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Law, Rights, and Governance in Africa. A Look to the Future

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The thematic focus of the workshop “Law, Rights, and Governance in Africa. A Look to the Future” - encompasses the study of institutions, actors and phenomena at various levels, i.e. the macro, meso and micro level. As such the workshop will not only build connections between disciplines but also between various levels of analysis.

The workshop theme refers to the study of past and present state law and state institutions, as well as the wide range of religious, traditional, “twilight”, and customary legal political institutions that can be found across the different countries of Africa. Attention is also paid to the increasing political and legal power of private corporations and of networks of businesses and investors, both private and public. At the regional and global level, our focus includes such disparate actors and institutions as the African Union, third states investing in different African countries and international organizations. The workshop’s theme “Law, Rights, and Governance in Africa. A Look to the Future” moreover includes the study of the creation, translation and appropriation of human rights, international business law, and development law. Finally, the workshop pays explicit attention to the governance of -, and the (often-conflicting) rights to natural resources.

We chose the topics of law, rights, and governance because of their relevance for some of the most pressing issues that people, communities and countries all over the continent of Africa are facing. What’s more, current large-scale developments on the continent of Africa, such as the rapidly increasing population, climate change, economic growth, resource stress, urbanization, the spread of new technologies and the displacement of the European border to the continent, cast the themes of law, rights, and governance in a new light and call for new research agendas for the next decade (2020-2030).

Added to the developments sketched above, are developments in the different disciplines from which law, rights, and governance in Africa are studied. These developments too shape the research agendas for 2020-2030. Here we will give some examples from the disciplines we are most familiar with: cultural and social anthropology and law. In cultural and social anthropology, for instance, documents, audit cultures, and bureaucracies more generally, have become important subjects of study. In addition, governance in relation to human security has become an important topic. In law, the recognition of the existence of different and interacting legal systems – while long recognized by other scholars - is leading to new legal scholarship. Similarly, the rights of the child have become an important research topic in law. Recent societal developments have moreover prompted research on legal mobilization in for example South-Africa.

It is evident that both the large-scale developments facing societies across Africa, as well as these new disciplinary developments bring new perspectives to the study of law, rights, and governance on the continent. At the same time, they allow for new interdisciplinary exchanges; that is, new

combinations of different theoretical and topical approaches. For these reasons, exchange between young and early-career researchers from different disciplines on the future of studying law, rights, and governance in Africa is key. It is this group who is best placed to develop new, relevant, multidisciplinary, and innovative research agendas for the next decade (2020-2030).