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Part A Fundamentals
- **Teil B Forschungsüberblicke und einzelne Ansätze/**
Part B Research Overviews and Specific Approaches
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Dennis Puorideme

SKAD analysis of development intervention in contemporary African society: reflecting on current and future challenges

Abstract: Technocratic approach to development in Africa has dominated the development landscape till date, but not without problems. Thus, how are conventional development interventions and practices connected to situated socio-historical processes in contemporary African societies and what are the ramifications? The SKAD analysis underpinned this study and showed that the technocratic form of knowledge continues to dominate Africa's development without recourse to situated discourses and forms of knowledge. So, this study recommends discourse and development studies scholars and practitioners give special attention to the situated interpretations of the *dispositif* for »sustainable development«.

Keywords: Africa, Sustainable development, Discourse, SKAD analysis, *dispositif*, social assistance, Ghana

Zusammenfassung: Technokratische Ansätze haben die entwicklungspolitische Landschaft in Afrika dominiert, nicht jedoch ohne Probleme. Vor diesem Hintergrund stellt sich die Frage, wie gängige entwicklungspolitische Interventionen und Praktiken mit sozio-historisch situierten Prozessen in gegenwärtigen, afrikanischen Gesellschaften verbunden sind und was die Rahmenbedingungen dieser Verbindung sind. Die im Folgenden eingenommene wissenssoziologisch-diskursanalytische Perspektive kann mit Blick auf diese Fragestellung(en) aufzeigen, dass technokratische Wissensformen weiterhin auf Afrika zielende Entwicklungsinterventionen und -praktiken dominieren und hierbei soziohistorisch situierte Diskurse und Wissensformen weitestgehend ignorieren. Der folgende Beitrag plädiert vor diesem Hintergrund dafür, die spezifisch situierten Interpretationen des *Dispositivs* der »nachhaltigen Entwicklung« bei der Analyse und Erforschung von Entwicklungsprozessen und -politiken verstärkt zu berücksichtigen.

Schlagwörter: Afrika, nachhaltige Entwicklung, Diskurs, Wissenssoziologische Diskursanalyse, *Dispositiv*, Ghana

Introduction

Geopolitical, resource, economic power struggle and accelerated globalisation processes are still key features of current human condition. Also, colonialism, postcolonial and neo-liberal struggles and the ramifications are real for Africa and the developing world (Collier 2008). These realities are defined, categorised and discussed under the theme of development in development studies literature, and the peculiarity of the low level

of economy has been a basic feature of the developing world in relation to the industrialised world (Shi-xu/Prah/Pardo 2016). Thus, with few exceptions and for a long time, the term ›development‹ has been associated with resource (aid) transfer and use, in a linear fashion, with an aim to transform the developing world, especially, the African economy (Collier 2008). However, a general assessment of Africa's development in the context of its multifaceted socio-cultural and political organisation in relation to the rest of the world is hardly undertaken. This study argues that the bureaucratic transformation and development intervention in the developing world and in Africa is not devoid of »power/knowledge regimes« or »assemblages« and struggles. The aim of this study is to interrogate the ramifications of power/knowledge regimes in relation to the transformative agenda of the development interventions in Africa's development discourses beyond mere resource allocation and use. That implies, extending the study of Africa's development intervention and transformation to include, for instance, situated discourses, social actors, practices and outcomes in specific socio-historical context.

