

Decolonizing Development from African Perspectives

SDIS-3000 (3 credits)

Cameroon: Development and Social Change

This syllabus is representative of a typical semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

Course Description

Cameroon, also known as “Africa in miniature” and more recently as “le continent”, provides the ideal setting for students to explore hierarchies of power and the challenges of decolonizing development in Africa. This course centers a variety of African philosophies including concepts such as Ubuntu, which emphasizes mutual respect and human dignity, the program interrogates dominant development paradigms through the lens of Afrocentric epistemologies. Students engage with theories about development and de/coloniality, the role of global capital in perpetuating patterns of dominance and learn about the relevance of Cameroon’s current development agenda from academics and policy makers.

Through case studies and site visits in Yaounde and Kribi, students will engage with NGOs and the local community to explore African based development practices, including language and cultural orientation. During the experiential visit with the Bagyeli people, an indigenous group in the South of Cameroon, students see first-hand impacts of large-scale development projects, such as the Chad-Cameroon pipeline, on indigenous communities. Through an ethical engagement with the Bagyeli community, students learn about sustainable use of forest resources, indigenous health practices, and the resilience of a vulnerable community confronted with a development industry whose power base is global capital.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Critically examine the concept of development policies, theories and strategies from decolonial standpoint.
- Explore African philosophical concepts such as Ubuntu and others as possible tools and frameworks for theorizing sustainable development.

- Analyze religious and ethnic conflict that continue to define and affect Cameroon's development
- Illustrate the realities, challenges, and successes facing development organizations in Cameroon.
- Critically evaluate existing development paradigms as a step towards conceiving locally grounded alternatives.

Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English, and where French is used, translation to English will be provided, but students will be exposed to vocabulary related to decolonization and development through in-country expert lectures and field visits in a wide range of venues and regional locales.

Instructional Methods

SIT's teaching and learning philosophy is grounded in the experiential learning theory developed by Kolb (1984; 2015) and informed by various scholars, such as Dewey, Piaget, Lewin, among others. Experiential learning theory recognizes that learning is an active process that is not confined to the formal curriculum; "knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 2015, p. 49). Learning involves both content and process. Learning is holistic and happens through various life experiences upon which students draw to generate new ways of knowing and being. Learning involves a community and is a lifelong endeavor. Learning is transformational. The suggested four step-cycle of a *concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation* embedded in the experiential learning model is not linear and might not always happen in that specific order, as any learning is highly context dependent. These stages of taking part in a shared experience; reflecting on that experience by describing and interpreting it; challenging their own assumptions and beliefs to generate new knowledge; and ultimately applying new knowledge, awareness, skills, and attitudes in a variety of situations and contexts are important for students to engage in to become empowered lifelong learners.

In addition, as the AD on this program I encourage the restoration of love and care as a praxis of decoloniality as suggested by Maldonado-Torres (2016).

Required Texts

See the course schedule for a full list of reading assignments.

Attendance and Participation

Due to the nature of SIT Study Abroad programs, and the importance of student and instructor contributions in each and every class session, attendance at all classes and for all program excursions is required. Criteria for evaluation of student performance include attendance and participation in program activities. Students must fully participate in all program components and courses. Students may not voluntarily opt out of required program activities. Valid reasons for absence – such as illness – must be discussed with the academic director or other designated

staff person. Absences impact academic performance, may impact grades, and could result in dismissal from the program.

Late Assignments

SIT Study Abroad programs integrate traditional classroom lectures and discussion with field-based experiences, site visits and debriefs. The curriculum is designed to build on itself and progress to the culmination (projects, ISP, case studies, internship, etc.). It is critical that students complete assignments in a timely manner to continue to benefit from the sequences in assignments, reflections and experiences throughout the program.

Example: Students may request a justified extension for one paper/assignment during the semester. Requests must be made in writing and at least 12 hours before the posted due date and time. If reason for request is accepted, an extension of up to one week may be granted at that time. Any further requests for extensions will not be granted. Students who fail to submit the assignment within the extension period will receive an 'F' for the assignment.

