TITLE: SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTIVITY IN WEST AFRICA: THE ROLE OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE FOR CREATING AND IMPLEMENTING NEW IDEAS

ABSTRACT

The following case is about the emergence of a new social business idea while highlighting the role of entrepreneurs who a) are characterized by different professional, educational and socio-cultural backgrounds (Gambia and Columbia); b) have the ability to realize a business and social entrepreneurial opportunity while being confronted with challenges in a so-called developing country; c) have the strong will to change the situation at hand; d) exchange their ideas and knowledge because of shared interests and mutual trust. The case demonstrates how a social entrepreneurial idea has been generated and realized by exceptional personalities with high intercultural competences with the goal to sustainably change the situation of women in a peripheral region in West Africa.

THE ENTREPRENEURS

Lamin Ceesay from The Gambia and Juan Rivera Acevedo from Colombia enrolled in a public policy program at the Willy Brandt School of Public Policy at the University of Erfurt, Germany, in 2012. Before pursuing a master´s program, Lamin received a Higher Teachers Certificate in Agricultural Science and English, in 2003, and a B.A. degree in Development Studies and Sociology, in 2010. He served for governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the West Africa Network for Peace Building as well as the SOS Children´s Village in The Gambia. Juan started his career with his own taxi company, and then studied economics in Colombia and Germany. After finalizing his bachelor degree, he worked for the NGO Barranquilla Cómo Vamos in Colombia.[1] The Brandt School's Master of Public Policy (MPP) is a two-year interdisciplinary degree program designed for young academics and professionals who wish to pursue a career in the public service, international organizations or the non-profit sector. Established in 2002 as Germany´s first professional school of public policy, the Brandt School incorporates the vision of its name patron that the world is fundamentally interconnected and interdependent, that local solutions require global understanding, and that responsible policy-making means to boldly think outside of the box. The Brandt School students are very much driven by this vision.

One of the major milestones of the MPP program is the completion of an internship. Juan was very much interested in working for an NGO in Africa or Asia to better understand the mechanisms to promote development in so-called developing countries. He shared his thoughts with Lamin during his first semester. Both discussed potential internship opportunities, they regularly exchanged their ideas and interests, and in doing so they developed mutual trust. "Lamin and I talked a lot about our home countries and our work experience. Lamin told me about the NGO TANGO (The Association of Non-Governmental Organizations) located in the city of Serekunda which is the so-called "Home of the NGOs" in Gambia. He explained me that TANGO plays a key role to promote development because it realizes important projects, coordinates the work and efforts of different NGOs in the country, and cooperates with big international organizations like the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). I was very interested in the work of TANGO, so Lamin established contact with the project manager who then

[1] I am grateful for the opportunity to build on the experience of two MPP graduates from the Brandt School who gave permission to using their commitment award application form and internship reports to write this case. Further, I am very thankful for their comments to this case.

offered me an internship. I had never been to West Africa before and was excited that I received the opportunity of gaining work experience and getting to know a foreign country at the same time. I decided to do the internship for seven weeks."[2]

THE GAMBIA

The Gambia is a comparatively small country in West Africa. In 2013, it was ranked 165 out of 187 countries according to the Human Development Index. More than half of the population has to live with less than US$2 per day. In 2006, the Household Poverty Survey Report stated that approximately 39 percent of Gambians were living in abject poverty, the majority of them belonging to rural household; 72 percent of the population was dependent on subsistence agriculture as a means to survival. Agriculture accounts for roughly 30 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) until today. Malnutrition and food insecurity are two of the most severe problems of The Gambia. One of the major reasons for low development is a strong dependency on food imports. Further, price and weather fluctuations as well as an outdated and unproductive agriculture sector have a negative influence on development efforts.

Women tend to suffer most from these circumstances. They are usually responsible for planting, cultivating and harvesting rice, one of the most important food products covering more than two thirds of Gambia's food consumption. They care for the food processing and the cooking as well. All the procedures are usually conducted manually because of the lack of financial resources to buy adequate machinery. Losses in productivity are the result so that production cannot exceed the family's own consumption. No extra crop can be sold.

Problems for women and children caused by this subsistence agriculture are obvious: (1) Productive sectors like horticulture, adult education programs, or petty trading are neglected; (2) school attendance and performance are impacted negatively; (3) babies and children under five cannot be taken care of sufficiently; and (4) fertility rates rise in order to get support for the mother's work.