The central questions in this study are, how are discursive constructions connected to situated socio-historical processes in contemporary African societies and what are the ramifications? By »discursive construction« (Keller 2018), I refer to the diverse materialities, practices, relations of the dispositif or technocratic development intervention. To better understand the connection between technocratic development interventions and situated discourses of contemporary African societies, this study uses one of the many revolutionary social protection programmes for the poor in Africa, social assistance, as the point of departure. Social assistance is a non-contributory intervention usually financed by the state from tax revenues and sometimes with temporary and minimal donor financial and technical support (Puorideme 2018). It comes in many forms including cash transfer programmes, public works programmes, fee waivers on basic health care and education (Carter et al. 2019) or a combination of two or more of such forms. However, for the purpose of this study, the focus is limited to cash transfer programme in Africa, specifically, Ghana. Currently, social assistance in the form of cash transfer programmes is common and central to poverty reduction in Africa despite the limited coverage of many poor households (OECD 2019). For these programmes, many successes have been documented in relation to reduced poverty, inequality and vulnerability (Bastagli et al. 2016; Ralston et al. 2017; Roelen et al. 2016; OECD 2019), but there are still some evident socio-political drawbacks in relation to horizontal and vertical social cohesion, which need securing and strengthening in situated contexts (Puorideme 2022). Thus, beyond the cash transfer programmes' impacts and in line with the apparent socio-political drawbacks mentioned above, this study sheds light on the ramifications of the development interventions in the context of Ghana.

Brief socio-political context of Ghana

Ghana is a »postcolonial society« despite its pre-colonial history. Thus, the local or traditional social structures remain relevant and practiced alongside the Western or bureaucratic social organisations. Similarly, each of the forms of social organisations are contingent on different

forms of knowledge, but the western or bureaucratic and the enduring locally situated forms of knowledge coexist in contemporary Ghana (Puorideme 2018). For instance, traditional political or governing systems exist in local communities alongside the modern constitutional democratic government. Thus, the authority of actors in both situations is limited by the traditional political norms and practices or the constitution of the state. In the same way, the understanding and practices of family systems and care in the traditional contexts differ from the household as a unit of bureaucratic analysis and intervention (Puorideme/Christensen 2022). Furthermore, the traditional Ghanaian society is heterogenous with varying ethnic groupings, cultural practices and local languages, but only eleven of these languages are government-sponsored (Puorideme 2018). Research participants in the local contexts in which the data for this study were gathered, spoke different languages – *Twɪ* in the south and *Dagaare* in the northwest of Ghana. However, English language is the official language of the nation for the conduct of government business and activities of bureaucratic organisations, also academic research is mainly conducted, documented and reported in the English language.

Conceptual objects and methods

To answer the research questions in relation to the situated context of Ghana mentioned above, the theoretical, conceptual and methodological tools for this study are drawn from the »Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse« (Keller 2018). Furthermore, in relation to the SKAD approach, this study is a hermeneutic situatedness of »meaning-making orientated discourse study« beyond linguistic focused discourse analysis. It privileges an ethnographic design and methods including ethnographic observation, interviews. Also, situated interpretation is the primary analytical approach. To enable data collection and analysis, the cash transfer programme is regarded as a discursive construction or *dispositif* (Keller 2018). By this I denote the procedures and processes in which »social actors mobilise a discourse and who are mobilised by discourse [to] establish a corresponding infrastructure of discourse production and problem solving« (ibid., p. 37). By discourse, I mean those situated and ordered practices of meaning-making and the formation of objects in specific contexts. For Keller (2018, p. 20), discourse is »realised through the communicative actions of social actors«, and it is

»a regulated practice of statement formulation responding to some problem, urgency or need for action, including knowing something, defining a situation and perpetuating or transforming a given order as such problems for action.« (ibid.)

Ghana's LEAP programme as *Dispositif*

The »Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty« (LEAP) is a cash transfer programme, which aims at reducing poverty and unemployment within the population of Ghana, thus, »the programme's main goal is to reduce poverty by increasing consumption and

promoting access to services and opportunities amongst the extremely poor and vulnerable households» (Puorideme 2022, p. 5). This section highlights the relevant aspects and elements of the programme as a »dispositif«. First, from the national to the local communities, there are different categories of social actors' performances in discursive structuration contingent on different forms of knowledge that are either rationally technocratic or traditionally situated and substantive. For, example, at the national level, the centre of discursive productions, there are programme officials who are staff of government, and they perform a variety of functions in different departments including MIS, case management and monitoring. Also, there are transnational agencies' actors who lend technical and financial support to enable the programme to achieve its goal. Similarly, social workers at the district level are intermediaries between beneficiaries in local communities and the programme officials at the national programme office. Furthermore, there are community focal persons selected and endorsed by both the district social workers and programme officials as intermediaries, mostly, between the local beneficiaries and district social welfare officials.

