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## **Federal President Steinmeier informs himself about research in Cabo Verde** International cooperation and education of young researchers were the focus of the visit to the West African archipelago

**05.10.2023/Mindelo.** During his official visit to Cabo Verde, the German Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier informed himself about the joint research of GEOMAR Helmholtz Centre for Ocean Research Kiel and its partners from Germany and abroad in the region. The programme also included a visit to the Ocean Science Centre Mindelo (OSCM), a research and logistics centre on the island of São Vicente jointly operated by GEOMAR and the Cape Verdean Instituto do Mar (IMar), as well as a meeting with students of the West African Master's programme "Climate Change and Marine Sciences" funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, BMBF) within the framework of WASCAL. In addition to Professor Dr. Katja Matthes, Director of GEOMAR, and Administrative Director Frank Spiekermann, Professor Dr. Otmar Wiestler, President of the Helmholtz Association, Ministerial Director Stefan Müller, Head of the Department of Basic Research and Sustainable Development at the BMBF and Chairman of the GEOMAR Board of Governors also accompanied the visit.

Located off the coast of West Africa, in an upwelling system of the tropical Atlantic Ocean, the Cape Verde Islands form the centre of one of our most important life support systems. In the archipelago, it becomes visible how the ocean influences our climate, feeds us and secures livelihoods. During his visit of the islands, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, President of the Federal Republic of Germany, informed himself about the research of the Helmholtz Association, the Leibniz Association, the Max Planck Society and various universities, which takes place in close cooperation with actors from the region. This is the first official state visit by a German president to Cabo Verde.

"We are very proud to be able to present our excellent research and infrastructure to President Steinmeier together with our Cape Verdean and German partners and to share our vision for future research with him. His visit is an important milestone for our cooperation, which has been characterised by a lively exchange and many valuable meetings both in Cabo Verde and Kiel," says Professor Dr. Katja Matthes, Director of GEOMAR Helmholtz Centre for Ocean Research Kiel. "Scientific data from the region are important for more accurate forecasts of climate change and its impacts, not only in West Africa, but around the world. In addition, the ocean offers us numerous opportunities to meet these global challenges and minimise risks. Therefore, research institutions from many countries are working hand in hand with regional actors in Cabo Verde."

As a leading German partner in marine science cooperation, GEOMAR looks back on almost 20 years of cooperation with science, politics and society in Cabo Verde. Together with the Instituto do Mar (IMar) and with the support of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, BMBF), GEOMAR founded the Ocean Science Centre Mindelo (OSCM) on the Cape Verdean island of São Vicente in 2017 as a central platform for field research, knowledge exchange and logistics.

President Steinmeier learned about the importance of the OSCM for regional, national and international research during a joint tour of the institute with José Maria Neves, President of the Republic of Cabo Verde. He got to know the infrastructure of the OSCM and informed himself about

the Cape Verde Ocean Observatory (CVOO), which is located about 100 kilometres off the islands as well as about the research of the IMar and the Universidade Técnica do Atlântico (UTA).

In addition, the distinguished visitors at OSCM met graduates of the Master's programme "Climate Change and Marine Sciences" funded by the BMBF within the framework of the West African Science Service Centre on Climate Change and Adapted Land Use (WASCAL). The programme for young people from twelve West African countries is organised in close cooperation between GEOMAR, UTA and OSCM. It includes lectures, laboratory and field work as well as training at sea – the WASCAL Floating University. The combination of international research and academic education provides students with diverse opportunities for their future careers in the region. WASCAL Cabo Verde is an official project of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.

In the coming years, a project initiated by GEOMAR will bring together further research institutions in West Africa: The large-scale international project "The Future of Tropical Upwelling Regions in the Atlantic Ocean" (FUTURO) will investigate how the natural upwelling system off West Africa, which is important for West Africa's population, will develop in a changing climate and how this biologically particularly productive and biodiverse region can be protected and sustainably managed. Health and disease processes in the ocean fundamental to food security and other important functions of the ocean are also assessed.

