A Bridge for the Exchange of Knowledge with Africa

The Africa Centre for Transregional Studies is holding a virtual opening ceremony

New University of Freiburg institution for interdisciplinary research with African scientists launches: on 4 May 2020 the Africa Centre for Transregional Studies (ACT) will be officially opened with speeches by the former German President Prof. Dr. Horst Köhler and Prof. Dzodzi Tsikata, Director of the Institute of African Studies (IAS) at the University of Ghana. Baden-Württemberg’s Minister of Science, Research and the Arts, Theresia Bauer, Prof. Dr. Hans-Jochen Schiewer, Rector of the Albert Ludwig University of Freiburg, and the Lord Mayor of the City of Freiburg Martin Horn will also speak at the opening ceremony. Because of the corona pandemic the ceremony is taking place virtually, and the speeches will be accessible on the website of the Arnold Bergstraesser Institute (ABI): www.arnold-bergstraesser.de/act

ACT is an interdisciplinary association of research institutes and individual scientists. Its research focuses on pan-regional studies of relevance to Africa. The center will invite researchers from Africa to visit Freiburg so that they can study global issues such as migration or ecological transformation alongside academics here. “Jointly organized conferences, public lectures, and freely available publications on the results of research will also help to promote a global academic dialog and give a greater presence and therefore influence to African voices,” explains Prof. Dr. Andreas Mehler, Director of ABI and ideas generator for ACT. The current pandemic has meant that he and his team have had to rethink the first steps for the new institution, “We would be very happy if the situation were to improve soon so that we could get going properly. Nonetheless we are considering what is possible remotely and with digital technology – things that we hadn’t previously considered – even after we have overcome this crisis. All the same I am hoping that we will still be able to resume the ‘Freiburger Afrikagespräche’ series of public lectures this year.”

The new University of Freiburg institution is part of the Baden-Württemberg initiative ‘Africa im Blick’. With its initiative the federal state government wants to raise the profile of existing cooperations with stakeholders in Africa and uncover potential for the expansion of in-depth cooperations. Within this framework ACT will also be a service center for scientific and social exchange with Africa in the Federal State of Baden-Württemberg: for example, African students and researchers can learn about opportunities to study and work in Europe at the Freiburg center.

Statements

“ACT comes to fill an important niche as part of a global community of African Studies Centres. (…) Rarely do African scholars have the resources to conduct research in other African countries, let alone beyond Africa. Becoming researchers of countries and peoples outside Africa is much more than extending the geographical boundaries of knowledge production in Africa. It goes to the very heart of the politics of knowledge production in normalising Africans as scientists and knowers who may come from elsewhere, but are grappling with similar questions regarding what it means to be human.”

Prof. Dzodzi Tsikata, Direktorin des Instituts für Afrikastudien an der Universität von Ghana
“The corona pandemic is currently making it brutally clear how much human existence on our planet is interconnected. There’s a great need for transregional research. We need to know more and be more aware of the global dependencies that shape all our lives. The new Africa center in Freiburg will (...) make a contribution to the visibility of interrelationships and to reducing global asymmetries of knowledge. In doing so it will not only research about Africa, but with Africa.”
Prof. Dr. Horst Köhler, German President (ret’d)

“Africa in all its diversity and variety is a dynamic continent, a young continent with a great hunger for education and great innovative capacity. We need Africa as a partner if we are to tackle the great global challenges facing humanity.”
Theresia Bauer, Baden-Württemberg Minister of Science, Research and the Arts

“ACT will host African researchers who set their own research agendas based on their own interests and knowledge, and therefore is open as regards their subject matter. At the same time, we want to work together with African academics on solutions to global challenges such as migration, racism or ecological transformation. The African perspective is essential to sustainable worldwide development that is fair to the whole of society and must therefore be incorporated into current research into contemporary issues. With ACT we are doing this across all disciplines: in the humanities and social sciences just as much as in the sciences or legal studies.”
Prof. Dr. Hans-Jochen Schiewer, Rector of the University of Freiburg

More information
• https://www.arnold-bergstraesser.de/act
• www.pr.uni-freiburg.de/pm/2020/erstes-zentrum-fuer-afrikaforschung-in-baden-wuerttemberg
• www.kooperation-international.de/aktuelles/nachrichten/detail/info/eroeffnung-des-africa-centre-for-transregional-research-act-in-freiburg/
• https://www.arnold-bergstraesser.de/sites/default/files/abi-newsletter_1-2020.pdf (page 4)

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Original publication:
Dzodzi Tsikata, Horst Köhler, Theresia Bauer and Hans-Jochen Schiewer open the Africa Centre for Transregional Research with virtual speeches.
Illustration: Sandra Meyndt