

## **Panel D16 Africa Knows! Conference**

**20 January 2021**

### **Country / region-specific knowledge development histories in Africa**

#### **Report**

##### **Convenors:**

Ton Dietz- Scientific coordinator of the Africa Knows! Conference, African Studies Centre Leiden

Marieke van Winden- Organizer Africa Knows! Conference, African Studies Centre Leiden

##### **Contributors:**

Torben Andersen, Annette Skovsted Hansen (Aarhus University): Capacity development-when international development studies meet human resource management.

Theoneste Rutayisire, Stefan Jansen (University of Rwanda): Developing African Science. A case study on the importance of local insights in the co-creation of scientific knowledge.

Emmanuel Sarabwe (Community Based Sociotherapy (CBS) Rwanda), Annemiek Richters (Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research), Angela Jansen (Community Based Sociotherapy in Rwanda): Knowledge development about the effectiveness of psychological support for people affected by mass violence in Africa.

Pieter van Hensbroek (University of Groningen): Beyond “Westplaining” in writing West-African intellectual history.

Melanie Guichon (Aarhus University): Tracing Conceptions of Global Inequality in the Writings of George Ayittey and Kwesi Kwaa Pra, 1980s-1990s.

Peter Shapland, Conny Almekinders, Annemarie van Paassen (Wageningen University and Research): Employing the elite capture critique to legitimize top-down control of development resources.

Harrison Awuh (Aeres University of Applied Sciences Almere): “We have other priorities”: framing pro-environmental attitudes in Africa.

Nelly Andiemba (Kibabii University): Education curriculum reforms in Kenya: From theory to competency-based curriculum.

Ton Dietz (African Studies Center Leiden): Meta knowledge about areas

Jon Abbink (African Studies Center Leiden): History education in Ethiopia post-1991: rethinking the nation’s history in the context of “decolonization” debates.

Lothar Smith (Nijmegen School of Management): Worlding classrooms: studying local-global issues through a multi-polar lens.

One author was absent without prior notice, but after submitting his abstract and paper: Jude Cocodia (Niger Delta University, Nigeria: The rejection of African solutions to African problems. The African Union and the Islamic Courts Union); later he informed us that he had

to join a meeting with his Head of Department about an ongoing Accreditation process at his Department. We include the summary of his paper in this report.

Report by Chadidja Faye and Ton Dietz

### **Abstract and introduction**

The papers discussed in panel D16 were partly meant to cover region-specific studies about knowledge development, but mostly also included high-quality papers that could not be allocated to other panels, but capture the overall topics of the conference, namely changes and developments in the African knowledge landscapes as well as the decolonization of minds and attitudes in post-colonial Africa.

This panel invited papers about long-term developments in knowledge institutionalization in specific countries and regions in Africa, with the aim of contributing to building histories of knowledge development, with a focus on recent developments and future prospects in individual African countries or regions. The panel was linked to the attempt to present a database about the current knowledge infrastructure in all or major African countries, that covered all African countries and became part of the *africaknows* website:

<https://www.africaknows.eu/country-profiles/> and the conference magazine: <https://readymag.com/ono.ono/2425814/3/> .

The introduction of the panel, given by Ton Dietz of the African Studies Centre in Leiden, covered the overall topic of education in Africa. Around 1960, Africa's average adult literacy rate was very low, but currently it is beyond 70%. Diversity across countries remains enormous, with current adult literacy rates going from only 16% in Niger and 22% in Chad, to 96% in the Seychelles. The expected years of schooling for children increased from a median level of 8.2 years in 2000 to 11.0 years in 2018. The expected years of schooling in 2000 was only 2.9 years in Djibouti and Niger, but 15.7 years in Libya. In 2018 the range was between 1.9 years for Somalia to 15.1 years in Tunisia, with substantial improvements in most countries during the last two decades (although with some doubts about quality).

Additionally, the introduction touched upon indicators such as the Human Development Index, and how there is a link between the number of girls going to school and demographic developments.

