Vater and Matthias Theodor Vogt, Görlitz

Production: Institute for Cultural Infrastructure Saxony, Klingewalde 40, D-02828 Görlitz, institut@kultur.org, 2018.

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**Cultural and religious dimensions
of sustainability in Africa
taking the examples
of Ghana and Cameroon**

Report on a delegation journey
undertaken in February 2018