

Collaborating Across Continents – The Challenges of Intercontinental Academic Partnerships

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Abstract

Amidst the current climate of concern about the flow of immigrants towards Europe, and the concomitant need for Africans to develop their many resources and talents, E4Impact, a spin-off foundation of the graduate business school in Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore is developing innovative forms of transnational education on social entrepreneurship in Africa.

Transnational education (TNE) has been defined as “All types and modes of delivery of higher education study programmes, or sets of courses of study, or educational services (including those of distance education) in which the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based” (Council of Europe, 2001). One of the critiques of TNE is that it may be conducted as cultural imperialism, pursuing profit at the expense of traditional educational values, as a means of enabling Western universities to raise revenue needed at home (Ziguras & McBurnie, 2008). The exclusive focus on social impact entrepreneurship within the tertiary education programmes developed by E4Impact, and the academic partnerships that deliver the programmes, are two reasons why the form of TNE discussed in this chapter can survive such critiques.

The programmes offer either an MBA or a Certificate and are currently delivered in English, French or Portuguese in countries from all over the African continent, from the Middle Eastern and Northern African countries to sub-Saharan Africa. Conceived as a partnership between the Italian university and a tertiary education institution in Africa, whose faculty work together with the Italian professors towards national accreditation and marketing, the model has had to adapt to diverse contexts, with different universities requiring different models. Although the Italian university behind E4Impact remains the original source of the idea and expertise, it is not exporting a monolithic

model, but is offering a collaborative educational proposal, which adapts to the context where it takes place.

The Chapter takes a two-pronged approach to the topic of collaborating across continents, firstly by describing the model of TNE of E4Impact, and secondly by presenting in-depth interviews with two female students associated with the programme in different countries. Accordingly, Section 1 situates the MBA programme in the context of transnational education, and recounts how it started as a programme in Italy for Africans. Section 2 narrates the development of the programme, from a rather uncomfortable model of international academic franchising to academic social franchising, which is closer to its current format. Sections 3 and 4 present the interviews with a Kenyan graduate and an Ethiopian student¹, while Section 5 discusses key points which emerge from the interviews. Section 6 looks beyond the specific cases recounted and considers the philosophy, methodology and future of this form of transnational education.

1. Transnational Education – From Africa to Italy and Back

According to the definition provided by UNESCO/Council of Europe Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education (Riga, 6 June 2001), Transnational Education (TNE) includes “all types of higher education study programmes, or sets of courses of study, or educational services (including those of distance education) in which the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based”. Transnational education is sometimes seen (and enacted) as a cash cow, enabling Western universities to raise revenue that is lacking at home; the model developed by E4Impact² continues to modulate in its efforts to succeed in providing education in an inclusive perspective, conforming the cost of the education provided to local standards. This paper discusses and problematizes the philosophy and

1 Both interviewees signed consent forms and their names and the names of their companies are real.

2 The foundation E4Impact (<https://e4impact.org/>) is a spin-off of ALTIS (<https://altis.unicatt.it/>), one of the eight graduate schools at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan campus. The President and vice-President of E4Impact are Letizia Moratti and Franco Anelli, Rector of Università Cattolica, its CEO is Prof. Mario Molteni, founder of ALTIS.

methodology of introducing such programmes transnationally where financial gain is not the primary goal, but a sustainable model needs to be created.

The internationalisation of a university's educational proposal can take various canonical forms. In the university under discussion, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, the largest non-public Catholic University in Europe, the most visible forms of an internationalised education start from the international office. Many forms of student and teacher mobility and study abroad (short and long) are on offer, including a few faculty-led programmes abroad. Some projects involving internationalisation of the classroom take place, as part of partnerships with other universities: small groups of students meet online for a limited number of weeks and a section of the curriculum, particularly in the Faculty of Languages. There is an increasing trend to provide English-taught BA and MA degrees on all the five campuses of the university, with Medicine and Surgery in Rome, Economics, Management, Political Science and Psychology in Milan, Food Science in Piacenza, and an international doctorate in Maths and Physics, offered in conjunction with three other universities around the world from the Brescia campus. It could be said that all such strategies focus on an inward-facing internationalisation of the institution.

Perhaps the most original and outward-facing enactments of internationalisation, which challenge the very philosophy and direction of internationalisation, are the projects centring around Social or Impact Entrepreneurship, delivered entirely on the African continent for African students. As of 2020, this is currently running in 18 countries, taught in English, French or Portuguese in Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Burundi in the East, DR Congo, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and South Africa in the South, Gabon, Cameroon, Nigeria, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Senegal in West Africa, and in the Middle Eastern North African countries of Tunisia and Egypt.