Lastly, Ton Dietz gave a concise overview of Africa's universities. The number of universities increased from a mere 107 in 1960, with many countries having none and South Africa leading, to an astounding 2262 in 2020, with at least one university in every country and (in numbers) Nigeria leading, followed by Morocco and Ethiopia. Of those universities and other tertiary knowledge institutions more than 60% are currently private institutions. In many countries the expansion of higher education started in the 1990s, and the very fast expansion of private tertiary institutions happened from 2000 onwards. Africa currently has many more students and alumni from tertiary institutions than ever before, and these people are leading a further expansion of higher education, research, and innovation in the continent, and beyond.

This report is going to briefly summarize each presentation, before then covering the discussion that took place between paper presentations.

## **Capacity development- when international development studies meet human resource management**

Torben Andersen, Annette Skovsted Hansen (both presenting), Aarhus University, Denmark

Their work is a study of a multi-disciplinary public-private cooperation between Ghana and Denmark, investigating how capacity development takes place around Tema Port in Ghana. The cooperation focused especially on the development when the Ghana-Denmark relationship changed from aid to trade. Their project is part of the framework of Ghana-Denmark strategic sectors cooperation.

Tema port is the largest port terminal in West Africa, and ever changing, which is why multiple disciplines were employed to investigate, since one type of research design would have been difficult in the attempts to capture these developments. These disciplines are business studies, human resources development studies, anthropology, international development studies, and transport studies. Capacity development happens to be an interplay between the aforementioned disciplines as well as between central institutions, global networks, national institutions, and politics.

Examples of these interacting players, are the regional maritime university, the meridian port services (MPS), and the Ghana Port and Harbor authority (GPHA).

The regional maritime university is an example of Ghana-centered development, constituting the central institution. The MPS, are a global network and covers many international institutions, while the GPHA are representing the national authority as well as a regulator in this interplay that constitutes capacity development.

The idea of capacity development specifically in Ghana, is that Accra connects Abidjan, Ouagadougou, Togo, Benin, and Nigeria.

The main outcome of this research project is the Ghana-centered co-creation of knowledge in the maritime sector, with its public-private characteristics, as well as a negotiated knowledge development. It became clear how negotiations create knowledge.

## **Developing African Science. A case study on the importance of local insights in the co-creation of scientific knowledge**

Theoneste Rutayisire (presenting), Stefan Jansen, University of Rwanda

The paper is dealing with socio-therapy in post-genocide Rwanda. The genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda happened in 1994. It was found that there are different ways of dealing with the aftermath of such horrific crimes. One, the one discussed in the panel as well as the paper, is rooted in Rwandan culture: the Gacaca Courts to reach reconciliation. The genocide was committed by “ordinary people”, many of whom are reaching the end of their prison sentence. In an effort to reintegrate them into their families and communities, community-based socio-therapy is being employed.

The study itself focused on the specific type of therapy, and how an African science approach might influence findings. There is a strong belief that communities know what is being done and how it should be done in order to support their members, while normally researchers do this type of therapy on pre-selected people, that do not belong to one single community. The approach used is a reconceptualization of Community-based Socioterapy (CBS), divided into

15 workshops within the community. When first discussing the most desired outcomes, restoring dignity was among the most mentioned goals.

One aspect differentiating the African from the European approach of CBS, is that the one performed in Rwanda was done in Kinyarwanda, the national language. Another point of conclusion was the importance of community and the overall use of CBS, in comparison to the European variation, where CBS is used as a therapy.

**Knowledge development about the effectiveness of psychological support for people affected by mass violence in Africa- A case study of a randomized controlled trial of community-based socio-therapy for Congolese refugees in Rwanda and Uganda**

Emmanuel Sarabwe (Community Based Socioterapy – CBS – Rwanda; presenting),  
Annemiek Richters (Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research), Angela Jansen  
(Community Based Socioterapy in Rwanda)

These presenters also focused on CBS, but in a different context. This paper focusses on Congolese refugees in Rwanda and Uganda. As discussed before, CBS is an approach that supports the restoration of dignity in post-genocide Rwanda and is implemented within communities. In contrast to the Dutch approach (where the approach had its roots), it is not done in a clinical setting.