Grading Scale

94-100%	A
90-93%	A-
87-89%	B+
84-86%	B
80-83%	B-
77-79%	C+
74-76%	C
70-73%	C-
67-69%	D+
64-66%	D
below 64	F

Program Expectations

- **Show up prepared.** For an interactive course to succeed, you must be present, on time, and have your readings completed and points in mind for discussion or clarification. Being prepared with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone. Moreover, the content of this course is learned collaboratively, meaning that when a student isn't here, they take away from everyone's opportunity to learn. The only way to maximize our collective learning potential is if we are all here contributing. Valid reasons for absence – such as illness – must be discussed with the academic director or other designated staff person. Absences impact academic performance, may impact grades, and could result in dismissal from the program
- **Submit assignments on time:** SIT Study Abroad programs integrate traditional classroom lectures and discussion with field-based experiences, site visits and debriefs. The curriculum is designed to build on itself and progress to the culmination (projects, ISP, case studies, internship, etc.). It is critical that students complete assignments in a

timely manner to continue to benefit from the sequences in assignments, reflections and experiences throughout the program.

- **Bring your curiosity:** Ask questions in class. Engage the guest lecturers, as these are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak. Remember, there are no foolish questions, and your inquiries might help others in class who have similar ideas/thoughts. By actively participating and showing curiosity, you demonstrate respect for our guests and contribute to creating a dynamic learning environment for everyone.
- **Maintain academic Integrity:** As members of a learning community, we all want to submit work that reflects our own ideas and efforts. Even if it is unintentional, plagiarism can have serious consequences. Before you submit each assignment, ask yourself these questions:
 - Did I reference ideas, quotes, phrases, or facts I read about in a book, article, or website, without citing the author and year of the source where I read about them?
 - Did I paraphrase by changing only a word or two or moving the words around?
 - Did you answer “yes” to any of the above questions? If so, you are committing plagiarism and need to give credit to appropriate sources before you submit your assignment
- **Principled Disagreement:** Learning often involves discomfort. Some discomfort can facilitate personal and collective growth. You, your peers, guest lecturers, instructors, and local constituents, have diverse experiences, values, beliefs, affiliations, and identities. Reflecting on these differences can be emotionally challenging, even when it deepens self-awareness and mutual understanding. In this course, we aim to encourage brave spaces where principled disagreement is encouraged rather than avoiding difficult conversations. *This is challenging work, and we will inevitably make mistakes.* Our goal is to thoughtfully critique ideas rather than attacking individuals. We aim to embrace productive discomfort and minimize unproductive discomfort, striving for principled disagreement.
- **Content Considerations:** Some texts and activities you will encounter in this course delve into sensitive topics that may be emotionally and intellectually challenging. Our classroom is a brave space where we can engage with challenging ideas, question assumptions, and navigate difficult topics with respect and maturity. As possible, I will flag content and activities that are especially graphic or intense, so we are prepared to address them soberly and sensitively. If you are struggling to keep up with the work or participate in the course because of the nature of the content and activities, you should speak with me and/or seek help from counseling services.
- **Our social identities** – Our social identities - race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual identity, religion, mental and physical ability, size, national origin, citizenship status, and more – shape how we are perceived, represented, and treated. They also influence what knowledge and learning is deemed valuable and legitimate. To challenge hegemonic paradigms and perspectives, this course intentionally includes readings, topics, videos, and assignments from authors and perspectives of diverse backgrounds. However, there may be gaps we have overlooked. Your constructive feedback is always welcome on how to make this course more inclusive and transformative.

- **Storing Your Work:** Keep several copies of your work as back up and keep one copy accessible to you through an online forum, such as an attachment in your email, the course learning management system, or cloud-based storage. This way your work will always be available to despite technical issues. Lost files, deleted drives, or computer crashes are not excuses for late, missing work.
- **Personal Technology Use:** Cell phones and other personal electronics can be used for taking notes and other class activities. Off-task usage is not acceptable. You may be marked as absent for habitually using them for something other than classroom activities.
- **Course Communication:** Although the course calendar provides a broad overview and the general sequence of work and assignments for the course, what we accomplish in class will vary, and revisions to the calendar will be posted at the course site. You will need to check the course site regularly. You are responsible for letting me know about any network-related problems that prevent you from accessing or submitting assignments.
- **Classroom recording policy:** To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.

SIT Policies and Resources

Please refer to the [SIT Study Abroad Handbook](#) and the [Policies](#) section of the SIT website for all academic and student affairs policies. Students are accountable for complying with all published policies. Of particular relevance to this course are the policies regarding: academic integrity, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), research and ethics in field study and internships, late assignments, academic status, academic appeals, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and misconduct, and the student code of conduct.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont, such as [Library resources and research support](#), [Accessibility Services](#), [Counseling Services](#), [Title IX information](#), and [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#) resources.