Consequently, it is evident that a whole network of complex elements, and relations are formed between the social categories enumerated above. Also, there is a hierarchy of relations and forms of knowledge, vertical relations between national level social actors and local community actors, and horizontal relations between actors at the national level and actors at the local community level. In addition, outside the programme's domain itself, there are other local actors, such as the local family heads and chiefs in the local communities aside beneficiaries that cannot be ignored, even though they are not directly involved in the operations of the programme after facilitating the community entry protocols (Puorideme 2018). Also, relations at the level of the different forms of knowledge are evident even though it may be a relation of domination and resistance, clashes of rationality and contestations between technocratic and situated knowledge forms owing to the actors' contingent embodied constitution and interpretation of the situated context (Keller 2018). Aside the materiality of social actors mentioned above, a complexity of materiality and material practices are performed and realised within the programme. For instance, the programme document, information leaflets and brochures, enumeration and payment devices, software and templates are produced and used as well as conceptual and spatial schemes for evaluation and certification of payment sites and field activities – thanks to the »basic capacity and freedom of sign creation and interpretation of a present situation inherent to the human condition« (ibid., p. 22). At each level and process in the programme, for instance, »targeting«, »enumeration«, »enrolment« and »payments«, there are a complex myriad of interactions between actors, materiality and practices.

A review of conventional development and discourse studies approaches

Development in the post war period was mainly conceived as a process to improve the low-level economic progress and poverty in the developing countries and to transform

them into industrialised societies (Collier 2008). Also, development was interpreted as a condition in the developing world that needs transformation through a planned or technocratic process, so it was a technical activity performed by technocrats according to technical rationality and has been the central focus of development studies or research till present. Thus, mainstream development research »has usually been conducted from such disciplinary perspectives as political science, economics, sociology, law, geography, demography, urban and rural studies, and so on« (Shi-xu et al. 2016, p. 2).

Similarly, development programmes including cash transfer programmes, till date have always had as their main goal to transform societies in the developing world by improving the poor conditions of the population that hold them back and thwart progress and transformation. Interestingly, however, conventional development studies rather than development discourses studies are still the point of departure in the studies of cash transfer programmes. Closely related to the conventional approaches to development is the recent focus on incorporating qualitative methods, for instance, mixed method approach grounded in pragmatist philosophy, to account for both quantitative and qualitative aspects of development interventions in developing societies (Roelen/Devereux 2014).

Recently, contrary to the conventional development studies or research, Shi-xu et al. (2016) have proposed an innovative approach to studying development in the developing world from the perspective of the people and their culture. The term »development discourse studies« was proposed as an emerging paradigm in which there is a shift in attention from development as a condition of the developing world to »development as discourse« where the emphasis gravitate towards the ›doings‹ and ›sayings‹ of the people of the developing world themselves. According to Shi-xu and his colleagues from Africa and Asia, development discourses should be studied from a »cultural discourse approach«, a framework that places emphasis on the culture of the people of the developing world rather than on the technocratic perspective. Consequently, development denotes a »cultural-discursive phenomenon« and must be studied as »the development affairs of the developing world« (Shi-xu et al. 2016, p. 3) by culturally competent native researchers who must take the native perspectives. In their recent book, *»Discourses of the Developing World: Researching properties, problems and potentials of the developing world«*, Shi-xu et al. (2016) have succinctly outlined the conventional development thinking and practice, the relegation of the language and culture of contemporary African societies as major challenges of Africa's development, which must be addressed through the development discourse studies approach.

