

Searching for 67 stoves in Nigeria

December 2012, 5 days, 2000 km. atmosfair employee Dietrich Brockhagen reports from Nigeria

It's in these moments that I don't know anymore whether what's happening is real. The young boy stands up from the sidewalk, or rather from the brick he is sitting on in the street dust, rummages in his pocket and presses my mobile phone into my hand. His gaze bothers me; he looks at me contemptuously. A quick look at the phone, then I glance inquiringly at his teacher, or rather at the young woman I assume to be his teacher. She translates for me in English: What a boring phone. No camera. No apple. The boy finally sees a white man, and then something like this happens!

I'm standing in Funtua, a mid-sized city in northern Nigeria, feeling bewildered, but Sofia, our chaperone from atmosfair partner DARE and stove saleswoman quickly tells me the most important thing: everything will be okay. Everyone who makes this trip makes mistakes or must ask others for help at some point. Everything will be okay. I lost my mobile phone, a real showstopper in a big country where we are trying to find 130 of the 15,000 stoves that atmosfair sold in Nigeria over the last five years with two cars, each with six people as well as two auditors working on behalf of the United Nations. The process is simple: the auditors have chosen a random sample from the sales books, 130 stoves in this case. These are the regulations of the Kyoto Protocol CDM. Each stove that we don't find or isn't being used properly will be extrapolated to all 15,000 stoves. In this case, atmosfair may only count a correspondingly smaller amount CO₂ savings.

Today we are in a hospital in Funtua. Our team together with Karunakar, the UN auditor from India, has 67 ovens in northern Nigeria on our checklist. Number 12 is in Funtua City at the house of a doctor who works in this hospital. Our driver drives up to the entrance, then we cross the large inner courtyard, and suddenly it looks a little bit like Europe: smooth façades, big windows, people in wheelchairs, doctors in white coats. Only the women in bright clothes and the plentiful dust indicate that we are in Africa. And the heat. The chief physician comes to greet us. Danjuma, the head stove salesman for DARE in this region, appears to

know everyone here. After what feels like two hours of waiting while we talk to nurses and patients, the doctor comes and leads us from the clinic grounds into the residential part of Funtua. Finally after searching for three hours, an apartment door on the ground floor opens directly onto the street, and a young woman informs us that the owner of the stove and daughter of the doctor with the stove moved to Kano two weeks ago. Great. The list of stoves has not really grown much shorter today; just 55 are still missing, and we do still four days left. Well, including today and the 14-hour journey back to Abuja. But Karunakar is on the ball: he asks the neighbour whether she can tell us something about the stove user, whether she cooked every day, for how many people, and what type of stove she had previously. The woman speaks English, her answers are plausible, and then she signs the survey without any hesitation. Wow! There are already just 54 stoves remaining, and we sit back in the car and drive further northward in search of stove number 13.

The farther we travel into the North, the more I am impressed by the country. The distances between the cities are growing larger, the soil ever redder, and the wind is picking up. Yahaya, the head of DARE (where the verification process and travels began yesterday on a farm near Kaduna), told me that in the North on the border to the Niger, the wind blows from the North and airborne sand stings your face. Ever more seldomly does one see trees or small forests, and the lowest branches are cut off. Wood is lifeblood. What I have otherwise only read in reports from the UN Millennium Development Goals on the fight against poverty is tangible here.



Stove assembly with atmosfair partner DARE.

The afternoon turns out to be surprisingly good. Contrary to our expectations we reached number 25 after two days. Three days, 42 stoves, 1500 kilometres and a glimmer of hope remain. I have no idea how Danjuma, a Muslim man about 50 years old, manages it all. He telephones without pause and directs our driver Modasir from one salesperson to the next. There are no signs, neither for cities, highways, roads nor even houses. Simply none. We drive for an hour across the country, and then a small town appears on the horizon. In the town Danjuma speaks with the mayor, who brings us to the stove salesman. The houses don't have windows, they are just one story, and the roofs are made of sheet metal or roofing paper.



The auditors at work. It is seldom men...

Sofia always goes ahead to ask the woman of the house whether the foreign visitors may enter. Then comes the exciting moment when we enter the inner courtyard and search: an atmosfair stove is standing along the wall with couscous cooking on it, children play, adults work or sit around. Even the glass lid is still intact. I remember how the manufacturer proudly told me that it is impossible to break them. We check the engraved ID number, Karunakar asks his questions, but it is clear. Incrusted and somewhat dented, the pots sooted and scratched: this stove has been used every day for years. "How much wood does the stove save you compared with a three-stone stove?" Karunakar asks the housewife. "Before I bought wood three times each week, now it is just every two weeks." We are satisfied. It is not often that a woman speaks unreservedly. In the North they are almost always veiled and speak quietly and unclearly. The translator must listen closely and almost always asks women to repeat. Apparently they are afraid of saying something wrong. But here the answers were clear; they were written down quickly, the protocol was signed, and we want to move on. However we need to stop because the woman still wants something. She follows us, lifts her hands, and looks at us directly. The translator says: "God bless you. Thank you for the wonderful stove." And I do feel blessed. The searching, heat, misunderstandings and aggravation: all that recedes and fails to exist completely. It's in this moment that people communicate directly with each other, in spite of all of the differences in culture, ways of thinking, demands, gender, age and material goods. Words are not important: her voice and eyes say it all. The woman is grateful, we are thankful. It is quiet long after our farewell.

