Maria Sibylla Merian Institute for Advanced Studies in Africa (MIASA)

Annual Report 2018/2019

The *Maria Sibylla Merian Institute for Advanced Studies in Africa* (henceforth MIASA) was established in March 2018 within the College of Humanities at the University of Ghana. A secondary site was also identified at the Centre de Recherches sur les Politiques Sociales (CREPOS), in Dakar, Senegal. MIASA is funded by the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF) and the University of Ghana. As an institute for advanced studies in the humanities and social sciences, its remit is to facilitate basic and applied research through the provision of fellowships for both senior scholars and early career researchers from Ghana and Germany, as well as from Africa and the rest of the world generally. It is dedicated to the topic of 'Sustainable Governance', with three main research foci: sustainable environmental transformation, sustainable peace and conflict management, and sustainable democracy. This 'annual' report covers in fact the first 18 months of MIASA from March 2018 to September 2019.

Background

The establishment of MIASA resulted from the successful proposal submitted to BMBF by a consortium of German universities and research institutes in collaboration with the University of Ghana. This application responded to a call by BMBF to establish one such Centre (or Institute) for Advanced Studies in the humanities and social sciences in sub-Saharan Africa. MIASA became the fourth *Merian* centre globally funded by BMBF. The others are:

- Delhi, India – Metamorphoses of the Political (established in July 2015)
- Guadalajara, Mexico – Coping with Crises (established in March 2017)
- Sao Paulo, Brazil – Conviviality in Unequal Societies (established in April 2017)

MIASA also became the first institute for advanced studies in sub-Saharan Africa, outside of South Africa.

The German consortium is composed of five institutions:

- Albert-Ludwig-University of Freiburg (in particular FRIAS, the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies and Arnold Bergstraesser Institute)
- Goethe-University of Frankfurt, Centre for Interdisciplinary African Studies
- German Historical Institute in Paris
- German Institute of Global and Areas Studies (GIGA) in Hamburg, Institute of African Affairs
- University of Konstanz, Dept. of Politics and Public Administration

FRIAS at the University of Freiburg provides the administrative hub for the project.

Funding

MIASA's programmes are funded by the German Federal Ministry (BMBF), while its local staffing, administrative and operational costs are borne by the University of Ghana. In addition, the University of Ghana has funded the capital costs of the renovation and equipping of a building for use as MIASA's office accommodation. BMBF funding is provided for a preliminary phase, lasting from March 2018 until August 2020, followed by a main phase of approximately six years, subject to a successful evaluation. The preliminary phase of 30

months is dedicated to the preparation, planning and establishment of the Institute, as well as initial research activities. The main phase will entail a more substantial research programme in the main thematic areas.

The first six months (March – August 2018)

This initial period was spent establishing the structures and processes, both on the ground at the University of Ghana, and for the Institute as a whole. Prof. Gordon Crawford was appointed as the Director (Germany) and Prof. Dzodzi Tsikata as the acting Director (Ghana). Subsequently, Prof. Abena Oduro was appointed by the University of Ghana as Director (Ghana) from 1 August 2018. Significantly, MIASA had no building at this time, but one was identified on the University of Ghana's Legon campus and renovation work commenced. In Germany, a team was established at FRIAS, University of Freiburg, to co-ordinate the management, administrative and financial aspects of MIASA, with an academic co-ordinator also appointed to work on the ground in Accra. Organisational structures included the Executive Council composed of a representative from each of the German Consortium members, two representatives from the University of Ghana and one from the Centre de Recherches sur les Politiques Sociales (CREPOS). Importantly, the Academic Advisory Board (AAB) was formed with invitations accepted by 12 leading African and Africanist academics from around the world. The AAB has the important task of selecting fellows following calls for applications, as well as guidance on academic programme matters. Finally, this period was taken up with organisation of the inaugural conference, a two-day event in September 2018 at the University of Ghana

Activities (September 2018 – September 2019)

Inaugural conference, 27-28 September 2018, University of Ghana

MIASA's first public event was a two-day conference entitled 'Africa's Institutions for Sustainable Governance', with a welcome address by the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ghana, Prof. Ebenezer Oduro Owusu. The conference highlighted the Institute's thematic focus on sustainable governance and the three sub-themes of sustainable environmental transformation, sustainable peace and conflict management, and sustainable democracy. It welcomed three keynote speakers (Prof. Amina Mama, University of California, Davis; Dr Kwesi Aning, Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping and Training Centre, Accra; Prof. Francis Nyamnjoh, University of Cape Town), and held panel sessions on each of the sub-themes, as well as a roundtable on the role of institutes for advanced studies in the 21st century. A highly successful event attended by over 200 delegates, this conference put MIASA on the map as a functioning Institute.