Whereas Shi-xu and his colleagues took a non-western development discourse studies approach to studying the development affairs of the developing world, Puorideme (2018) developed and used an interdisciplinary discourse framework in which he mobilised »conversation analysis« (talk and text), »critical discourse studies« (power) and »multimodal discourses« (material and material performances), and relied extensively on Foucault's concepts of discourse and power in terms of governmentality to study a cash transfer programme in Ghana. His study brought interdisciplinary discourse studies framework into dialogue with aspects of development studies, such as gender and

governance, a shift from purely conventional development studies, to analyse specific development intervention in the developing world context. Also, he used ethnography design to access data and analyse social actors' practices in relation to the cash transfer programme as a development intervention. In his recent studies, Puorideme (2019, 2022; Puorideme/Christensen 2022) combined discourse and ethnography and still in a Foucauldian tradition to study relevant aspects of the cash transfer programme, which include gender power relations, the concept of family and family relation as well as social cohesion in Ghana. Shi-xu et al. (2016) and Puorideme, (2018) were both inclined to grounding their studies in the situated context of the developing world as the point of departure rather than mainstream development studies approaches. However, the hermeneutic situatedness meaning-making orientated discourse studies of SKAD conceptual objects – discourse and dispositif – corresponding methods of interpretative analysis were not explicitly emphasised.

SKAD thrives on the social relations of knowledge and the politics of knowledge and knowing, and its objects of study include discourse and dispositif with interpretation as its corresponding analytic approach (Keller 2018). Such an approach is related to »ethnomethodology and ethnomethodological conversation analysis« (EMCA) approach to discourse studies, which Puorideme (2018) mobilised in the interdisciplinary discourse studies framework. However, this study specifically employs SKAD concepts and corresponding methods to analyse the LEAP programme as dispositif in Ghana.

Perpetuating and transforming existing discourse order

This section presents the analysis of the materiality, performances and actions of social actors in the LEAP programme of Ghana considered as a dispositive, via two sub-sections: the first comprises the »discursive perpetuation of western or bureaucratic order of discourse and forms of knowledge« at the level of individual, and the second comprises »the discursive transformation of situated existing order of discourse at the level of social relations and form of knowledge«. As a SKAD inspired study, it re-uses data collected in 2017 for a PhD thesis (Puorideme 2018). Three relevant examples of data excerpts are presented below.

The perpetuation of western or bureaucratic order of discourse

Classification and categorisation are common in conventional development studies and practice and bring people under expert and technocratic calculation for action, thus, this section analyses the processes, material performances and forms of knowledge and the ramifications. The data presented here comprise an interaction between the Researcher (R) and a Programme Officer (PO) at the LEAP programme office in Accra, which was collected in 2017 for a PhD study in Ghana as mentioned earlier. Also, relevant secondary documents referenced in the analysis include the Ghana Living Standard Survey report

and the LEAP operational manual (Government of Ghana 2020). The purpose of the interaction between R and PO was to ascertain how individuals and households were classified and formed in discourse.

Excerpt 1

- 1 R: there is one =one interesting thing that
 2 also came out of your discussion err
 3 PO: mm
 4 R: the household must be poor
 5 PO: ↑yes
 6 R: ha-
 7 PO: [↑extremely] poor
 8 R: [how do]
 9 how do you determine
 10 that a who:le
 11 PO: ok
 12 R: and who qualifies to be poor
 13 PO: ok(.)so before we go out
 14 we actually take data
 15 from the ghana statistical service(.)
 16 there is something call glss
 17 R: yeah(.)ghana living standards survey
 18 PO: survey
 19 R: ↓yeah
 20 PO: ok so we take the latest information from glss
 21 so we take that data

(Source of data, Puorideme 2018, p. 106)

The key feature in the interaction excerpt 1 above involves a definition of the »poverty situation« (Keller 2018) of individuals and households (lines 4 and 7) in local communities, but in a technocratic way. The process involves the mobilisation of a plethora of materialities, performances and practices of certain institutions and forms of knowledge (lines 15, 16, 20, and 21). In such instance, the programme officers approach the definition of situations as experts or technocrats mobilising bureaucratic forms of knowledge without recourse to locally situated definitions of the conditions of members of families who cannot be defined as individuals and households in local communities (see Puorideme 2018). Consequently, poor individuals and households are statistically defined,

mainly for the purpose of efficiency and efficient intervention (Puorideme 2020), but such technocratic definitions are unintelligible in the local context and thus are contested and resisted as we may see in the next data set.