This paper focuses on challenges encountered in a still ongoing Randomised Control Trial of the effectiveness of community-based socioterapy (CBS) for Congolese refugees living in refugee camps in neighboring countries. The major challenge addressed is the tension between the implementation of rigorous research procedures and protocols developed in the West and the implementation of CBS as developed over the past 15 years in Africa. In the CBS adaptation to the RCT-linked procedures and protocols what are considered as some of the key characteristics of CBS are crumbling away. On the other hand, there is also some merit in being asked by 'outsiders' to clearly explain the ins and outs of socioterapy in writing and provide additional documents required for a smooth running of the RCT.

CBS was introduced in Rwanda from Netherlands in 2005. As a Western approach implemented in clinical settings, it was co-creatively redesigned to fit a society shattered by genocide and continuously adapted to changing local contexts, resulting over time in what can be considered a home-grown approach. Once the implementation of CBS in refugee camps has been tested and results are positive, a scale-up of CBS for refugees elsewhere in the world lies ahead. At issue is whether the RCT measured intervention is suitable for such scale-up. This raises the question whether measurement methodologies can be developed that leave interventions to be evaluated intact and are internationally recognized as valid.

The research conducted in this case is described as expensive and time consuming, since a lot of approvals are required, as well as the need for approved research tools and protocols.

**Beyond “Westplaining” in writing West-African intellectual history**

Pieter Boele van Hensbroek, University of Groningen, the Netherlands

In his paper and during his presentation Pieter van Hensbroek argued against the notion that West African pioneer intellectuals, and especially those from the Gold Coast, were importing Western ideals and were detached from their home countries due to their social status and an education in the West. He is trying to bring forward the agency of these intellectuals through

the study of their work and looking at them from their specific historical context. Pieter van Hensbroek talks about those scholars who lived before colonialism and therefore before the sense of African nationalism emerged.

During the presentation it was argued that calling these elites “westernized” is in itself a colonial discourse, since it undermines the knowledge institutions and education present before colonialism. Additionally, through investigating the scholar’s personal histories, it can be found that they themselves come from royal and educated families, proving that they were deeply rooted in their African cultures. Lastly, it was added that, in comparison to Europe, the educational institutions in Africa at the time were much more advanced, since everyone had the right to education. Another point of comparison that was presented were the political institutions, that were in place, and that allowed for officials elected by the people.

### **Tracing Conceptions of Global Inequality in the Writings of George Ayittey and Kwesi Kwaa Prah, 1980s-1990s**

Mélanie Lindbjerg Guichon, Aarhus University Denmark

The goal of this research according to the author Melanie Guichon was to investigate how two different scholars- George Ayittey and Kwesi Kwaa Prah- shed light onto African “underdevelopment”.

She divided the scholars into their ideological schools of development thinking, dependency and Marxist theories on the one hand, and free-market approaches on the other, and compared them directly to each other. She presented how dependency and Marxist theories focus on external factors, while free-market approaches focus on more internal factors and how the two scholars fit into the different narratives.

George Ayittey was an economist focusing on post-colonial political elites and how they are and were responsible for the African crisis in the 1980s. He focused on so-called black neocolonialism to emphasize the role of African elites and “Wabenzi”, men with Mercedes-Benz cars. This term is, as was explained during the presentation, how he described said elites after colonial times.

Kwesi Kwaa Prah argued in favor of dependency theory, and he saw the use of colonial languages as the main source of underdevelopment in Africa. He highlighted unequal power relations between the Global North and the Global South, as well as a superiority complex of people from the West and their behavior. While Ayittey focused on African elites, Prah argued mostly against so called “Krachi”- clerks- who he described as an African formed in the image of a Westerner.

The research presented by Melanie Guichon was focusing on the content of the writings of these two scholars, and how they saw the underdevelopment of Africa, as well as possible solutions presented by them.

#### **Employing the elite capture critique to legitimize top-down control of development resources**

Peter Shapland (presenting), Conny Almekinders, Annemarie van Paassen,

Wageningen University and Research

In their paper, Peter Shapland, Conny Almekinders, and Annemarie van Paassen focus on so-called community driven development. During the presentation, the focus lay on enabling communities to decide what to do with the development aid that reaches them. The three authors focus on the fact that the concept of ‘development’ is hotly debated and that normative debates dictate how and by whom research is conducted.