The first initiative of tertiary education for African students in Università Cattolica started by invitation of the Vatican Dicastery, Propaganda Fide, who decided to invest in African students whose background showed leadership skills and a high level of education by organising a Master's for Future Managers in African society. The Dicastery set aside the necessary funds for the project, and provided links in various African countries, and asked the

then Rector of Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Prof. Lorenzo Ornaghi, to take on the challenge. He proposed it to the newly founded graduate school ALTIS, *Alta Scuola Impresa e Società*' (Graduate School for Business and Society), whose director, Prof. Mario Molteni, willingly accepted, since the ethos of the school centred on promoting social and environmental issues and its vocation was to concentrate on the Global South. The first Master's programme was held in Rome in 2008 and the students, all male, were chosen on the basis of their curriculum, leadership skills and motivation. As Molteni says³, the Master's represented on the one hand an opportunity for the students, giving them knowledge, skills and a network of relationships that could help them throughout their future life; on the other, it demanded considerable sacrifice, requiring them to leave their country and families and spend a year in Italy.

The first edition of the Master's was deemed a success, and many of the students who took it have remained in contact with ALTIS. However, the leadership of Propaganda Fide changed in 2007 and the new leaders decided to invest elsewhere, withdrawing the financial support which had enabled the project to exist. This unexpected turn of events forced the researchers and professors at ALTIS, who had gained considerable experience through the first edition, which had been conceived as a kind of laboratory in which the lesson contents and delivery style were honed to the students' needs, to evaluate the value of their endeavours and the whole enterprise. They were loath to abandon the project, and found an intermediate solution which moved the Master's to Milan and opened it up to other emerging countries (particularly India and various Latin American countries). The necessary funds were sought through scholarships provided by the network of companies and institutions around the world that ALTIS had created since its foundation. The 2008 financial crisis, however, thwarted plans for the second formula, because scholarships were impossible to find; also, it became clear that the students who managed to gain a place on the Master's wanted to remain in Europe, rather than take their newly gained management skills back home. Thus ALTIS found itself

3 The author wishes to thank Prof. Mario Molteni and David Cheboryot for granting several interviews and for providing access to as yet unpublished documents recounting the history of the programmes.

caught up in the brain drain of the African continent, obtaining the opposite effect of its original intentions.

One element of the first edition was a key to finding the right path: the final task within the Master's required students to develop a project, and two students from the first edition had conceived social business ideas to implement back home. They took part in the Global Social Venture Competition, an international competition for social business promoted by the University of Berkeley, USA, which ALTIS had brought to Italy in the meantime. They were awarded by the Jury for their entrepreneurial projects, which gave rise to the idea of focusing entirely on social entrepreneurship. Accordingly, in 2010, the school turned the previous formula upside down: instead of Africans coming to Italy, Italians would go to Africa, and the focus would not be management, but on entrepreneurship that could create jobs and have a positive impact on society.

2. From International Academic Franchising to Academic Social Franchising

TNE often comes under the model of an international academic franchise, involving a franchisor, usually a university with a strong reputation in a developed country, which exports its academic programmes to another, typically developing, country where franchisees buy into the academic formulae proposed. In many cases, this creates revenue for the home university, as well as increasing its international reputation. This kind of model is inevitably hierarchical, with the balance of power lying with the franchisor. While initially the MBA in social entrepreneurship did indeed bear the title of the Italian university in question, as time passes, the balance is gradually reset, and in current agreements between E4Impact and an African university, there is typically a number of years established within which the programme must become a joint or dual degree, awarded by both the Italian and the local African university.

From the outset, the formula of international academic franchising (IAF) was not a perfect fit for the MBA, for a number of reasons. First and

foremost, it was clear to the Italian academics that if the programme contents were to be truly relevant, they had to be developed together with faculty who could understand the characteristics and needs of local students; the nature of the agreement needed to be more of a partnership than is usual in IAF.

