The Maria Sibylla Merian Institute for Advanced Studies in Africa opens at the University of Ghana

An international center for meeting, interaction, cooperation and networking between researchers from Germany, Ghana, the continent of Africa and beyond: the Maria Sibylla Merian Institute for Advanced Studies in Africa (MIASA) has launched with an inaugural conference. MIASA is based in Legon (Accra), with a secondary site located at the Centre de Recherches sur les Politiques Sociales (CREPOS) in Dakar, Senegal. The University of Freiburg with the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies (FRIAS) and the Arnold Bergstraesser Institute (ABI) is responsible for developing and coordinating the international research college.

One major goal of the new center is to contribute significantly to reducing the global asymmetry of knowledge. “MIASA will massively strengthen dialog in the humanities and social sciences between the continent of Africa and the northern hemisphere,” says Prof. Dr. Hans-Jochen Schiewer, Rector of the University of Freiburg. “It offers scope for cutting-edge research, promotes creative cooperation by outstanding academics across disciplinary and national borders, and will attract young talent as well as established academics with the aim of stimulating groundbreaking developments in research as well as in African and European society.”

“We look forward to the next years as the Institute takes a foothold in the University of Ghana and on the African continent”, says Abena Oduro, MIASAs Director, Ghana. MIASA is dedicated to the issue of sustainable governance with the research foci sustainable environmental transformation, sustainable conflict management, and sustainable democracy. “We define governance as the interaction of the informal and formal rules that govern public affairs, incorporated in the social, material and cultural practices of daily life,” explains Prof. Dr. Andreas Mehler, Director of the ABI and Professor of Development Theories and Development Policy at the University of Freiburg. In the initial phase of MIASA, issues such as migration, democratic consolidation and ecological reconstruction will be at the heart of collaborations by experts from different disciplines and different origins.

The first steps are already mapped out: MIASA is organizing an international workshop in December 2018 on the restitution of art objects acquired during colonial times – an issue that is much discussed at present, not least with regard to ethnographic collections in German museums. In February 2019, the first group of international and interdisciplinary fellows will come to spend several months at MIASA in Accra and research the subject of migration, mobility and forced resettlement. Preparations are also underway for an individual Fellowship program when the project enters its main phase from 2021. “A special program funded by the University of Freiburg will also enable academics from Africa to come to FRIAS as fellows,” says Prof. Dr. Bernd Kortmann, Director of FRIAS and Professor of Linguistics at the English Department of the University of Freiburg.

MIASA will also give further impetus to Eucor – The European Campus, the grouping of universities of the Upper Rhine region: working in close cooperation with the Centre for Africa Studies at the University of Basel, through FRIAS and the ABI the University of Freiburg will be establishing an Africa Center in Freiburg. A major international conference on
Africa-related research will take place in Freiburg in 2022.

MIASA website
www.mias-africa.org

Background information
With the Maria Sibylla Merian Centres international research colleges, the Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF) aims to promote the internationalization of humanities, cultural and social sciences in Germany through close bilateral and multilateral cooperation projects at sites outside Germany. In regions and partner countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa that are important to academic and science policy, colleges are being created where a group of academics from Germany and the host country will research jointly into humanities and social science issues and regularly invite fellows. The colleges are being set up and run in partner with German scientific institutions.

The German partners of MIASA are the University of Freiburg with FRIAS and the ABI, the German Historical Institute Paris as a member of the Max Weber Foundation, the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA) in Hamburg, the University of Konstanz and the Centre for Interdisciplinary African Studies (ZIAF) at the University of Frankfurt. The BMBF is initially providing the center with 1.7 million euros funding for a preparatory phase until the end of 2020. For the planned twelve years funding period, total funding will amount to 18 million euros.

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