

Fenneken Veldkamp ~ Farewell Interview With Ton Dietz As Director Of The African Studies Centre Leiden



[Ton Dietz](#), a human geographer, will retire as the director of the African Studies Centre Leiden and as a professor of African Development at Leiden University on 1 September 2017. On this occasion, we did a 'farewell' interview with him.

You have been the director of this Centre and a Professor of African Development at Leiden University since May 2010. What was a highlight for you during your directorship?

'The best highlight - there were many - was the news that Chibuike Uche had been appointed as full Professor at the African Studies Centre, last April. Many things were combined in that: 1) It was the first official Professor we got as African Studies Centre. That was possible because of our successful merger with Leiden University. 2) It's a subsidy for the next three years from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, acknowledging the importance of what the African Studies Centre did and does for the Ministry. 3) The Chair was named after Stephen Ellis. And Stephen Ellis has been our most important, most influential scholar, who unfortunately died in 2015. And finally, it was very important to have a first African Professor as a member of our staff, and a Professor in a very important field: the Governance of Finance and Integrity in Africa. Which makes it clear that the political economy aspects of the study of Africa have become very much at the heart of the African Studies Centre, next to all the other things we are doing. The fact that Chibuike Uche has been appointed to this Chair for me is in fact a dream come true of what I see an African Studies Centre should be.'

In your inaugural address '[Silverlining Africa](#)' in January 2011 you were optimistic

about Africa, almost in a provocative way. You said:

'Not long ago, the continent was seen as lagging behind, a sick place full of violence, hunger and disease, and either a threat to world stability or a disposable place to avoid. Now its image has shifted to one of hope, which is making Africa a hotspot in the new geopolitical reality of a multi-polar world.'

In the meantime, we have seen tremendous outbursts of violence, the Ebola virus epidemic and, recently again, millions of Africans threatened with starvation. Has the image, and reality, shifted to that of a sick place again?

'As you rightly say: it was deliberate intention to provoke, because so many of the people who dealt with Africa, particularly in the media at that time, were still so much overwhelmed by this negative atmosphere, while the examples of things that did go well or were nice, were just minor experiences. I decided to try to flip the coin. In the 2000s it was already clear that Africa's economies were experiencing high growth rates, that there clearly was a growing middle class. So it was not a story that was cooked, it was real.

Read more: <http://www.ascleiden.nl/farewell-interview-ton-dietz>