Elite capture, one of the main topics of the presentation as well as the paper, is when local elites in a developing country take the money donated as development aid, for themselves. Corresponding to elite capture is also the fact that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) often aim to please their donors when active in African communities, and therefore try to keep a close control of the projects they implement. Elite capture criticism does enable them to keep that control, but what is argued is that these NGOs also do not have the best interest of the communities in mind. In some way, they critique the elites active in the community, while using the exact same tactics they are condemning.

On the other hand, the communities in which these conflicts between NGOs and local governments are taking place, also want to have control over their resources and they know what they need.

This conflict leads to estranged power relations, with NGOs rivaling with elites, and one practice is condemned and unacceptable, while the other one is not. The main argument and criticism is that the elite capture critique is only about elites in the global south, while elite capture by elites from the Global North in the global South or anywhere else is completely ignored. This can also be seen in other historic settings.

### **“We have other priorities”: framing pro-environmental attitudes in Africa.**

Harrison Awuh- Aeres University of Applied Sciences Almere, The Netherlands

The paper by Harrison Awuh as well as his presentation was concerned with environmental attitudes in Africa. The paper illustrates human behavior as a source for mitigating and adapting to climate change, investigating how local attitudes are constituting environmental behavior.

When investigating climate change and environmental behavior as well as attitudes, it becomes evident, that the research conducted about climate change and developments related to sustainable development are mainly centered around Europe and the Global North in general. In the course of the research, online surveys were conducted in different African countries, namely in Cameroon, Ghana, and Egypt.

The analysis of these surveys showed that opinions and attitudes about environmental behavior are based on utilitarian values such as food security: if basic needs are threatened, people will not accept changing their habits. If people are aware that pro-environmental behavior is not harmful to their overall basic needs, they might be more open to changing their habits. Another finding was that religious practices can influence people’s eating behavior and for example whether or not they are open to becoming vegetarian for the sake of having a more sustainable lifestyle. Lastly, the idea of a hierarchy of needs was introduced, in order to showcase how attitudes differ between countries.

Immediately after the presentation, it was asked whether the research could have been expanded and the use of the hierarchy of needs could have been improved, if more categories

such as the difference between rich and poor as well as rural and urban would have been included.

### **Education curriculum reforms in Kenya: From theory to competency-based curriculum**

Nelly Andiema, Kibabii University, Kenya

Nelly Andiema offered an elaborate introduction to Kenya's education system. Starting before the colonial period, the development of Kenya's education system was illustrated.

In pre-colonial Kenya, traditions used to be passed on from generation to generation based on age groups, and gender. Additionally, vocational training took place through songs as well as proverbs. During the Colonial period, European and Indian children were favored, and only later independent schools were formed for African children. Although there was mass enrollment in those schools after Independence in 1963, the demands of the job market were not met by graduates of this school system. This was due to the fact that the focus lied more on passing exams, rather than getting the competence and knowledge necessary to integrate into the job market. Launched in 2020, the competency-based curriculum (CBC) was introduced in Kenya. The plan aims to cultivate students' capacities to learn and perform to their expected standards matching current and future needs of Kenyans.

Concluding remarks by Nelly Andiema included that education systems should produce graduates skilled to fit into the job market, impacting knowledge, and skills of children. The conclusion was followed by the recommendation, that the Kenyan government should work with institutions, and the idea of having schools in Kiswahili, the language spoken in Kenya was also brought up.

The debate about Kiswahili being made the official language of African institutions such as the African Union was discussed shortly, and it was mentioned that this would be an example of Prah's approach that was discussed earlier.

### **Meta knowledge about areas**

Ton Dietz, African Studies Center Leiden

In his paper, Ton Dietz investigates the history of knowledge development in the areas of the Pokot in Kenya and in Uganda. He does this by asking specific questions about research:

What has been the long-term history of knowledge production about an area? How can this long-term knowledge history be traced and assessed? Who publishes what, when, and where? Who is referring to whom? Another aspect that is investigated is the study of the sources in particular, whether they are academic or not, the languages used in sources, and the disciplines that are used or neglected.