Excerpt 2

- 1 PO: some people also
 2 they don't want to be seen as poor
 3 like you are saying
 4 R: mm
 5 PO: WE ARE NOT POOR
 6 WE DON'T WANT ANY INTERVENTION
 7 meanwhile they are(.)
 8 R: mm(.)ok
 9 Based on the data you have
 10 PO: ↑yes
 11 R: ok
 12 PO: so there are interesting dynamics when you
 13 go [out there into er]
 14 R: [and =and do you]
 15 i mean(.).it's very interesting(.)

(Source of data, Puorideme, 2018, p. 118)

The apparent technocratic situation definition in excerpt 1, however, does not always go down well with the local community leaders such as opinion leaders and chiefs as observed in excerpt 2 above. Thus, even when the technocratic definition appears accomplished, there were instances where some people didn't want to be seen as poor, so they will tell programme officers »WE ARE NOT POOR AND WE DON'T WANT ANY INTERVENTION« (lines 5 and 6). However, the programme official was astonished at such locally situated concrete contestations as observed in lines 7 and 10, thus, the official described such manifest resistance as »interesting dynamics« out there in the local community (Lines 12 and 13). It is evident the two categories of actors, the »programme official as a technocrat« and the »local people«, particularly, the chiefs and opinion leaders approached the definition of the situation from two different forms of knowledge that are bureaucratic and socially situated respectively. In the local communities' discourse, it is difficult to objectify members of families as individuals, and in the same way, it is difficult to reduce families to households and treat them as such (Puorideme/Christensen 2022) in the community. Social relations in the local context are irreducible to technocratic forms of knowledge and knowing, thus, the situated interpretation is necessary for better understanding.

The transformation of situated existing order of discourse

As mentioned earlier, Ghana is a postcolonial society in which bureaucratic and local traditional social relations and forms of knowledge and knowing coexist and play key roles in the interpretation and understanding of everyday life. However, how individuals approach interpretation and understanding depends on the issues at hand, the audiences involved and what the individual wants to achieve. Nevertheless, as observed in the previous analysis above, the coexistence of the two forms of knowledge is not without contestations owing to the »politics of knowledge and knowing« (Keller 2018). In this section, the focus is on the ways conventional development approach defines, intervenes and transforms existing orders of discourse and social relations by mobilising bureaucratic forms of knowledge and knowing. Already, it is evident how members of families were statistically objectified and households delineated for technocratic analysis and intervention. Similarly, this section presents and analyses data about ways programme officials and technical officers defined situated social relations and gender relations in communities and families in a way to transform such relations in line with technocratic and bureaucratic social relations and organisations without recourse to the culture and everyday life and discourses of the people of the developing world (Shi-xu et al. 2016) such as the local communities in Ghana. The data presented below is an interaction between the researcher (R) and a technical officer (TO) of a transnational organisation involved in the cash transfer programme in Ghana.

Excerpt 3

- 1 R: gender has featured
- 2 very strongly in leap
- 3 is TNA in any way interested in
- 4 this issue of gender and
- 5 all that within the leap programme
- 6 TO: very much(.)you know i told you that
- 7 one of the driving
- 8 the key driving force of
- 9 the work of TNA is equity and
- 10 when you look at inequities
- 11 gender is one dimension
- 12 one source of inequity
- 13 so you may go and take attendance
- 14 or enrolment or learning achievements
- 15 and you see that there are differences
- 16 between males and females
- 17 you take poverty and

- 18 you see that there are differences
- 19 between males and females
- 20 so gender is one of the
- 21 the dimensions in which
- 22 inequality expresses itself
- 23 so gender influences a lot of err
- 24 and gender is one of the
- 25 key considerations of the work of TNA
- 26 both in how we formulate our programmes
- 27 and how we implement them we
- 28 we try to help to breakdown
- 29 some of the barriers

(Source of data, Puorideme 2018, p. 206 f.)