The sun sets at 6 p.m., at 7 it is dark. Now it becomes cold, and the streets are slowly becoming unsafe. We drive to the guesthouse, which lies somewhere on the large, unlit university grounds in Katsina City, searching yet again.



and mostly women that answer questions.

We are dead tired; I don't even care that the water in my room isn't running. I simply wait until morning when Karunakar leaves his room to use his bathroom. I can hardly sleep during the night. The building is exposed to the wind, and the storm from the Niger howls around the sides of the building. When Karunakar knocks on my door at 6 a.m. and asks if he can use my bathroom, we get up and shortly thereafter, a friendly hotel employee carries big vats of water to the rooms where the others are also waiting in the meantime.

We set out early. Just three days left; the clock is ticking. If Karunakar boards the plane on Saturday and we haven't found all of the stoves, then atmosfair cannot count a single

tonne of CO₂ – the UN regulations are strict. Maren, my German colleague who is driving along in the other team's car with the UN auditor from Nigeria, gives me a call. She is stuck in gridlock, police controls, and there are also riots on their planned route. We discuss the route planning and agree to meet that evening in a hotel in Kaduna, 400 km southward.

The farther my team travels northward, the more evident it becomes that climate change has already left its mark: soil erosion is increasing, and people are losing the fields as a source of livelihood. Forests would break the wind and hold the soil together, but they were used for firewood. Piles of wood imported from the South lie for sale on the side of the road. On the coast, in contrast, the water level is rising in the Niger Delta, and ever more frequent flooding is driving the people northward. In the middle of the country, people are crowded together, and living space is becoming scarce for this most populous country in Africa. This is how Yahaya presents the situation to me; he sees it as a central cause of the riots and violence among communities and villages in the middle of the country and not the terrorist group Boko Haram or the conflict between Christians and Muslims cited in the newspaper.



In northern Nigeria, a typical housing development.

Things are moving forward. By noon we see two mayors, three marketplaces, six stoves and even a bank director. A stove owner built his own press with which he can press corncobs into pellets that he can use in the stove. In this way he doesn't produce any

additional CO₂ emissions whatsoever since the corncobs, which drew CO₂ from the air in order to grow, are part of the natural carbon cycle.

At noon our car stops on the side of the street before a small village. The two Muslim employees from DARE get out, unfold their rugs and pray the Dhuhr towards Mecca. Nobody looks at the clock; we take a break and buy water and melons for everyone.

On the Sunday before the verification process began, I went with Maren and an employee from DARE to a Christian worship service, and all of the clichés were true: charismatic preachers with sparkling eyes in fancy suits, hundreds of enthusiastic singers and dancing people, the church overflowing and everyone in their best dresses, shoes, and suits. They do this even though churches are sometimes attacked. I'm impressed. Why does this happen so seldomly in Germany? The people beam, wish each other good luck, pray for each other, talk about their lives, share their worries, laugh and enjoy the moment. They earn 12 Euros per day, but that doesn't appear to be important.

At night in the hotel in Kaduna. Two days and 28 stoves for our team and 35 for Maren's remain. Together with the auditors, we push back all of the appointments that don't necessarily need to take place in Nigeria and make the most of the remaining hours. The next morning there are roadblocks again, controls, traffic jams and waits in Kaduna. Time is running out. Our driver is solid as a rock; the streets are overflowing, the traffic is crazy – I would have been at my wits' end after a quarter hour at the wheel. A stove salesman from Kaduna is part of the military. We must go to a barrack past the exercising recruits; waiting has long been futile. The next stove customer is a bank employee and cannot leave the building, but Karunakar is eventually permitted to enter alone. We continue on until late in the evening.

It's the last night of the trip, and 12 stoves remain. Karunakar thanks the whole team effusively for our patience and preparedness for all unforeseen events. One can tell that he really means it. On the last day I suddenly realise with surprise that I have become used to Nigeria. It's no problem to arrive hours late, to leave the car that just died on the side of the street and wait for a replacement. Why should one get excited? It will work out somehow. This is how it inevitably goes until the late

afternoon. Of course we head for stove number 67, a big house with a wall in the rich part of town. A dog tears at my pants, a television is playing. The stove doesn't look like it has been used very much, which will lead to deductions. Oh well. Then comes the moment when Sofia tells me that a teacher had just called and we can drive to a school where a pupil will give me back my mobile phone.

It's getting dark – that happens quickly in Nigeria. I'm sitting in the back of the bus. There are seven of us. No one speaks, the motor hums quietly, and each of us is lost in thought. We found the stoves after 2000 kilometres, 14 hours of effort each day, heat and dust. However I can't remember a time that I laughed so much recently. Misunderstandings, embarrassments, unforeseen situations, mishaps, and in the end, all was well. Everything also went well in the other team.

The stars begin to twinkle, the sky changes from dark blue to black. I am so grateful to my team, Maren and the Nigerians to have been welcomed in this way. I had not been very motivated to come here and had balked at the heat and the effort. Only later in Germany do I return to thoughts about my summer vacation in Southern France, but I would never trade this week in Nigeria for it.