The choice of a partnering university is a crucial decision when setting up TNE, particularly if it is mission-driven, rather than revenue-driven. Università Cattolica is a non-public university, and the current 18 partners in Africa tend to be the same, although they are not predominantly of Catholic or religious denominations. The first edition in Africa of the MBA in entrepreneurship and management was launched in 2011 in Kenya at the Catholic University of East Africa, specifically Tangaza College, where the Institute of Social Ministry⁴ had a slogan that was aligned with the MBA's outlook: we are not job seekers, but job creators! The interests of the Institute of Social Ministry revolved around the concepts of enterprise, underlining the African spirit of initiative, creativity and access to all types of resources and on the social, paying close attention to the needs of the majority of the population still under the poverty line. This approach matched the ALTIS philosophy: there was no intention to provide some kind of charitable aid to the poorest of the poor through the MBA, or only attract the affluent class in Kenya. The aim was to attract and train the young and growing middle class who had the energy to develop a new business idea, and build up their own company which could have impact on their local situation. Indeed, over time, the MBA became specifically associated with Impact Entrepreneurship (hence the name E4Impact).

Another significant factor in the formula is the cost of the MBA, which is aligned with the costs of higher education in the local country, rather than with European standards. This precluded any significant economic gain from the Italian university, although it obviously brought rewards in terms of reputation and networking. According to the E4Impact model, the revenue from tuition on the MBA remains with the partner university; from the third year only, the partner university shares 1/3 of the revenue with E4Impact⁵.

4 The author wishes to thank Fr. Pierli and Brother Jonas for in-depth interviews about the foundation and history of the Institute of Social Ministry at Tangaza College.

5 The transformation of what was a programme called E4Impact into a Foundation with a high-profile non-university president was designed to attract European companies looking to invest in African entrepreneurs, who could build up mutually rewarding partnerships.

The first Kenyan edition drew participants from 18 African countries, showing the relevance and attraction of a degree from a European university, which is perceived to increase employability and enhance job prospects. Such a mix of nationalities showed the intrinsic international vocation of the MBA, which was also reflected in the faculty, who came from the ALTIS network in the United States and in India, as well as from Italy. On the other hand, the international classroom limited the extent to which the programme was rooted to the local society. It was a residential course of several months, requiring both students and faculty to leave their countries and their businesses, causing considerable sacrifice to many families.

Many aspects of the original MBA evolved over the years. It became evident that the ideal student was one with business experience; the 'executive' formula, with a combination of long and short weekends and few residential weeks amounting to 37 days of training, spread over more than 12 months, was thus found to be the best way to enable students to carry on working. Another significant development was the introduction of a business idea competition as a way of assessing the potential for entrepreneurial innovation of candidates wishing to attend the MBA. The participants on the MBA became those who were successful in the competition, rather than candidates who were assessed merely on their curricula. A third key factor is the efforts required of the partnering university: the African university not only provides faculty to work on the contents of the modules, tailoring the proposal to the context, but leads marketing and the applications for national accreditation. Over time, other developments include the engagement of a successful local entrepreneur to provide a point of reference for students, and the involvement of graduate Italian students, who undertake a period of tutoring in the African university, mentoring students for certain exams or projects. The benefits of taking part in an international programme abroad thus do not remain only with faculty members, who update and internationalise their profile, but are now increasingly shared with students, enriching their employability skills with knowledge and experience.

Among the interesting developments over the years is the evolution of the MBA model, and this is in line with 'social' franchising, where the objective is to maximise social impact. Some African universities are copying rigid Eu-

ropean academic rules, and beginning to demand, for example, that an MBA lasts two years. This might appear to jar with the initial choice of an MBA as a practical type of qualification, since the aim of E4Impact is to prepare young entrepreneurs to enter the business world more effectively. Many young entrepreneurs do not need to spend two years in education, and it may actually slow down the impact of their training. This has led to the development of an E4Impact certificate, provided by Università Cattolica, which is not recognised as a fully-fledged MBA. This solution provides students who do not need an MBA with the core features of the programme, enabling them to be entrepreneurs with impact, regardless of their academic qualifications. On the other hand, in some universities which have delivered the MBA for several years, the role of E4impact can evolve from being front-line delivery into being a guarantee of the quality of the MBA.

3. Interview With Sally Sawaya, Meru Herbs, Nairobi, MBA graduate 2015/16

During the summer of 2018, the author spent 10 days visiting two partner universities delivering the MBA, Tangaza College at the Catholic University of East Africa in Nairobi, Kenya, and St Mary's University in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Interviews were conducted with both faculty and students, and followed the same semi-structured format: the questions were intended to provide a profile of each interviewee and their business, probing the motivations for enrolling on the MBA, and asking about features of the programme such as the language of delivery, the attention to the local context and culture, the degree of localisation of the contents of the programme.