Course Schedule

**Please be aware that topics and excursions may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lecturers' availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs*

Module 1: Introduction to development, theories, policies and strategies

In this module, from a decolonial lens students examine the historical context behind the concept of development with specific reference to Truman Speech of January 20th 1994. Prior to Truman Speech students examine how colonialism shaped the concept of development in most African

state. From there the definition of development is examined taking into consideration the ideological aspect of the concept. Thereafter students will delve into theories of development like modernization, dependency and institutionalism to name a few. The module concludes by examining international development policies and strategies like the basic needs approach, the Washington consensus, the emergence of NGOs and INGOs, local development as well as democratization, human rights, participative development as espoused by the La Baule Conference January 16, 1990, sustainable development, demography, good governance and African development and public development assistance.

Sessions may include

- An understanding of development
- Development policies and strategies

Required Readings:

Harriss, J. (2014). Development Theories. *International Development*, 35–49.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199671656.003.0003>

Preston, P. W. (1999). *Development theory: an introduction*. Blackwell Pub.

Matthews, S. (2017). Colonised minds? Post-development theory and the desirability of development in Africa. *Third World Quarterly*, 38(12), 2650–2663.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26616454>

Mbembe, A. (2019). *Out of the dark night: Essays on decolonization*. Columbia University Press.

Murrey, A., & Daley, P. (2023). Chapter 1 & 8. In *Learning disobedience: Decolonizing development studies*. Pluto Press.

Recommended Readings:

Emmanuel, N. G. (2013). 'With a Friend like this . . .': Shielding Cameroon from Democratization. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 48(2), 145-160. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909612442656>

Rostow, W. W. (1959). The stages of economic growth. *The economic history review*, 12(1), 1-16.

Veltmeyer, H. (2005). Democratic governance and participatory development: The role of development NGOs. *Whitehead J. Dipl. & Int'l Rel.*, 6, 89.

Google readings and writings on/by Kwame Nkrumah, Bibi Titi Mohammed, Patrice Lumumba, Nyerere Julius, Sankara Thomas, Nelson Mandela, Tabo Mbeki, Cheikh Anta Diop, Théophile Obenga

Videos/Link

- US President Harry Truman's 1949 inaugural address. Available: [Harry Truman inaugural address: Jan. 20, 1949 \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kpi0FhFu5nw)
- La Baule Conference January 16, 1990 https://youtu.be/cu_IrRBXo3s
- The Washington Consensus - [What is the "Washington Consensus?" | PIIIE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=om5so5znk-o)
- Dependency theory: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kpi0FhFu5nw>
- Modernization theory: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=om5so5znk-o>
- Le réveil de l'Afrique de Alain Foka: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hwl2Qg6_w5Q

Module 2: Understanding development in Cameroon, perspectives and next steps

The aim of this module is for students to familiarize and understand development in Cameroon. Students are exposed to some of the challenges that the country faces in light of development. Some of these challenges include difficulty in nation building, negative international interaction, the devaluation of the 1994, ethnicity, corruption, governance, the Anglophone crisis, Boko Haram insurgency in the North etc. From here students begin to explore different perspectives and way forward for Cameroon and maybe Africa as a whole. Concepts like good governance, sustainable development, new Pan Africanism or total independence of West Africa.

Sessions may include

- An understanding of Cameroon today
- Perspective of development in Cameroon

Required Readings

Kimengsi, J. N., & Gwan, S. A. (2017). Reflections on decentralization, community empowerment and sustainable development in Cameroon. *International Journal of Emerging Trends in Social Sciences*, 1(2), 53-60.

Tagou, C. (2018). *Democratic Rotation in the Head of State Position in Africa: Political Transcendence and Transformation of Ethno-regional Conflicts in Divided Societies*. Cuvillier Verlag.

Tagou, C. (Ed.). (2010). *The Dynamics of Conflict, Peace and Development in African Societies: La Dynamique Des Conflits, de la Paix Et Du Développement Dans Les Sociétés Africaines*. Universités Protestantes d'Afrique.