The hypothesis established in the paper is that the specific topic studies about an area often tell more about the scientific / societal questions relevant to the countries where scholars come from, than about the questions that are relevant for the situation in the particular area that is being studied. Ton Dietz mentioned that most if not all knowledge has an external gaze, meaning that local population are not included in conducting research as researchers, but only as interpreters or assistants.

Meta knowledge on the other hand studies the needs of decolonization of minds as well as research practices, and to become more inclusive in research processes, much more including local researchers and experts than is often the situation.

### **History education in Ethiopia post-1991: rethinking the nation's history in the context of "decolonization" debates.**

Jon Abbink, African Studies Center Leiden

Jon Abbink gave a concise overview of Ethiopian history education during the post-1991 period. Ethiopia in itself is an ethnically very diverse and very densely populated country.

This diversity is why it is difficult to clearly define a national identity of Ethiopia. The question has been debated over many years, also, but not only because the country was never colonized and therefore not directly influenced by colonialism. The question that is posed is whether a common, shared history of Ethiopia as a nation and polity is seen as "illusory by most interlocutors, or still a shared aim"- and if so, how it might be scientifically defended and taught as part of the curriculum.

### **Worlding classrooms: studying local-global issues through a multi-polar lens**

Lothar Smith, Nijmegen Centre for Border Studies / Human Geography / Global/Local Divides and Connections (Glocal), Radboud University, Nijmegen

Lothar Smith presented his paper on worlding classrooms and studying local-global issues. He stated that themes like globalization in the context of human mobility and developmental issues has been increasingly focused on in academia. This discussion includes recent developments of themes concerning globalization and human mobility. Additionally, he linked developments to fields like critical feminism or post-colonialism. The view of development has changed from only being seen as progressive, and governments were instated following Western ideals. This is again touching upon the question of a superiority of the West in relation to Africa. If ever theories are employed coming from the global South, and being put into place in the global North, these too stem from the theories previously developed there.

This is why the world class room approach has been emerging during recent years, a theory demanding a new evaluation of the connection between space and learning. It entails connecting universities all over the world through the internet to bring diversity towards education in general.

### **The rejection of African solutions to African problems.**

#### **The African Union and the Islamic Courts Union**

**Jude Cocodia (Niger Delta University)**

(not present during the session, but in a podcast, later)

The dependence of the African Union (AU) on its western benefactors compels it to abide by their dictates in the provision security on the continent. The influence of these donors sometimes inhibits the security objective of the AU and the intervention in Somalia clearly proves this point. Unfortunately, the western narrative on the salience of AU intervention in Somalia has dominated conflict literature and the majority of African scholars have kept with this trend. This paper takes an alternative view and questions the rationale behind the AU's

peace enforcement in Somalia. Were there viable alternatives? Can the AU retrace its steps? Is there some way through which stability can be achieved? This research adopts a problem solving approach in arguing that the AU ignored viable indigenous options for peace in Somalia in order to promote the interests of its donors. It advocates that a change in strategy is needed to bring peace to south-central Somalia and a cue can be taken from the indigenous modes of governance in Somalia's northern regions where stability has long since been achieved.

## Discussion

Since the panel had no single overarching theme, bringing in papers focusing on multiple different topics, there was no discussion covering only one topic. Nevertheless, a discussion was taking place about various of the topics introduced, and that discussion took place in three rounds.

