

# Some case-studies – a perspective from Cameroon



## Who am I and what can I say in a particular context?

You meet a few people at your internship location in the south of Senegal and one evening you are invited for dinner at their place. Over dinner you get to talk to the pater familias, while his wife serves you from the kitchen.

*Is it appropriate to insist the lady of the house joins you for dinner, or should you not interfere with their traditions?*

*In the context of Cameroon, it is polite to ask the wife to join you people for dinner. In most cases when you request that the wife joins for dinner, if it's not their tradition for them to sit on the table with the head of the family, they will give you a polite reason for their refusal, for example, I am sorry I am currently still busy in the Kitchen. In most traditions wives can join strangers and rest of the family for dinner.*

After dinner, you discuss life in Belgium and the husband has a lot of questions for you: do you have children, how much do you earn, are you married, do you go to church, how much does a plane ticket to Belgium cost?

*Should you be honest about how much you (or your parents) earn; can you say that you do not believe, that you never go to church and that you just live together with your boy/girl friend; what about talking about your bother who is gay and can you be honest about the cost of your plane ticket or even the price of your iPhone?*

*With respect to the questions being asked by the husband, try to be as cautious as much as possible when giving your answers. Reflect before saying anything. For the question of salary if you're students just tell them you are being supported by your parents. If you are already working just tell them you earn a fair wage that it's a bit higher than that you could earn in Africa but that you have more bills to pay and life is very expensive back home. About the costs for a plane ticket it is perfectly Ok to say it. With respect to being a Christian, gay etc, it's preferable to say you would like not to talk about this. This because certain groups may be hostile to gay people for example.*

## Having a bad day and language

You've had a terrible day at your internship location in the local hospital of Dar es Salaam. You are tired and it seems everybody is angry with you. You want to skype with your friends in Belgium, but guess what...no internet today. The heat is terrible and you never manage to get one single moment of privacy. Fortunately, there are some Dutch students working in the hospital as well. Let's have a chat with them.

*Can you just have a conversation in Dutch with your fellow students, while your Tanzanian colleagues are also around? Do you think irony and humour are universal? Is body language universal?*

*In Cameroon, most foreign students or interns always speak in English when they are amongst their other Cameroonian peers. However, when they have moments which they find themselves isolated from the local students they speak to themselves in the language of their country. So to respond to this question it will not be good for the Dutch speakers to start speaking in Dutch when they are sitting with their Cameroonian counterparts. However if some Cameroonian students were listening to you, you could ask them to permit you that you were switching to Dutch. If no one wants to speak to you, it is perfect to speak to your Belgian friends in Dutch.*

## Sightseeing in the city

Together with a few Belgian friends you have decided to pay a visit to the centre of Kinshasa. You walk through the local market; there are a lot of people in the street – local taxi's, people selling stuff, beggars,...

*How do you deal with intrusive street vendors, with beggars, shoe polishers or people who want to sell you tourist souvenirs? Do you give money and to whom?*

*If you don't want to buy just tell them politely you're not buying at the moment. Most will understand and leave. If you have money to buy some souvenirs then you can buy. It is advisable to always go to the markets with a local student, they can advise you on which products are good.*

*With respect to beggars, it's up to your discretion to decide whether to give them or not. Perhaps ask a local if you're confused if the beggar is really in need. There are some fake beggars as well. Most of the times, locals know the real beggars and fake ones.*

*When buying something, how far can you go in bargaining? Can you accept the fact that you will pay more because you are from Belgium – will that necessarily be the case?*

*When buying something always feel free to bargain like the locals. Everyone has the right to bargain. You shouldn't assume that you'r coming from Belgium, and necessarily need to pay more. However it is nice to give tips if you want to those you buy from. Always ask a local student or guardian to accompany you when you go to a shop or a market.*

*Is it wise to make pictures of people in the street? How to react when people ask money for you taking pictures?*

*It is perfectly Ok to take pictures in the street in Cameroon. However, always listen to your tour guide. He will advice you on whether there is a need to pay anywhere before pictures can be taken at a particular spot.*

## Staying in the country side

Life in South Africa is more difficult than you had expected. You stay in a village in the Limpopo Province but you do not get along with your host mother – she is too strict and you always need to be home before dark. The food is always the same – beans with starch (pap) and you are never alone – you even have to share a room with two of the smaller kids in the house. You rather want to go home.

*How important is privacy for you? What can you do if you do not get along with the locals? What are the implications for you, your host organisation and future UGent students who will travel to the same location?*

*Privacy is something I like but at times you need to live out of your comfort zone to achieve your said objectives. If you don't get along with the locals, my advice is you should try to settle issues amicably with them so that you can achieve your goal. However, if there is no way to persevere, inform your host organization. They might find a solution for you or otherwise, if they see that the location is not suitable for students, future students won't be allowed to go to this location.*

## Hierarchy and status

Today is an important day at your university in Jimma (Ethiopia), as the Minister of Education will visit the university. As a Belgian guest you are also invited to the ceremony; you even get to sit next to the rector of the university.

*Can you handle authority and strict hierarchy? How do you behave when having a conversation with people who have more authority? What will you do when you have another opinion?*

*Do everything to show respect for hierarchy. This is followed very strictly in Cameroon. During your conversation, listen more to the person with authority and talk less. If you disagree on a particular topic they are discussing, present your argument in a cautious way for example, 'with respect to the last statement you just made, in Belgium it is slightly different, we normally do like this.....'. In this case you are disagreeing but in a unique manner.*

*How will you react when you are (perceived to be) higher in rank and people do things for you – carry your bag, serve your food, clean the table, arrange a taxi for you?*

*Generally sometimes, this happens. My advice is, try to be as humble as much as possible and also speak politely to those helping you at all times. Don't feel scared if you face this. Also when you go to sit somewhere to eat, you can buy them food as well.*

## Hierarchy and money

Your Head of Department at the University of Nairobi has invited you and your Belgian colleague to visit another campus of the university, a bit out of the city. He will take the two of you with his car + driver. On the way you have lunch together in a local restaurant, but the driver stays in the car.

*Will you address this with the Head of Department and suggest the driver gets to eat together with you?  
What will you do when the bill comes – will you offer to pay?*

*You can propose to the HOD if you can call the driver to join you guys in the meal. However, do not tell him you will pay. If he says Ok, ask the driver to join us, it means he will pay the bill. Do not offer to pay the bill when bill arrives. On the other hand if the HOD says driver won't join you guys for lunch do not insist.*

## Punishment

The teachers are strict at the school in southern Tunisia where you do your fieldwork. When three boys talk too much during class, the teacher takes out his measuring rod and hits them on their fingers.

*What will you do? Will you address this when talking to the teacher after class? How will you punish the children when they miss behave?*

*Various schools have their own unique way of disciplining students; however, you may not feel comfortable seeing some of the methods. You can speak to the teacher after class but speak in a nice polite manner and ask if it's possible he punishes students in a different way, mention that you're not used to seeing kids being punished this way.*

*To punish students when they miss behave, it's up to your discretion to choose a method you like. You must not follow the same harsh methods like other teachers.*



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