Interestingly, the technical officer's statements about gender and gender relations were all about how the transnational agency conceptualises and defines those concepts. Of course, as indicated earlier, conventional development (studies) thinking (Collier 2008) is still present and informs how development is done to and in the developing world (Shi-xu et al. 2016) from the perspective of the TNA as expressed in the utterances of TO in lines 6 to 12 in excerpt 3 above. Such bureaucratic definitions appear to universalise gender and gender relations in non-western societies. As mentioned earlier even though the transnational agency may be, genuinely empowering and addressing specific practical needs of males and females in the local context from a developmentalist perspective by focusing on financial resources distribution, the sociocultural and political discursive situatedness of the people in the developing world, especially in the local communities of Ghana need special attention and recognition. SKAD conceptual and methodological orientation is relevant in addressing such conventional developmentalists shortcomings. For instance, without placing so much emphasises on such global concepts, as in gender and gender relations, for their global appeal, though important to SKAD analysis, it addresses the situatedness of discourses in specific contexts and deals with the unique and relevant discursive materialities, performances and practices. As observed in excerpt 3, the technical officer's statements about gender and gender differences are limited to a bureaucratic and technocratic conception of gender and gender differences in development (lines 23 to 29).

However, in Ghana, it is difficult to propose and propagate a 'technocratic universal' definition for gender and gender relations and by extension differences between males and females, because the local context of Ghana is not uniform. Uniformity is only found in the bureaucratic or technocratic organisation of the Ghanaian society contingent on the western constitutional democracy as adopted and practiced in Ghana in relation to the country's postcolonial history. Locally, social relations, including gender and gender

relations are still grounded in the two major lineage systems, matrilineal and patrilineal systems, and in these two systems, gender relations or social relations cannot be the same (Puorideme 2019). The same can be said about language, tribes and ethnic groups across the Ghanaian society, thus, the discourses of the people in Ghana cannot be universal – it is best to talk about and work with multiplicities of situated discourses.

Concluding remarks

This study is mainly a SKAD inspired analysis of a development programme. In addition to discourse and the *dispositif* as its conceptual frames, it drew on the SKAD's methodological orientation grounded in interpretivist research approaches. Most importantly, the interpretations are based on what Keller (2018) called the »hermeneutics of the given«. Consequently, this study is not grounded in disciplinary and conventional development studies or approaches to development practice that have dominated the development landscape since the post war period in a technocratic and west-centric fashion (Shi-xu et al. 2016). The SKAD analysis shed light on the additional benefits of paying keen attention to the situatedness of discourses in relation to development intervention as *dispositif* for a better understanding of development in the developing world. This is in felicitous dialogue with Puorideme's (2018) Interdisciplinary Discourse Studies Framework as well as Shi-xu et al.'s (2016) development discourses studies embedded in the cultural approach to discourse studies, particularly, of the developing world (Shi-xu 2015). All these approaches are useful in denaturalising west-centric and technocratic disciplinary approaches to studying development and discourses of the developing world.

However, studying discourses and *dispositif* (development intervention) of the developing world, especially, in contemporary African societies such as Ghana is not without problems. The apparent neglect or little attention to local languages in favour of English language as the official language of the government of the state, and the heavily diverse ethnic groups and cultural practices across Ghana are key challenges. As indicated earlier in the overview of the Ghanaian context, there are many local languages that are spoken by many ethnic groups, but only eleven of them have the support of government and thus are studied. However, many official documents (e.g., development programmes or intervention operational manuals) are not written in the situated languages but written in the English language and as such limited to the few educated elite. Thus, the attitude of the government of the state towards the study and use of locally situated languages contributes to the growing limited local cultural competence and limited situated discourse comprehension. What is more worrying is the fact that contemporary native researchers and scholars educated in the English language are limited in conducting situated authentic interpretation of discourse or *dispositif*. However, the technocratic interpretation of discursive materiality and performances in the English language does miss the hermeneutic meaning-making which SKAD analysis cherishes. Consequently, this study recommends that discourse studies scholars and development practitioners in the developing world pay attention to interpretive analysis grounded in pragmatism and

the symbolic interaction traditions to provide situated interpretations of the dispositif or development interventions relevant to both practical and strategic needs of the people in contemporary African societies.

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Research Interest: Discourse, Communication, Management, and Development in contemporary societies