Concerning both presentations about CBS in and around Rwanda, the main questions revolved about funding, measurement, regarding both who measures as well as what was being measured. Regarding the funding, it was said that for both projects, it was very difficult to get funding but it is important to see to what levels minds are open to see what knowledge exists and how it is developed. One should be open to collaborate with local people as treasurers of knowledge. Additionally, the value of the concept of dignity was questioned, along with its importance. Social dignity is a central concept in CBS, but at the same time it is difficult to measure. People who are participating in this form of therapy, are unpacking the concept themselves, while simultaneously dealing with PTSD. Something that stood out, was how most participants, wish to “feel like a human again”, and feel like CBS and the dialogues they are entering can support them in regaining that feeling. Translating concepts like dignity in local languages is crucial and also what value people attach to these concepts. In Rwanda ‘dignity’ mainly relates to feeling safe, trusted, respected, cared for but also being able to care for others as well. Secondly it was questioned, whether randomized control trials could be a problem to some people and whether there are more sensitive ways to conduct such analysis, seeing that the research participants tend to be highly traumatized. This is from the start a very ethical issue. It was guaranteed, that in most approaches, the control group also receives treatment, meaning they are also profiting from the therapy, after the scientific experiment finished.

During the second round of discussions (after the papers by Mélanie Guichon, Peter Shapland, Harrison Awuh, and Nelly Andiemba) a first question was for Harrison: what were the major differences in environmental opinions between respondents in Egypt, Cameroon and Ghana? Many things were comparable, but there were huge differences between Egypt and the other two about eating meat. Because of its importance in Islam Egyptians were much less willing to change their eating habits than the others. That result has an implication for the research design in follow-up research: are the same differences visible between Christians and Muslims in Cameroon and Ghana, and what about the Coptic Christians in Egypt? Mélanie’s answers to questions posed to her were about the contrasting opinions of leading scholars during the era that many would call ‘Africa’s lost decades (the 1980s and 1990s), despite their shared biographies. Then there was some discussion about favouring one African language over another (which would create major problems in a country with 250 different languages like Cameroon) and Prah’s answer to that is the need to harmonize and standardize the most common African languages (with an example how that is currently being done in South

Africa; and for instance the ever-growing use of Kiswahili in major parts of Africa (and even on the website of the African Union now). Nelly was asked about the importance of apprenticeships for competence-based learning and she is convinced the only way forward is to emphasize the importance of connecting universities and schools to the job worlds by increasing the periods of apprenticeship for students, and for giving more emphasis on it in teacher-training institutions.

The third round of discussion mainly covered the papers by Ton Dietz, Jon Abbink and Lothar Smith.

There was a lot of attention for the idea of global classrooms, and how it is difficult to get these projects started, and how dependent these initiatives are on funding and on (lack of) continuity. From an African perspective it was doubted if the emphasis should be on virtual staff and student exchanges about theory and concepts. Sharing experiences about practical issues seem to be much more in demand, both in teaching and in research. What is important are strong partners in Africa, who lead the initiatives and do so for a long time. Additionally, the missing infrastructure, especially of the internet, in Africa was mentioned and put into the discussion, although things are developing very rapidly now, and Covid speeds up the experiences. And what is growing is the use of diaspora Africans teaching virtually (often as volunteers), as well as African-based scholars participating in shared teaching programmes, following experiences of joint Afro-European summer schools.

Jon Abbink answered a question about Eritrea: yes, that is part of his analysis, and also Eritrean historians in teaching history classes still very much look at the Horn as a whole. And of course Ethiopia's history teaching is special because the period for which there are written texts is so long (1900 years).

The final word was for Ton Dietz. He first answered a question about the knowledge available prior to European influences, as he only started his knowledge history with the first European writing about Pokot. Unlike countries like Ethiopia the written texts prior to 1850 are probably absent, and archaeological evidence is also scarce. But maybe there are written sources in Arabic along the East African Coast, that form a very separate domain (and treasure) of knowledge and until recently have been mostly neglected by European scholars.

Then he widened the debate to the issue of funding dependence. He stated that lack funding should not be used as an excuse not to do research. Some African universities now stimulate their students to do much more community-based research and do so with very limited funding. Some even go further and stimulate citizen science. Often these are the more marginal and some of the private universities, not having to fight vested interests and frozen behaviour so often visible in the 'leading' universities in Africa, who still follow a lot of (what they regard as) European 'ways of doing things' to be seen as 'prestigious'. A second funding-related issue is the fact that the current technologies make it possible to use social media as research tools and research objects, and that can be done with very limited funds. Africa's institutions often are experts in doing 'frugal research', so with these new technological developments these speed up bottom-up research and teaching.