In Kenya, where the programme had been running for 8 years, the interviewees were all considered to be champions, who had made a success of their MBA business ideas. In Ethiopia, where the edition was only in its second year, all the students on the programme were asked if they wanted to be interviewed. The two interviewees presented here are women with interesting profiles (35% of the MBA attendees overall are women). The interviews have

been subjected to minimal editing, with some questions, features of spoken English and repetitions removed for ease of reading.

Sally Sawaya, Meru Herbs Kenya 2015/16

Q: Could you start by telling me a little about you and your job?

S: So my name is Sally Kimoto Sawaya, I was born on 8th February 1975 and I went to school in Embu. Embu is like 200 km from the capital city Nairobi, I went to Sacred Heart College, and then for my undergraduate I went to Catholic University of East Africa. After that, while doing my degree, my undergraduate degree at the University – at the Catholic University I had a chance to do internship for Meru Herbs Kenya. So during the holidays I would join them and do my internship here. I graduated in 1997, I now joined Meru Herbs as a full time employee and then I joined Meru Herbs in marketing, and then I moved on to be the logistic manager, and then assistant general manager.

Let me tell you a little background about Meru Herbs. We started in 1989, as a water project and the primary aim of the water project was to provide water to close⁶ 440 families who are living in a semi-arid area about 250 km from the capital city Nairobi. The idea was to give them piped water into their homes, because the other alternative was to pick water from the well and carry it on their backs or on the animals to their homes for domestic use and for other purposes in the house, watering the animals and all. So once the project was in place, it was a project in collaboration with the Italian government and the Catholic Church, then there was a need to come up with a commercial venture, one to meet the operational maintenance costs of the water project and then also to provide a source of income for this community, to improve the quality of their living.

So then the project coordinator founded the Meru Herbs and using the Italian connections that we already had while implementing the water project, we realized that there was a market niche for herbal teas. Kenya was already exporting tea and coffee but there was a small market for herbal teas. It was a very new concept in Kenya then, but in the international market there was

6 Features of the variety of English spoken by the interviewees have been left in.

really a small demand for Herbal teas and that's what we went into. So, we started growing hibiscus, chamomile and lemon grass and initially we just sent it out as bulk because we didn't have any form of machinery and all that. So we just grew it, ground it and then packed it. With time we started adding value, value addition, and we invested in a tea bag machine, we started making tea bags and then we started now blending the teas as well. And then, at that time we were working with a group of mango tree farmers. And we realized that these farmers also had loads of fruits, tropical fruits, that were going to waste when it was the mango season, you'd have too many mangoes and then there's only a little bit that you can consume, that you can sell, but you also can't sell to your neighbours because they also have mangoes. So there's a lot of fruit wasted. Then we realized what can we do with all these fruits, and we decided to get an expert from Italy who came here and taught us how to make jam. And so in 1995 we started making tropical fruits jam. And so now the farmers were benefitting from the herbs and also from the fruits that we are buying and transforming into jams. Then, as a kind of strategy, marketing strategy, we decided to also go organic. Already the community was not using pesticides and chemicals, so we were actually growing organic, but we thought "why don't we just get a proper certificate to prove that we are actually growing organic?" And it was also an added advantage to the international market. By 2000 we had our certification for the farmers. So from then on we progressively added more farmers - at this point we have 285. We are looking to add more and encouraging farmers to grow organic and all that.

The main success about Meru Herbs is it employs women, a great number of women because they are the ones who prepare the herbs, they are the ones who prepare the fruits and all that, and gives them a source of income and then also it employs the rural youth who would now have no other option but maybe come to Nairobi and look for work. And already there is a high rate of unemployment here. So it provides a source of income for the community and then secondly we try and encourage the community to not only grow the herbs organically but also their own food. And then we decide to put a solar project into the whole factory, so now we are producing using solar energy as opposed to using electricity.

Q: And at what point did you decide you needed to do an MBA?

S: The opportunity came in 2015, I had been looking into doing an MBA from the local university, but the problem was the flexibility in terms of hours. It required that I dedicate a whole three hours in the evening every day to do the MBA and so it was not suiting my work programme. And the family programme as well. But when I got the opportunity now to do the MBA in Tanzania with flexible hours and the content and the structure of the MBA, I took it up immediately.

Q: So was it the structure of the MBA that attracted you? Or that it had an international element?

S: I already had some Italian contacts

Q: Was that a factor of attraction?

S: Actually that was a main factor. Even the structure, and the content of the MBA and the fact that it was also on entrepreneurship was also a big factor.