Module 3: African approaches to sustainable development with focus on Ubuntu

In this module students will be exposed to an African philosophical concept called Ubuntu, which emphasizes mutual respect and human dignity to imagine and conceptual sustainable development practices. At the same time students will interrogate dominant development paradigms through the lens of Afrocentric epistemologies. Other African approaches to development like Ujama (self-reliance), the Basic Need Approach, African unity, community base development and African renaissance will be discussed in this module

Sessions may include

- Students will be called to suggest and interrogate African approached to development

Required Readings

Moyo, D. (2009). *Dead aid: Why aid is not working and how there is a better way for Africa*. Macmillan.

Ramose, M.B. 2002. The philosophy of ubuntu as a philosophy. In Coetzee, P.H. and Roux, A.P.J. (eds.), *Philosophy from Africa: A Text with Readings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Van der Westhuizen, M., Greuel, T., & Beukes, J. W. (2017). Are we hearing the voices? Africanisation as part of community development. *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 73(3). <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i3.4512>

Van Norren, D. E. (2022). African Ubuntu and Sustainable Development Goals: seeking human mutual relations and service in development. *Third World Quarterly*, 43(12), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2022.2109458>

Recommended Readings

Van Norren, D. E. (2020). The sustainable development goals viewed through gross national happiness, Ubuntu, and Buen Vivir. *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics*, 20(3), 431-458.

Module 4: Linking Peace building and development in Cameroon

In this module students examine the link between conflict, peace and development in Cameroon in light of the conflict happening in the North West, South West and the Northern region of the country. Johan Galtung's conception of positive peace which goes beyond the absence of war but presupposes a social condition that unites dimensions of social justice, equality, political and individual freedoms, and the full development of people's potential that exist in harmony with their environment. Through guest lectures with experts in the field students will interact on the peace building methodologies that has led to development in rural communities.

Sessions may include

- Guest lectures

- Videos of peace building initiatives in rural areas

Required Readings

Annan, N., Beseng, M., Crawford, G., & Kewir, J. K. (2021). Civil society, peacebuilding from below and shrinking civic space: the case of Cameroon's 'Anglophone' conflict. *Conflict, Security & Development*, 21(6), 697-725.

International Crisis Group. (2022, February 23). Rebels, Victims, Peacebuilders: Women in Cameroon's Anglophone Conflict. www.crisisgroup.org.

<https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/rebels-victims-peacebuilders-women-camerouns-anglophone-conflict>

Nsaidzedze, S. B. (2022, February 2). *Grassroots Perspectives on Building Sustainable Peace in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon*. Kujenga Amani.

<https://kujenga-amani.ssrc.org/2022/02/02/grassroots-perspectives-on-building-sustainable-peace-in-the-north-west-and-south-west-regions-of-cameroon/>

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Module 5: Case studies: Visits to NGOs and Indigenous communities

This module aims to familiarize students with the spectrum of organizations or institutions engaged at various levels in development programs in Cameroon. Covering mostly local and non-governmental organisations, these institutional visits inform students of the current developmental issues being addressed while also providing them with an introduction to potential organizations to work with during their research projects. Short presentations are conducted at the organizations sites followed by field visits to some of their projects. These case studies are intended to provide students with empirical material with which to critically analyze development practice.

In addition, students will visit an indigenous group of people called the Bagyeli's in Kribi, South region. This case study examines the social, economic and political transformation of the Bagyeli people. In addition to studying Bagyeli culture, dances, and aesthetic features, student experience the changes in the community intensified by state pressures to leave the forest as a results of development, the Tchad-Cameroon pipeline being one of major development project that has affected the lives of this indigenous population. Topics include Bagyeli culture meeting the modern world, issues of citizenship and access to education, outside intervention with foreign companies, NGOs and the state, national inclusion.

Excursions:

Student will spend a week in Kribi during which they will visit different Bagyeli communities.

Required Readings

Chabal Patrick and Daloz Jean-Pascal. 'The Illusions of Civil Society' Chapter 2. *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*. Indiana University Press. 1999. Pp 17-30. Print

Baka: A Cry from the Rainforest. Phil, Agland. BBC. 2011. Web.

Pyhälä, A. (2012). What future for the Baka. *Indigenous peoples' rights and livelihood opportunities in south-east Cameroon*, 13.

Tucker, S. (2011). Integration by Education: A Study of Cameroon's Bakola-Bagyeli.

Recommended Readings

Duda, R. (2017). Ethnoecology of hunting in an empty forest: practices, local perceptions and social change among the Baka (Cameroon).

