

## Four questions addressed to Professor Gordon Crawford



*Professor Gordon Crawford is a Research Professor in Global Development in the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University. He is the newly appointed Academic Director of the Merian IAS Africa, representing the German consortium partners. The second Academic Director will be named by the University of Ghana. Prof. Crawford is also an honorary professor of the University of Freiburg.*

### **FRIAS: From your perspective on the region, why is Ghana a good place for an Institute for Advanced Studies?**

For one, it is the quality of the University of Ghana. It is the foremost public university in the country, with a significant history being established at the end of the colonial period in 1948. It has long been regarded as one of the premier universities on the African continent. It is well-known for the quality of its academics, the range of academic disciplines that it covers, and its superb and very large green campus. Another reason for choosing Ghana

is political stability. Ghana has the distinction of being the first country in Sub-Saharan-Africa to gain its independence in 1957. Currently, it is regarded as a model for democratic progress in Sub-Saharan Africa, making its democratic transition in 1992 and achieving a sustained process of democratic consolidation ever since. Civil and political rights are respected and regular elections held every four years, with three peaceful turnovers of power between the two main political parties. During the period of military regimes, the political environment was characterised by “a culture of silence”. Today, people are no longer afraid to express their opinion, far from it. A third reason is that Ghana is a very easy country to visit and in which to undertake research. There are no major personal security issues. Ghanaians are very hospitable and look after foreign visitors.

### **FRIAS: Given the many difficulties African countries are facing, will societies at large profit from the exchange between African and European academic communities in the humanities and social sciences?**

In terms of the impact on local people's life, it is important to adopt an outreach strategy that ensures that research findings are made relevant to policymakers and to civil society organizations. I am confident that through its Ghanaian partners in particular, the Institute will have constructive engagement and dialogue both with the government of Ghana and its ministries and with Ghana's vibrant civil society, leading to relevant policy reforms.

### **FRIAS: Why should European and German research communities in the humanities in social sciences engage more with Sub-Saharan Africa?**

Africa is a very significant continent. It is the poorest continent globally. As scholars in the humanities and the social sciences, there are many questions to be explored that aim to improve the living conditions of so many people in Africa. There is much research to be undertaken that will gain from the collaboration of African and European researchers, and will contribute to global knowledge production of relevance both to Africa and African societies as well as to the rest of the world.

### **FRIAS: What was your most memorable experience in Ghana?**

I have many memorable experiences, especially instances of the kindness of Ghanaian people. But the first time I went to northern Ghana sticks in my mind. It was at the end of the dry season. Everything was brown, there wasn't a blade of grass to be seen. We went out to a rural village and I thought: How can people survive here? And then it rained. The next day you could see the shoots of green coming up. When I went back a month later, the whole place was transformed. Seeing that transformation, but also being aware of the hardships of rural life in what can be a quite unforgiving climate, was a very memorable experience.