Q: Which languages do you speak?

S: I speak English, Swahili and Kiambu, my local vernacular. At work we speak English.

Q: But if you are interacting with the farmers?

S: Oh we speak local languages as well

Q: So what do you think the added value of the international element is in the MBA?

S: The added value is fast, you don't have to travel all the way to Italy to get a degree. So you have the same quality of degree but you are having it locally. So it cuts down a lot of expenses, because imagine if you have to travel to Italy and then get accommodation, then again it takes away from your work, as opposed to get the same degree locally given and whatever it is that you are learning in the classrooms, in the lecture rooms, you come back and implement it. So that is one of the most attractive thing about this MBA, that all the

knowledge that is imparted, you are actually able to go back and practically look at your business and see strategic partnerships.

And you are able to go back and look: we are not been having partnership with our farmers, who are a big component of the whole value chain system. Then you come back and look at your suppliers, I'm just giving an example of the content that you get from the MBA, and then come back and actually, practically implement it as opposed to- because in Italy I'd be putting notes "ok so when I go back I need to do this, I need to do this, I need to do that..." So that is one of the most attractive things: the practicability of the MBA programme.

Q: Is it important for you to be present online? Does your company have a webpage or a Facebook page?

S: Yes, the company has a webpage, a Facebook page, though the webpage is under maintenance. We are moving a few things around and then we have a Facebook page. We have an Instagram page.

Q: Do you have a manager for that?

S: Yes, social marketing is very important

Q: And is there anywhere mention of the fact that you did the MBA which is Tangaza-Cattolica or not? Does it come out in your profile that you have an international degree or something like that?

S: On the website?

Q: Under your name, does it matter to you that you have this international certificate?

S: Yes, yes it matters so much to me

Q: The Master's is delivered in English, because English is the language of instruction in Kenya. Were there people from other countries in your class?

S: Yes, there were

Q: And was everybody talking in English or did you talk in other languages in the classroom?

S: Everybody was talking English, though maybe during lunch it was not odd to find Swahili being spoken. I mean people would also interact in Swahili, but mainly we spoke English, definitely

Q: Do you think there is a space to have something in Swahili, for example, in the master's? Or do you think that it is already international, and you don't need anything else?

S: You are gonna use it in the business, I don't see the need to, personally, I don't see the need to. I think it's ok as is in English.

Q: And did you ever have any problematic issues around English, for example, either there were people from another country who maybe didn't speak it as well as you did, or the lecturers who were not speaking in their own language found it hard to talk in English to an international classroom? Did you ever find that there was a barrier in anyway?

S: No, it wasn't. Not in my track, not in track 5, no. I didn't notice any problems at all

Q: And what about the content? Because the MBA was first designed in Italy, and then designed together with the Tangaza people or the international faculty. Is the curriculum localized? Did you ever feel that you were getting western content that wasn't relevant? Or did you feel that it had been Africanized?

S: The content was actually Africanized. The only thing I remember we all kind of struggling with was the project management. We found it a little bit complicated, trying to like put the model into our own models. But we managed eventually, but everything else was very very localized.

Q: Was the lecturer African?

S: The lecturer was then Kenyan, but a few of us found the project management a bit difficult to interpret and then implement. But we managed.

Q: You managed, and you felt that the content was localized?

S: It was trying to be localized, yes, but there was a little bit of struggle. I would say that the content of this MBA has really helped us, at Meru Herbs.

If it was marketing, it was broken into different bits of marketing, if it's research, if it's marketing analysis and all that, it was broken up and given in small pieces and it was- it's something you could actually take back to your organization and see how to implement it: Are we at the introduction stage? Are we at the maturity stage? And all that. It was easy.

Q: And as a person, how did you feel that the MBA helped you grow or develop yourself? Did it open your mind, how did that happen?

S: Oh yes, it did. The- what is it called- business model canvas, that opened my mind completely in terms of looking at Meru Herbs. It actually opened my mind because all along I have been thinking Meru Herbs in that different kind of setting, but now looking at it in terms of all these components, the strategic partners, looking at what value are we giving our customers, it made us now get back as a team and look keenly at Meru Herbs, and now like decide, make strategic decisions depending on different components of that canvas.

Q: Did the Master's give you new contacts? Did your international profile take off more, thanks to the MBA or during the MBA? I mean, did you make contacts that you then took forward?

S: We discovered the Canadian market.

Q: And did you remain in contact with people from the MBA who are from other countries?