Leonhardt, A. (2006). Baka and the magic of the state: between autochthony and citizenship. *African studies review*, 49(2), 69-94.

Lueong, G. M. (2016). *The forest people without a forest: development paradoxes, belonging and participation of the Baka in East Cameroon*. Berghahn Books.

Assignments and Evaluation

Assignment Descriptions and Grading Criteria

1) Analysis Paper (25%)

Reflect on the different themes covered in this thematic seminar and write your views about development in Cameroon in a 4-page essay. Start your reflection by saying how you will define development, what development policy and strategy you identify with, and which approach to development will you recommend for Cameroon as the way forward. Make sure to use lectures, classroom discussions, readings, observation and community experiences to add substance and depth to your analysis. Your essay should include an introduction, a coherent body with each paragraph explaining one main idea. Conclude your paper by restating your essay opening debate. Your paper should include a reference section. Community and host family observation and interviews will be cited as primary information. Readings and other published written material can be cited as secondary information.

2) Ubuntu Development Framework Challenge (25%)

In small groups, students are required to create a development framework based on Ubuntu principles.

Must incorporate:

Local language concepts
Community consultation
Indigenous knowledge systems
Practical applications for NGOs

3) Research and development assignment (40%)

The aim of these assessments is to dive deeply in any topic of interest as it relates to development in Cameroon. The assessments will be broken down into different phases with one phase feeding into the next and also to allow the student to complete them into small chunks. This assessment to assist students to start harnessing some research skills that will assist them with the independent project.

Assessment #	Requirement	Due date	Out of mark
Assignment 1	<p>The aim is to assess whether you have a good understanding of your topic of interest.</p> <p>This is a one page submission that includes a topic, a brief background, your research questions, objectives and hypothesis (where applicable). Show how this relates to development and social change</p>	TBA	10 marks
Assignment 2	<p>The aim of this assessment is to test your ability to find relevant literature review for this topic of interest,</p> <p>Identify atleast 4 secondary sources and submit a 2 page document that shows a clear link between assignment 1 and this assignment. It is not enough to only provide an overview or summary of the key literature sources that you intend to consult. You should demonstrate how the articles/documents that you have read are relevant to your research problem. You should also mention whether you have come across any similar studies that have</p>	TBA	10 marks

	<p>been conducted in your topic of interest.</p> <p>Use APA style to reference these sources.</p>		
Assignment 3	<p>The aim of this assessment is to explore different methodologies used in the area of development that you have chosen. We recommend you consult four sources and state the following.</p> <p>The research approach; for example, qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods.</p> <p>The research instrument: interviews, questionnaires or observations.</p> <p>The sampling that was used; for example, you will discuss the sample size and why they are relevant.</p> <p>The main aim here is to critical evaluate the choices of these authors</p>	TBA	10 marks
Assignment 4	<p>This aim of this assessment is to ensure that student have reflected and can articulate some of the ethical issues that relates to studying or working with development projects in cameroon.</p> <p>Read NPR's Renee Bach story (cited below) and reflect on your role as a student from a wealthy country studying or participating in development in Africa.</p> <p>Some areas you might consider in your reflection include.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bias and positionality 	TBA	10 marks

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Protecting your research participants - Managing power relations - Seeking consent - Validity and reliability of the research 		
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Aizenman, N. (2020, July 31). U.S. Missionary With No Medical Training Settles Suit Over Child Deaths At Her Center. NPR.org; NPR. <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/07/31/897773274/u-s-missionary-with-no-medical-training-settles-suit-over-child-deaths-at-her-ce>

4) Participation (10%)

This includes active involvement in lectures, readings, discussions and excursions using the following criteria:

- Attendance - promptness to class and positive presence in class.
- Active Listening - paying attention in class and during field excursions, asking appropriate questions, showing interest and enthusiasm (this includes body language), entertaining contradictory perspectives, taking notes.
- Involvement in Class Discussions - either in small or large groups, sharing knowledge. This means challenging yourself to speak up if you usually don't, and also means allowing others to speak if you are a person who tends to dominate class discussions.
- Group Accountability – positive participation in the group during field excursions and classes; not keeping others waiting.
- Displaying Respect – culturally appropriate interaction with hosts, SIT program staff, SIT lecturers and communities.

Assessment

Analysis paper – 25%

Ubuntu Development Framework Challenge – (25%)

Research and development - 40% (10% each)

Participation – 10%