"Coastal upwelling systems like the one off West Africa account for less than one per cent of the ocean's surface area, but provide five per cent of the biological productivity and twenty per cent of the world ocean's fisheries yield. Fish is a major contributor to food security in West Africa, providing about 60 per cent of animal protein needs in some countries. At the same time, these regions are threatened by global change in many ways," explains Professor Dr Arne Körtzinger, Scientific Director of OSCM and coordinator of FUTURO. "In view of this enormous importance and the expected changes, the international large-scale experiment FUTURO is intended to provide the necessary understanding of the system and a basis for sustainable use and protection of the coastal upwelling area. The core of this experiment is, on the one hand, the close cooperation with international scientists, especially from West Africa, and, on the other hand, a concerted deployment of several international research vessels and a large number of autonomous observation platforms."

"Climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time – beyond continents and political systems. We can see the devastating consequences it can have in the global south, where people and the environment suffer particularly from the effects of climate change. We can only confront climate change consistently together with strong partners – locally and internationally," says Professor Dr. Otmar Wiestler, President of the Helmholtz Association. "With the planned international mission FUTURO, GEOMAR will gain important knowledge off the northwest coast of Africa in the future, which will help to better understand climate change and develop innovative solution strategies. It is also an impressive example of strategic cooperation with partners from Africa."

The Federal President also visited an observation platform that will help to link ocean and atmospheric research more closely: new remote sensing devices on the roof of the OSCM study the atmosphere by laser and radar. They are part of the Cape Verde Atmospheric Observatory (CVAO), which both presidents visited following the visit to OSCM to lay the foundation stone for a new laboratory building. These investments are part of the BMBF-funded ACTRIS-D research infrastructure project led by the Leibniz Institute for Tropospheric Research (TROPOS) in Leipzig. This is another important building block for research into the climate system. The CVAO atmospheric station is operated by a consortium of the Cape Verde Institute for Meteorology and Geophysics (INMG), TROPOS, the Max Planck Institute for Biogeochemistry in Jena and the University of York in the United Kingdom.

"With the successful programme, we represented the entire range of our GEOMAR research on the ocean and climate system," says Professor Dr. Katja Matthes. "The interest and support from our federal government encourages us and our local partners to continue to pursue our plans for future

research with enthusiasm and to contribute through our work to the protection and sustainable use of the ocean, for example as a source of food or as a partner in the fight against climate change." The missions of the German Alliance for Marine Research Alliance (Deutsche Allianz Meeresforschung, DAM), which Professor Dr. Katja Matthes also represented as a board member during the visit of Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, will also benefit from the future activities and the close cooperation between science, politics, business and society.

**Links:**

<https://www.geomar.de/en/news/article/cabo-verde-center-of-ocean-research-for-sustainable-development> GEOMAR press release „Cabo Verde: Center of Ocean Research for Sustainable Development“ (01.02.2023)

<https://www.geomar.de/en/news/article/high-ranking-delegation-from-cabo-verde-visits-the-kieler-woche> GEOMAR press release “High-ranking delegation from Cabo Verde visits the Kieler Woche” (14.06.2023)

<https://www.geomar.de/en/centre/research-in-cape-verde> GEOMAR: Research in Cabo Verde

<https://www.oscm.cv> Ocean Science Centre Mindelo (OSCM)

<https://www.geomar.de/en/futuro> Projektvorhaben FUTURO

<https://wascal.org> West African Science Service Centre on Climate Change and Adapted Land Use (WASCAL)

<https://www.tropos.de/en/current-issues/press-releases/details/atmosphaerenforschung-im-atlantik-wird-ausgebaut> TROPOS press release „Atmospheric research in the Atlantic to be expanded“ (05.10.2023)

<https://www.tropos.de/en/research/projects-infrastructures-technology/coordinated-observations-and-networks/cvao-cape-verde-atmospheric-observatory> Cape Verde Atmospheric Observatory (CVAO)

**Images:**

Images are available for download at <http://www.geomar.de/n9139-e>

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