Female academic career workshop, 6-7 December 2018, Dakar

One goal of MIASA is to actively support women researchers, particularly female early career researchers, given that women academics form a minority in most African research communities. The first of a series of workshops aimed at promoting the careers of female scholars was held in Dakar in early December 2018, with 16 participants from Algeria, Morocco, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Togo, Cameroon, Senegal. The workshop consisted of two parts: a public round table on 'Female academic career development in African academic

environments' at which academic board member Prof. Fatou Sow (CNRS-Dakar) and three other Senegalese and German scholars participated, and a non-public coaching seminar, which was conducted by Dr. Folashade Soule-Kohndou (University of Oxford). The discussion focused on how the position of women has transformed over time in African academic environments and how academic careers of women can be better promoted. The coaching seminar considered applications for academic positions or research grants, the construction of international academic networks and the role of gender in the classroom. The workshop was a great success, with reports and feedback available at: https://ihacrepos.hypotheses.org/category/activites/ateliers-de-carrieres-academiques-feminines

Workshop: 'Restitution and repatriation of African artefacts in European museums' workshop, 13-14 December 2018, University of Ghana

This workshop was convened by Dr Wazi Apoh of the Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies, University of Ghana, in collaboration with the Arnold Bergstraesser Institute, Freiburg. It explored the issue of the restitution of looted and illegally acquired African cultural objects in European museums, especially topical after President Macron of France commissioned a report on the subject by Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy. Workshop speakers included academics from Togo, Cameroon, Nigeria, Ghana and Namibia, as well as museum-based researchers from Switzerland and Germany. Prof Andreas Eckert from Humboldt University, Berlin, gave a keynote speech on *'Decolonizing the Museum? African Objects and the Politics of Restitution'*, which was livestreamed to an audience in FRIAS, University of Freiburg. An end of workshop statement was prepared by the participants for distribution to the media and was featured in German papers. A Special Issue of the *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* is being prepared with papers from the workshop, edited by Wazi Apoh and Andreas Mehler.

Interdisciplinary Fellow Group 1: Migration, Mobility and Displacement, February – May 2019, MIASA premises, University of Ghana

An innovative format of the preliminary phase was to have fellowship groups to work collectively on various specific topics for a period of four months. The first IFG (of four) was on the cross-cutting topic of migration, mobility and displacement. It was convened by Franziska Zanker/Stefan Rother (University of Freiburg) and Prof Joseph Teye (Centre for Migration Studies, University of Ghana). It brought together an international group of 13 senior and early career scholars from Germany, Denmark, UK, Nigeria, South Africa, and five from the University of Ghana. The group was also highly interdisciplinary with academics from Geography, Anthropology, Sociology, Political Science and Development Studies. The IFG was strongly linked to the Centre for Migration Studies at the University of Ghana. The format proved to be very successful. The first two weeks were devoted to the development of a research agenda, entailing a 'bottom up approach' that identified research topics from the research interests and experiences of the fellows. This led to the formation of four main research groups focusing on: 'Free Movement', 'Representation and Narratives', 'Migration Infrastructures' and 'Remittances', with overlapping membership. An end of IFG two-day public conference was held which featured the findings of the four working groups, with discussants, as well as keynotes from a policy fellow (Nunu Kidane) and a guest

researcher (Loren Landau). Additionally, a roundtable discussed the important topic of "Decolonizing Migration Research". The conference was attended by over 100 delegates on both days. Outputs from the IFG include a number of MIASA working papers available to download from the website: https://www.ug.edu.gh/mias-africa/miasa-working-papers

Interdisciplinary Fellow Group 2: 'Parliaments and Democracy in Africa', Preparatory workshop, 18-20 March 2019, Dakar