S: Definitely, yes. We have like social groups, we have WhatsApp groups, we formed a social entrepreneur group - we interact on a daily basis.

Q: Even now?

S: Even now.

Q: 3 years later?

S: Yes, and actually what the aim is anybody who is going through the MBA becomes a member and so we continue adding the group. We interact, if there is anybody going through a successful moment they post so we share, if you

are going through a difficulty, if you are looking for a contact, so the MBA, especially track 5, we really have become really close knit.

Q: So, another of the claims that Tangaza came up with is that the master's doesn't create job seekers but job creators. Have you created jobs, do you think?

S: Hm, I think-Meru Herbs has already created jobs, so it was a question of managing those relationships now in a better way.

Q: Would you like to add anything else?

S: One of the most attractive things about it is the flexibility in hours, so you find that the boot camps, the long weekends, the virtual learning - I mean it allows you flexibility, time for organizing yourself. So you are able to work, you don't get to lose your job. So you are able to work and still come back to implement activities that you read into the business itself.

Then, secondly we are only in the same MBA class, but we are all doing the MBA for our unique businesses. Whether it's a start-up or ongoing, we are not copying what another person is doing, so you have a chance to excel in what you know best. So you are not in competition with anyone. As opposed to other MBAs where you go, it's contents and it's who is getting the A, who's getting B and who's getting the C. But it's not about that. This allows you to learn for your business or for your start up, that is one of the most attractive things about this MBA.

And then another thing, having business coaches is excellent. Because you have a business coach and you must meet your business coach and you have to discuss everything, your financial plan, everything. They came here and you had to have appointments with them and see them and go through your models and you listen to them and they tell you the mistakes you have or something. Then you also tell them whatever challenges you are going through, because all of us was struggling with- cause most of us didn't have- didn't come from financial background. All struggling with our financial models, but eventually they made it look so simple. And the idea was, even if you are not going to be the financial person in the organization you need to interpret simple financial models as well. So the business coaching, that was

excellent and then it also allowed for feedback. That was very important. After every lecture, we would give feedback. The students were allowed to give feedback about each and every lecturer, what we liked, what we didn't like. So if we struggled, it came out clearly and anonymously, cause you don't have to put your name and all that, you just need to give feedback.

Q: Did you stay in contact with any of your coaches?

S: I think I did, I think I have quite a number of them on WhatsApp. But also what I liked is that they don't know you from class, so are not already putting you in a category. They'll coach you with a very open mind, so that was very excellent. This is one degree I totally enjoyed. I totally enjoyed it right from the beginning.

4. Interview with Betaly, Addis Ababa, MBA 2017/18

B: My name is Betaly (Bethlehem), I graduated from Barhir Dar University, it's in another city, in industrial engineering and I was born in June 25th 1991 in European calendar. Immediately after I graduated, I started my master's degree, so I have two other Master's degrees: industrial engineering and general MBA.

Q: And why did you particularly choose this one?

B: Well, I heard that it's more practical, so, for instance, like I said, I graduated in industrial engineering and the idea was to give us skill in order to improve the performance of an organization after we graduate, but it was focused on giving us only theoretical perspective on the field. So, when I hear that it is, yeah, this programme is more practical I was impressed and then joined.

Q: Which languages do you speak?

B: My native language is Amharic. I can speak English, I can speak a little bit of Spanish, Korean, Chinese and a little bit of Italian.

Q: When you chose the MBA, in conjunction with an Italian university, did that make any difference or was it purely the practical side that you were interested in?

B: Of course it did, because I have been in three different institutes while doing both my Bachelor's degree and my Master's degree, so I was looking for a different approach to get an education, that is linked to the actual world.

Q: Do you think that, that the product is sufficiently joint? Are you getting a perspective that is both European-Italian and specifically Ethiopian?

B: I can feel the combination, I can feel the integration because, for instance, the schedule, I mean, we get the schedule before it even started, so we have a general perspective of what the programme will look like, will look like, so if I wanted to do something I can check on my calendar. That's our business culture telling us before even the programme started, so in Ethiopia we do things randomly. For instance, if a teacher wants to give us a class in the evening, he might call us before 30 minutes and he will just ask us to come to the class.

And the other thing is the virtual education. That is very helpful. Because foreign professors are giving us lectures on different subjects. Even the distance education right here from Addis in St Mary's University, for E4Impact we have a distance programme material, which is very helpful and the videos are descriptive and it's so easy for, for instance, for myself, to understand what they are talking about.

