

Closing event of “Academics in Sub-Saharan Africa”: Doing Research in Africa – Institutions, Projects and Challenges (12 May 2017)

SUMMARY of the talk with Prof. Dr. David Simo (Cameroon) and Prof. Dr. Norbert Sewald (Germany) about the challenges and opportunities of doing research in Sub-Saharan Africa

At the time of the talk, Prof. Dr. David Simo is currently a visiting professor and holder of the [Harald Weinrich Chair](#) that is awarded by the Faculty of Linguistics and Literature to especially renowned researchers in the fields of literature, linguistics and German as a foreign language. The German philologist and head of the Centre for German-African Center for Scientific Cooperation (DAW) from Cameroon is a long-time bridge builder between the German and the African academic world. Prof. Dr. Norbert Sewald, on the other hand, knows the challenges and the benefits of doing research in Sub-Saharan Africa from the other perspective. As an experienced facilitator of cooperation and head of the bilateral graduate school between Bielefeld University and the University of Yaoundé I ([YaBiNaPa](#)) Prof. Sewald has many international contacts and knows also the working and researching conditions in Cameroon. From the talk with Prof. Dr. Simo and Prof. Dr. Sewald and also the preceding presentations the following challenges and opportunities of doing research in Sub-Saharan Africa were made evident.

Challenges native and foreign researcher face when working in Sub-Saharan Africa:

1. Although improving, the lack of financial and technical resources is still a difficulty both for African researchers and international researchers coming to Cameroon. This makes it especially arduous for native academics to have a normal scientific career. Cooperation with international partners is therefore vital as it usually brings financial support that allows the building of (technical) infrastructure and an exchange not only of scientific knowledge but also about the rules and strategies of academic work.
2. Access to academics journals and (primary) literature is also still limited – although availability improved through open access media, publishing remains challenging for academics from Sub-Saharan Africa. In order for a submission to be accepted, researchers need to be up to date and be informed and knowledgeable of more than regional primary literature. Recommendations are also important. For this reason building a network beyond the borders of the African continent is especially important for native researchers.
3. Since getting acquainted with scientific research, learning how to write for journals, knowing the difference between journals and internalizing these differences is more challenging for young researchers from Sub-Saharan Africa than for ones let’s say from Germany, coaching by experienced (international) researchers is pivotal for their career.

Opportunities in doing research in Sub-Saharan Africa:

1. Establishing a sustainable infrastructure in Yaoundé for research, including technical and financial transfer that is needed for example to buy instruments needed to be able to research and study directly in Cameroon.
2. Building an international network, exchanging scientific insight and furthering cooperative knowledge, getting to know each other’s’ mentality and way of seeing the world and their approach to science.
3. Since Europe is also an object of research for African researchers and vice versa, cooperation allows for field research and a deeper scientific understanding of each other.
4. Being able to combine different approaches and pools of knowledge, for example in the treatment of diseases, as it happens in the cooperation of YaBiNaPa and at the German-African Centre for Scientific Cooperation in Cameroon.