The workshop "Parliaments and Democracy" was organized as a preparatory activity for the forthcoming Interdisciplinary Fellow Group. It was convened by Dr Anja Osei from Konstanz University. It brought together future fellows and other scholars working on legislatures, political parties, and democratization. Participants came from all over the world, about half of them were African scholars. There was a mix of junior and senior scholars, ranging from PhD students to full professors, as well as academics from both anglophone and francophone contexts, with presentations in either English or French. Future fellows had an opportunity to present their MIASA research proposals for feedback, and the workshop helped to map the field of African legislative studies and draw attention to existing gaps in research for further research. It also gave scholars the opportunity to link up to their peers and discuss possible future collaborations.

'Summer school' on Intra-Regional Migration in Africa, 23-28 May 2019, University of Ghana

Organised by the Centre for Interdisciplinary African Studies at the Goethe-University of Frankfurt and the Point Sud network (Bamako), this summer school included ECRs and final year doctoral students, drawn from a large number of applicants. Selected participants came from all over Africa. For the first two days of the summer school, participants joined the final conference of the Migration IFG, giving young scholars of the summer school the opportunity to network with the international fellows of the IFG. Thereafter, the summer school followed their own programme of speakers, presentations and film shows. The programme was organised along three thematic axes, namely: logics, practices and history of migration; admission and integration of migrants; and migrant relations to the countries of origin. The summer school was bilingual, with an equal number of anglophone and francophone participants, and an almost equal gender balance.

Interdisciplinary Fellowship Group 2: Parliaments and Democracy in Africa, September – December 2019, MIASA premises, University of Ghana

The second IFG brought together an international group of scholars from Germany, Ghana, Togo, the UK and US. It was convened by Dr Anja Osei (Konstanz University) and Dr Seidu Alidu (University of Ghana). Following on from the successful experience of IFG1, the first week was spent with fellows providing an overview of their background, research interests and plans for the IFG. Based on the research foci of the individual fellows, four topics for joint research groups were identified: role of institutional design; candidate selection; representation and accountability; power within parliaments. The IFG has a strong

relationship with the Department of Political Science at the University of Ghana, and contributes to their public lecture series. A two-day conference is planned for the end of the IFG in mid-December. This will provide an opportunity for fellows to present the findings of the research groups to a wider audience, with invitations to other leading scholars, activists and policy-makers from Africa and beyond. Policy and practice roundtables are also planned as part of the conference.

Workshop on 'The Governance of Sustainable Energy Transitions in the Global South', 16-17 September 2019, University of Ghana

This was organised as a preparatory workshop for the fourth Interdisciplinary Fellow Group on the topic of Sustainable Energy Transitions (SETs). It was convened by Simon Bawakyillenuo (Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research, University of Ghana), Vanesa Castán Broto (Urban Institute, University of Sheffield), and Michael Pregernig & Philipp Späth (University of Freiburg). Participants were selected from a call for proposals. The workshop brought together a range of scholars, especially early career researchers, studying the governance of SETs in the Global South. It facilitated the participation of African scholars in particular, though participation was open to researchers whose work was relevant to any Global South context. Paper presenters came from Ghana, Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, South Africa, Germany, Denmark, France and the UK. The workshop fostered a dialogue between interdisciplinary researchers, notably from environmental science and social science perspectives. Participants at the workshop were informed about the call for applications for fellowships to participate in the Interdisciplinary Fellow Group on this topic from September to December 2020.

Final remarks

By September 2019, MIASA has established its presence at the University of Ghana, and has undertaken a full programme of research activities and public scholarly events in the past 12 months. Its approval as a full Institute of the University of Ghana by the Council of the university in September 2018 was a very important step. Similarly the renovation and opening of the office building in December 2018 was another momentous event. The initial few months were also significant in establishing the relevant structures and processes, and not least the teams of people, for the governance and smooth running of the Institute. There is already a full programme of activities planned for the next 12 months until August 2020. This will take us to the end of the preliminary phase and further consolidate the existence of MIASA as an important institute for advanced studies on the African continent, indeed the only one outside of South Africa.

Abena D. Oduro, Director (Ghana)

Gordon Crawford, Director (Germany)