Q: What about the way they present the topics? Do you feel a difference between the way the Europeans present whatever topic they are doing and the Ethiopians?

B: It's, it's jointly, every programme was given jointly, but, for instance, on the slides, we see instructions to the local lecturer, so the local professors, to give local examples. For instance in the slide there are different international examples that us Ethiopians may not be familiar with. So right there I see an instruction for the instructor to give us, the Ethiopians, a local example, so that we can get a better insight of the topic.

Q: Do you feel that while you're doing these subjects, you are forced to open your outlook to something more international or you are naturally like that anyway?

B: I believe that I'm naturally international, because I like to expose myself to different things, personally, I'm that kind of person, but this programme motivates, not only me but almost everyone in the class, because it's engaging, even our classroom arrangement is completely different from any other university, or any other teaching learning method in all over the country.

Q: Can you explain? Why do you say your classroom arrangement?

B: Our classroom arrangement, as you can see right now, it's a U shape, which is easy for all of us to see each other, and if it's necessary, for instance, if we have a group assignment, the tables will, can be disassembled, and we can rearrange them in different shapes or in different layouts in order to discuss. But, from my experience, that never happened in Ethiopia. So, I mean it's really engaging, it doesn't even seem like we are in the classroom.

Q: Now, what about the language? I mean in some of the MBAs there are people from other countries, so if you are in the Kenya classroom, I was in Kenya last week, there were people from Sudan and from Africa, from Uganda. Here you are all Ethiopians - do you feel that there are cultural differences among you? I mean, are there people coming from outside Addis or is it fairly homogeneous in the classroom?

B: For now I believe it's homogeneous, but for the older people, I mean, I was raised in Addis which is the capital city of Ethiopia so I'm exposed to technology and speaking different language, so I find the language of teaching method is English, it's not a problem for me, but I can see difficulty in the older students.

Q: You say it's not a problem for you and English is the medium of instruction in Ethiopia, but I noticed, yesterday for example, when we were doing the feedback on the finance module, somebody started talking in Amharic when they were talking to the teacher and therefore he switched, and from then on

all the conversation was in Amharic. Do you think that there should be some kind of official section of the course which is in the local language?

B: Yeah. Actually the idea, the policy is to teach local students, the general policy is to teach local students by using the English language, if it's in higher education level, but the practice is that both the instructors and the students use both the English language and the Amharic language.

Q: And how do you distinguish between the two? What do you do in one language and what do you do in the other?

B: Usually when some topic is up for discussion we start with English and we continue with Amharic.

Q: Because I noticed yesterday in the law lesson, that all, whenever he said "go to your pairs" everybody then talked in Amharic, right? So, would it be unnatural for you to talk in English to one of your peers?

B: We don't speak in English at all. We speak Amharic. Amharic is the national working language. So, if you go outside there are, I think, around 80 different languages, but everywhere you go they use Amharic. I was even responding to you in Amharic right here.

Q: Yes, that's right. I was wondering if there was a reason, like if you have a resistance to speaking English.

B: No.

Q: Lastly, can you tell what your business idea is?

B: The plan is for me to do a feasibility study for a textile company. The idea is to study the market and give them a better insight on how to start a business in Ethiopia.

Q: Another question. Do you have an online profile? Are you present on LinkedIn or Facebook, or anything like that?

B: I use both, I mean, most of us have an account but we don't update it on a regular basis.

Q: Right, so it doesn't say, for example, that you are in the process of doing an international MBA?

B: No, it does not.

Q: Do you think you will put that on or not?

B: Actually, I'm a private person. Even my Facebook profile is private, but I use social media intensively. For instance, I use Instagram, I love Instagram. And, most of the people I follow are influencers, musicians, bloggers. So, I like to know what's going on in the world. How the world it is running its business. For instance, nowadays, I can understand that bloggers, social media influencers have a huge impact on almost any business.

Q. I'm interested in knowing is when you finish this MBA, for example, will you consider it a plus in your profile to have an Italian university giving you your MBA?

B: Of course. I actually have a plan to do something with my master's degree and that involves acknowledging the university. Actually, I run the social media page of St Mary's University.

Q: OK, great. Thanks a lot.

5. Discussion of the Interviews With Students

This section will discuss some of the themes that emerge from the two interviews in Sections 3 and 4, and relate them to the overall model of the MBA delivered by E4Impact-Università Cattolica and its partner universities.

