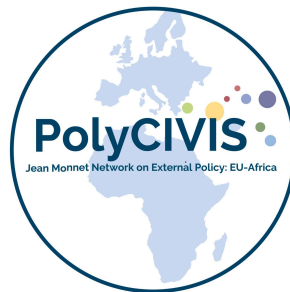


DEVELOPING AFRICAN-EUROPEAN JOINT TEACHING PROGRAMMES

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“TEACH YOUR STUDENTS HOW TO COOK A SOUP”

Mobility to Train Agribusiness and Food Systems Scientists for African Agriculture (TAFSA)

Interviewee

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Interviewer

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in Europe and Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Nícia Givá, professor of Rural Development at Department of Economics and agrarian development, at Faculty of Agronomy and Forestry Engineering, at Universidade Eduardo Mondlane in Maputo (Mozambique) shares her experience in the setting up and running of TAFSA, a mobility programme in the field of agribusiness and agro-economics. In a conversation with her colleague Prof. Emilio Tostão, she explains how the partnership was first built, how it manages to organise credit and degree mobility, and what are lessons learned from the first two cohorts of students. While the running of the programme is highly rewarding, at times it also requires creative solutions and work beyond classical job descriptions.

THE INTERVIEW

[Q1.] Which possibilities does the TAFSA programme offer to students?

Nícia Givá: TAFSA stands for Mobility to Train Agribusiness and Food Systems Scientists for African Agriculture. It is thus a programme focusing on agribusiness, which aims to strengthen capacity within African universities to fight food insecurity. This aim closely links up with African Union policies (Agenda 2063/2030) and the role of universities therein.

In a regional context where many students end their higher education trajectory with a Bachelor/undergraduate diploma, we offer opportunities to continue studies at Masters and PhD level. The scholarship allowance we can offer, thanks to EU funding from the “Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme”, is attractive for students and allows them to fully concentrate on studies.

TAFSA draws on existing Master and PhD courses offered by its partner institutions in the field of Agribusiness, Agro-economics or Food Consumption Science. The partner institutions include Makerere University and Gulu University in Uganda, Abomey Calavi in Benin, University of Pretoria in South Africa, and UEM.

TAFSA offers both credit and full-cycle mobility to Master and PhD students, and training missions for academic and administrative staff. Transnational mobility is at its core, meaning

that a member university cannot award a scholarship to its own students already living in the respective country.

[Q2.] How did you build your consortium?

Nícia Givá: The idea for the mobility programme originated in a RUFORUM meeting. RUFORUM is a network of now 170 African universities that collaborate on building capacity in agriculture and related fields of study and training. Helped by this preexisting network, we were able to choose four reliable partners, two in Uganda, one in South Africa, and one in Benin. The Universidade Eduardo Mondlane (UEM) where I teach, had participated several times in the Intra-ACP Mobility Programmes, and was then ready to take the coordinating role for the first time. The University of Copenhagen (Denmark) participates as EU technical partner, providing valuable advice on the setting up and running of academic mobility.

[Q3.] Which languages do you use in your teaching across the partner universities?

Nícia Givá: We have three languages that universities use in their regular teaching: University of Pretoria, Makerere University and Gulu University use English, Université Abomey-Calavi teaches in French, and we at UEM normally teach in Portuguese.

Our initial idea was that each country would use its regular language in teaching within TAFSA, supposing we could find multilingual students. As the programme now moves into its third year, we can say that this assumption was too optimistic, especially with regard to knowledge of Portuguese. Fortunately, the Faculty of Agronomy and Forestry Engineering at UEM had previous experience in teaching in English, so it was relatively easy to mobilise our Dean and colleagues in order to offer English-language classes for TAFSA students.

More recently, we have succeeded to also integrate our TAFSA students with Agri-food systems and nutrition **centre of excellence** students within the same classes to allow for a more standard group size, and more opportunities for peer exchange and discussion.

We were lucky to have found this solution as learning Portuguese properly for scientific purposes takes at least 6 months, claimed the students, and we would have been unable to build that into the funded mobility periods.

For future programmes, we may consider including in the consortium at least 2 universities in 2 different countries with the same language. In that case, a student from Mozambique would be able to study in a Portuguese-speaking partner institution in Angola, São-Tomé and Príncipe or Cape Verde.

[Q4.] Is Intra-African mobility relatively common in your universities, or is it a rather new and niche phenomenon?

Nícia Givá: From my point of view, it is still relatively new. Some of the consortium universities do not have well-staffed International/mobility offices at central administration level that would be able to support outgoing and incoming students with visa applications, health insurance or housing advice. And even where such structures exist, their staff may not speak any foreign language, so their possibility to communicate with foreign students may be very limited.

Such an environment means that as an academic coordinator of such a programme in your university, you may find yourself in a position where you dedicate substantial amounts of time to taking on such tasks, on top of the academic and scientific part of it.