IDEA GENERATION

While staying in Gambia, Juan expressed already his concern about the devastating working situation in the agricultural sector which imposes hardships specifically on women. This problem is strongly interlinked with the nutrition problem. The Gambian government but also regional NGOs and international organizations have already tried to tackle this problem with diverse policy approaches. The first Millennium Development Goal pinpoints to eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. Therefore, various agricultural projects have been launched throughout the last decade. Especially in rural areas, organizations such as the Gambia Emergency Production Project (GEAPP), the Agency for the Advancement of Women and Children (ADWAC), and various Village Development Committees have established ventures to teach new methods of cultivation and food processing, and to equip people in rural areas with the machinery. Nevertheless, the situation remains disastrous in many places and the effects of new policies are very limited. The major reason is the lack of post-harvest processing equipment like paddy threshers and hullers and, among others, limited knowledge in simple food preservation techniques.

[2] Rivera Acevedo, Juan (2013). My internship: The Gambia. Internship report submitted to the Brandt School on 13 May, 9 pages.

N'Yofelleh is a small city with around 1,500 inhabitants located in the south of the country between the delta of the River Gambia and the Atlantic Ocean. Although close to Brikama (distance less than ten miles), the second biggest city in the Gambia, it is a rural and subsistence agriculture-based community. The two students decided to develop a project with focus on the N'Yofelleh village while tackling two facets of the agriculture problem:

RICE - Firstly, since rice is the basic food of the Gambians, women's typical work includes threshing, winnowing, drying, husking, and shelling. This labor intense work requires a lot of time leaving the working women with a low yield, which is not enough to nourish their families. Rice milling machinery would ease the women's work, making it more productive, and less monotonous. Rice milling machines are available, spare parts are obtainable, and experts to maintain and repair the machines are accessible, but not affordable with the families´ or even a community's budget.

MANGO - Secondly, mango trees are the world's largest fruit trees reaching a height of up to one hundred feet. The Gambia's temperature and climate conditions are optimal for the growing of mango trees. The consequence is mangos cover the countryside during the picking season. But once they are ripe and harvested they have to be consumed or preserved quickly in order to prevent them from fouling. Women in rural areas such as N'Yofelleh lack skills and experience on how to adequately use the fruits. However, in other parts of the world mangos are used as pickles, or as basis for juice, chutney, ice cream, or jam.

When Juan returned from The Gambia, he shared the idea with Lamin to preserve mangos. The techniques to produce mango jam do not require a lot of equipment and are easily to learn and transferable. The idea to produce mango jam was absolutely new to Lamin. He has never thought of using mangos for productive reasons. Juan was very enthusiastic about this idea because his mother-in-law who happens to be German (because he is married to a German woman) is fanatic about preserving fruits. She shared her recipes and knowledge with Juan and Lamin. Both were impressed about the many ways to preserve fruits and learned everything about producing mango jam to transfer this idea to the Gambian context.

Both started thinking of a strategy on how to promote development in Gambia. The students decided to launch a pilot project with two interlinked goals: (1) providing technical support to women of N´Yofelleh Village by purchasing a multi-crop thresher or paddy thresher; (2) offering training to the community on mango processing and preservation methods to produce jam.

IDEA DEVELOPMENT

The next steps were clearly defined: raising money, establishing networks to increase funding, and developing support mechanisms on the ground to realize the idea. The Brandt School offered a promising opportunity to raise initial funds by calling for project proposals for social entrepreneurial ideas which are awarded with a so-called Commitment Award at a yearly basis. The award is a financial donation by the *Engagementpreis Stiftung* which is a small foundation initiated and directed by Markus Pins who regularly teaches the mandatory course on ethics in the public sector at the Brandt School. The winner receives a prize amounting to €2,500 (second prize €1,500 and third prize €1,000) to take first steps to realize a social entrepreneurial endeavor. Lamin and Juan were thrilled by the opportunity to turn their idea into practice and submitted a well written, strong proposal to the selection committee. They both underlined that participating in this competition gave them an important target and further

strengthened them in their passion and desire to contribute to development being part of the "millennial generation". They felt connected with a special community of risk-taking entrepreneurs pursing social ideas, and their fear of failure faded away.

To make sure that the future machinery will be used efficiently, the students got in touch with the GEAPP which offers training on use and maintenance of multi-crop threshers; they contacted the Methodist Mission Agricultural Programme (MMAP) which has the capacity and technical knowhow to support training in context of mango processing; and they built up strong links with the Village Development Committee (VDC) to make sure that both projects are handled with greatest professionalism on the ground. In this context, the students insisted on a female committee to manage the handling and maintaining of the machinery and production processes. The students put major emphasis on involving the community to create a bottom-up approach while respecting and considering the expertise, passion and concerns of the people in N'Yofelleh. They hoped to turn the project into a community project taking on a very low self-centered attitude.

