LAGSUS 2003-2006

Summary

Research on this project was carried out between July/October 2003 and June/September 2006 by researchers from the universities of Frankfurt, Kassel and Zurich in close cooperation with counterparts in Ivory Coast (Centre Suisse de Recherche Scientifique); Namibia (Univ. of Namibia); Indonesia (Universitas Tadulako, Palu), and with actors engaged in various roles in local development projects. Local communities participating in the research were the Tura (Ivory Coast), the Herero (Namibia), and speakers of different local languages situated in the perimeter of the Lore Lindu Park in Sulawesi.[1] In the wake of the Ivorian crisis, an outpost in Uganda was added, which contributed significantly to the project. The declared objective of the project, namely to study the relevance of local language for sustainability in development, was generally well received by the host communities : on the one hand at the academic level, as evidenced by the strong participation of the universities in Namibia and Indonesia at the annual LAGSUS conferences in 2004 and 2006 (the conference 2005 was held in Germany with a small number of invited guests attending for evaluatory purposes), and two colloquia devoted to LAGSUS topics in 2004 and 2006 at the CSRS in Ivory Coast. Media coverage of these events ranged from reports in local papers to TV specials. Sustained interest and participation in the rural target areas - an indicator of a hitherto little noticed general awareness of language-related issues among the populations concerned – called for a language-sensitive type of Action-Research, which in turn provided a natural frame for

- field-testing the core hypothesis underlying the research : *communicative sustainability* as a prerequisite to « real world » sustainability ;

- elaborating its methodological correlate : *local language hermeneutics*, a set of rules and guidelines for identifying and interpreting communicative sustainability indicators in local discourse ;

- observing, analyzing and documenting its ethnographic correlate : *procedural infrastructure*, culturally determined sets of institutionalized conversational routines (C-type knowledge), essential to local decision-making processes on which effects of sustainability hinge to a large extent.

As a result, the role of the local language can be defined as follows :

1. as an epistemic tool for accessing local analysis of local and global issues;

2. as a factor of social cohesion, via language-governed exclusion or inclusion;

3. as a clearing place serving to mediate between expert and local knowledge ;

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[1] Improperly assimilated to Kaili. See www.lagsus.de for information on the individual sites as well as on the theoretical underpinnings of the project.

4. as the privileged instrument of implementing and monitoring local development;

5. as an object(ive) of development in its own right;

6. as a means of appropriation of both new and old contents, with implications for environmental responsibilisation;

7. through writing, as a factor of strengthening local analytical capacities and redefining functional role attributions between languages in multilingual environments, as well as the role relationship between experts and actors.

The degree to which these insights are supported by, or can be applied to, the different settings vary from to case to case, depending on the socio-political, physical, economic and historical environment in which the inquiry took place, depending also on the consistency with which the proposed research methodology was applied. Nevertheless, taken as a set of parameters with varying distributional properties, they have proven to be enlightening in environments ranging from institutionally stable settings (e.g. Herero) to crisis-affected areas in which institutional support to development had vanished in the wake of political strife, such as Western Ivory Coast (Tura). They thus provide a broadly applicable framework from which guidelines for defining and enhancing communicative factors influencing the outcome of development interventions may be drawn. It may be further submitted that heightened awareness of the language factor in development processes according to the findings of the project will lead to reducing mutual irrelevance between those participating in the development process, and thus will contribute to make participation come alive.