There are challenges related to recognition and harmonization of credits, especially for credit seeking mobility. Tuition fees are a good example: for those students going for credit mobility (thus a study period of 3 to 10 months), universities require payment of tuition fees in the hosting university. There is currently no system like a fee waiver system (in which European universities often accord students from other institutions with whom they have a bilateral agreement, on a basis of reciprocity). So in our case, we have been able to recognise them internally as research-based mobilities, in which case tuition fees do not apply.

In a nutshell, I feel that African universities increasingly talk about internationalisation, but resources and facilities are not yet there in all cases. However, in other parts of the world enabling systems for higher education mobility did not develop overnight either. It takes a lot of patient work, and also a critical mass of mobile students and staff, to build such systems.

[Q5.] How has the development and coordination of TAFSA transformed your own individual perspectives in teaching and transnational cooperation?

Nícia Givá: Setting up and running the programme allowed me to strengthen my coordination skills, to deal with partners diplomatically while making things move. I feel the biggest gain has been that we succeeded in creating a good environment and working as a team, in a network including students, teachers, researchers among the 5 universities and beyond. Through sharing experience with my peers, we learned how to run transnational mobility, which was new to all of us. We have to talk about our programme widely for promotion and recruitment of students. So in the process, we get to know working methods and curricula of foreign universities, as we enter into an exchange about harmonised academic structure across Africa, where we can move freely and without challenges to get study acknowledged.

The TAFSA experience also changed our perspectives about how universities are able to position themselves internationally. They may have discourses about becoming more international, more research-focused, but what are they doing in practice? Which resources, strategies and indicators can orient such endeavors?

[Q6.] How has the development and coordination of TAFSA transformed your own individual perspectives in teaching and transnational cooperation?

Nícia Givá: Those students that come for an entire study cycle (thus for degree-seeking students) obtain a diploma according to the national legislation of the host university. When they return to their home country, they individually launch the procedure to have it recognised nationally. As the first students graduated very recently, we have no feedback on how easy or complicated this process can be.

For credit seeking mobility, the situation is very different as it requires intense interuniversity coordination. First, we need documents such as student agreements and learning agreements, which refer to courses and research work expected from students. Filling those documents requires exchange between the sending and hosting organisation, or the consortium as a whole, as they have to find answers to questions such as “How many credits are given for 30 hours in the lab?”, etcetera.

To bring curricula closer together, so that a degree from Mozambique will be acknowledged as equivalent in Uganda or Benin, we need to assure research methodology courses satisfy common criteria. To date, each African country has its own quality assurance system in higher education. How can we get them synchronised? If we work towards a continental QA system, mobility will be much easier to organise.

Apart from TAFSA, there are other mobility programmes at UEM, and in the network, but their respective coordinators and teams do not yet meet each other to compare practices and strategize together. Very likely, a lot could be gained from such exchange of experience.

[Q7.] How are incoming students able to integrate locally, and get comfortable in a new study and living environment?

Nícia Givá: Some students clearly encounter difficulties at first when they take off to live and study far from home. On a very practical level, some find themselves, for the first time, in a situation where they have to cook. Some students need to adapt to a different accent of English, which can take a month or more. The combination of both of these factors led to a situation where a teacher accompanied a student to a medical consultation to act as an interpreter. During that consultation, the doctor advised the teacher, “Teach your students how to cook a fresh vegetable soup”, and that was indeed the point from where the student felt better. As said above, such moments are outside core academic business, but they are part of the experience when carrying out a mobility programme, especially in its starting phase.

As our first Master students have graduated very recently either here in Maputo or in Benin and we now move to the 3rd cohort of students, they can also help each other on very practical advice, in social media groups or through other channels. This reassures incoming students, valorises the experience of those in the second year or finished, and gives teachers more time to focus on academic matters.

Nícia Givá, PhD, is an agronomist with a PhD in Environmental Communication (SLU, Uppsala, Sweden) and MSc in Education and Training for Development (Reading University, UK). An action researcher expert, Nícia has strong experience in qualitative methods and participatory approaches to building local community self-esteem and capability to lead their own development through engagement and facilitated dialogue with multiple stakeholders for collective exploration of co-management opportunities to reconcile conservation objectives and people’s livelihood needs. She works as Researcher and lecturer at Faculty of Agronomy and Forest Engineering (FAEF),

Eduardo Mondlane University (UEM), and course director for the MSc Program in Rural Development. For the last 20 years, she has been working on community-based participatory development projects, farming systems and technologies adoption, gender equity and empowerment, problem-solving oriented agricultural curriculum design, institutional and networking analysis. From 2012, as part of her PhD research project, she expanded her research scope to environmental governance, governance of protected areas, communication and sustainable development in conservation and rural livelihoods nexus.



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PolyCIVIS: confronting the polycrisis in Europe and Africa

PolyCIVIS is a Euro - African collaboration that brings to the forefront the global polycrisis, allowing a better understanding of the impacts of several concurrent major societal crises challenging the world in the form of a polycrisis.

In the wake of the global polycrisis, urgent challenges have emerged, prompting PolyCIVIS to take action. Our initiative is dedicated to addressing these pressing global issues and their interconnected consequences.

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