In summer 2013, Lamin and Juan were awarded the first prize in the Commitment Award Ceremony. Nonetheless, the seed funding was not high enough to realize both elements of the pilot project. They would have needed €3,150 to realize both projects. Motivated by this success, they enforced the fundraising activities reaching out to students and alumni of the Brandt School, and offered transparent information about the costs but also lack of financing to make both project goals happen. Though they managed to establish fruitful contacts with NGOs such as Concern Universal and the Catholic Relief Services but also with private sector organizations such as Jalma Trading Enterprise, the funding did not increase substantially.[3]

Lamin and Juan entered the most difficult phase of their project, and disillusionment was about to take control of their feelings. Lamin started considering to drop one project goal and to prioritize purchasing the rice milling machine, since that is the immediate need of the women; in addition, a multiplier effect would have been reached because revenues might have been re-invested in the future training of food preservation. However, Juan disagreed because he aimed at developing a comprehensive approach for development. In his opinion the project was about the interests but also choices of women to take part in activities; splitting the money and concentrating on just one element of the project was, therefore, not an acceptable solution for him. It would have limited the opportunities of women to live better lives.

Because of this disagreement, they decided to meet with Markus Pins to discuss their dilemma. Mr. Pins organized a meeting in November 2013 to discuss the funding problems. In this meeting, a strategy was developed to raise additional funds while building on Mr. Pins´ expertise and support. They reached an agreement to further pursue the realization of both elements of the pilot project. Further, Mr. Pins offered the students to using the foundations´ web platform to place a call for funding which would then allow the funding partners to profit from tax reductions according to German legal standards. The social entrepreneurs hoped to raise the incentive for potential funding partners to support their project if tax reductions can be offered to them. Thanks to this mediation initiated by both students and the support by Mr. Pins, the project development picked up steam, again.

[3] Ceesay, Lamin (2014). State of the Art Report on: January 2014. Submitted to the Engagement Foundation and the Brandtschool, January.

After all these efforts, the story took a sudden turn after Juan and Lamin successfully reached out to beneficiary families who announced to provide the two social entrepreneurs with the lacking funding which would then allow them to realize both ideas. Both families underlined that the tax reduction was the major incentive for them to provide funding. The *Engagementpreis* foundation turned out to be highly supportive for the young social entrepreneurs not only in financial terms but also because it offered mental support, management and legal expertise, and networking facilities.

IMPLEMENTATION

In spring 2014, Lamin took a cheap budget flight from Frankfurt to Banjul (the Capital of The Gambia) via Kap Verde with the money in his pockets (or rather his shoes to not provoking corruptive thoughts while passing the customs). The students decided to change the money in The Gambia to receiving a better exchange rate while taking the risk that the money has to be transferred manually. Lamin´s journey was linked to an internship placement with ADWAC in The Gambia, and he was lucky that the flight costs were, therefore, covered by an external organization. After a long and enduring trip by flight, boat and bus, Lamin finally arrived in N´Yofelleh.

With the seed funding he has received from the Commitment Award and beneficiary friends, he bought a rice milling machine from a Chinese manufacturer who delivered the machine for a low prize including a free training on how to use and to maintain the machine. The machine is now owned and administered by the VDC of N'Yofelleh who appointed a female committee to manage the usage of the machinery; a small user fee is to be paid to the female farmers for usage. The prize for rice processing is calculated per kilo to keep the fees low.

Further, the MMAP offered mango processing and preservation training programs in N'Yofelleh, in the form of one to two days training sessions for the women. This training helped to extend their knowledge of productive operations enabling them to sell or even export the resulting mango jam and, therefore, to provide their families with an extra source of income. The training fees were covered by the students´ donation. The recipes from Germany were introduced to the MMAP trainers and integrated in the training programs with special context on mango preservation.

"The trainees were taken through the theory and various practical stages of how to process and preserve mango into Mango jam and mango chutney. At the end of the training, sheets of paper with the list of ingredients were distributed among the trainees to serve as a guide for trainees when they want to demonstrate their skills. (…) In a show of appreciation, the women of Nyofelleh and the representatives from other villages joined together and composed a song for the facilitators and trainer."[4]

[4] Nyockeh, A. (2014, April 15). Nyofelleh village members trained on mango processing and preservation. *The Point Newspaper*. Retrieved from: http://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/article/nyofelleh-village-members-trained-on-mango-processing-and-preservation. Accessed on February 27, 2015.