Firstly, the weight of the international connection in the MBA is clearly important to both women. While Sally already had connections in Italy due to the project linked to the company Meru Herbs, she declares that the main attraction of the MBA, distinguishing it from others, was the fact that the MBA was being delivered by an Italian university. Later in the interview, she appreciates the flexible organisation in terms of time which allowed her to attend the programme, and the practical nature of the topics, which spurred her to go back into her company and take a critical and creative look at the way in

which it was being run. The close connection with her work is clearly a strong attraction point of the programme.

Betany agrees that the international nature of the programme made a difference to her choice of MBA; she is proud of her many languages, and feels she has an international outlook, but it was above all the reputation for being a practical MBA which made her enrol. She declares that when she has got her international qualification, she has plans that directly stem from it. Perhaps the fact that she is still enrolled in the programme make her appreciation of the international element harder to gauge.

Among the strong points of the programme, Betaly appreciates the fact that the examples given in class by local staff are directly applicable to the Ethiopian context, and she can sense the joint nature of the academic contents, created by both Italian and Ethiopian staff. Sally also notes that the contents are localised. Both speak highly appreciatively of the teaching style: in the case of Kenya, the fact that all the subjects are broken down into manageable bits is a positive point, as well as the personal approach taken by the business coach, who became a friend. The fact that the class remained a group on Whatsapp and continue to speak to each other after 3 years would seem to indicate that it was a very cohesive class; Betaly indicates the same kind of engaging approach by pointing out the stark difference in classroom layout (the U-shape of the desks) compared to a typical class in Ethiopia and by the comment that it does not seem that they are in a classroom situation. She also notes the quality of the distance education materials that are used.

Questions were asked to both interviewees about the role of languages in the classroom: there were many different mothertongues in the class in Kenya, but Swahili could be heard during breaks. Nevertheless, Sally did not perceive any problems at all as regards use of English, either among staff or students. Betaly, on the other hand, noted that the most natural language for all was Amharic, the official governmental language, and pointed out that some older students had difficulties using English; the natural language of discussion in her class where there are only Ethiopians, is Amharic. Indeed, English is the national medium of instruction in tertiary education in Ethiopia, but can represent a barrier for many students (Murphy and Solomon 2020).

6. From a TNE Programme to a Pan-African Alliance

From the detailed description of the development of the programmes and the transcription of the interviews with students, it is clear that the formula of the MBA in Impact Entrepreneurship meets with considerable success. The entrepreneurial spirit which drives the E4Impact foundation can be seen in the ways in which the programme continues to modulate according to the local contexts. If one allows for the inevitable politeness of Africans being interviewed by a representative of the university behind the programme, the enthusiasm among the students is nevertheless notable, and their lack of any hint of 'cultural imperialism' highly appreciable. The efforts made by the Italian faculty to create materials that are Africanised, thanks to the partnership with local professors, as well as a classroom atmosphere that is engaging and open is surely to be lauded. Perhaps the only element that emerges from the interviews as being underdeveloped is the awareness of the extent of the partnership between the two universities in both cases. There seems to be a certain vague appreciation of the value of an international degree, but no sense of added value due to the dual or joint nature of the MBA.

This Chapter could have dwelt on many other aspects of the programme, because the model is extremely dynamic and is hard to pin down. After the institution of the Certificate, a shorter, less academic version of the MBA, an interesting current development which has been requested by some partner universities is a plan for an international Doctorate in Entrepreneurship. This would appear to return towards the idea of educating academics, rather than training Impact Entrepreneurs. Another notable development is the expansion of the programme in the MENA area, in countries such as Tunisia and Egypt. The cultures of these countries are considerably different from those of sub-saharan Africa and the Pan-African alliance of universities partnering with E4Impact-Università Cattolica is becoming ever more variegated.

According to the E4Impact website⁷, more than 1,112 entrepreneurs have been through the MBA programmes since 2010, creating more than 10,000 new jobs: from the point of view of internationalisation of education,

⁷ <https://e4Impact.org>

that is a considerable number of graduates who have received a diploma from one Italian university, without necessarily having set foot in Italy. One question that arises is the extent to which the home institution is aware of this patrimony; without a doubt, the 60 students who have so far undertaken internships or periods of study for their thesis within the MBA programmes in Africa will be one effective way in which the Italian institution realises its own reach. While the pan-African alliance is steadily growing, it would perhaps be worth studying ways in which more students from the Italian side could benefit from such experiences of transnational education, even through virtual visits, or virtual exchange, in these COVID-ridden times.

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