

INVESTIGATING THE POSSIBILITY OF CREATING AN INTERCONTINENTAL RESEARCH HUB FOCUSING ON ZAMBIA

The African Studies Centre (ASC), Leiden, the Netherlands, established 1947, is the largest and best equipped Africanist research centre in Europe, with an high-ranking research staff, a competent support staff, several successful publication series, and one of the best African Studies libraries in the world – with special emphasis on digital library services. In close collaboration with African research institutions (e.g. CODESRIA) and individual African researchers, and with associated Africanist research institutions and individual researchers in the Netherlands, Europe, and worldwide, the centre aims at the creation of relevant Africanist knowledge in social-sciences disciplines in the broadest possible sense, i.e. including economics, history, philosophy, etc.

The ASC is currently reconsidering its research policy and organisation. In the process, the idea has come up to concentrate ASC research and research cooperation, now somewhat thinly spread all over the African continent and islands, into a handful of ‘research hubs’. In practice, each ‘research hub’ is to concentrate on one selected African country. In the light of current, counter-hegemonic thinking on intercontinental research collaboration in the production of African knowledge, each hub will ideally comprise the following:

1. a fair selection of that country’s active and qualified researchers, as employed at (selected) universities and research institutions
2. a fair selection of that country’s PhD and MA students as clustering on (1)
3. at least one major university
4. that university’s library and publishing wing
5. a wider, and actively expanding, network of research associate’s from among that country’s civil society, interested and knowledgeable non-academics, who will provide local knowledge, feedback and accountability, and who will link up to the hub through a special, easily accessible website, and through other, more classic, means of communication e.g. a Newsletter
6. a small number of ASC researchers specialising on the country in question
7. ASC-associated researchers (senior ones, as well as PhD and MA candidates), in the Netherlands, in Europe and world-wide, specialising on the country in question.

Such a hub is to be a context in which to pool resources, and to further high-quality publications, academic education, and higher degrees, in an atmosphere of exchange, dialogue, mutual respect, mutual learning, and societal relevance.

As a Zambia-researcher of long standing (I came to Zambia as an Assistant Lecturer at UNZA in 1971, and have been engaged in Zambian research, publication and teaching ever since), I have been commissioned by the ASC Director, Prof. Ton Dietz, to look into the possibility of creating this type of research hub in Zambia in the immediate future. For this purpose I will be in Zambia from 5 to 20 July 2011, reviving old ties and seeking to establish new ones.

I would be grateful if in connection with this exploration of feasibility, I could meet with you at your institution, in order to discuss the overall idea of a 'Zambia research hub', and perhaps to initially explore how your institution, and your person, may fit into the overall picture sketched above.

Looking forward to hearing from you and learning from you

yours sincerely,

Wim van Binsbergen