

Exchange to change **Alumni** magazine #38

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IOB

Institute of Development Policy
University of Antwerp

Contents

E2C

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Boots in the soil, heads in the skies

Studying development is also a question of balance. The right balance, for example, between realism and imagination. The British philanthropist and agricultural economist Leonard Elmhirst allegedly said, at the opening of an international conference of agricultural economists, that the participants should take care to keep their boots firmly rooted in the soil and their heads in the skies. Elmhirst's advice was directed against the many academics apparently doing the reverse: dangling their boots in a sky of abstruse concepts and improbable variables, while burying their heads in the soil at the moment of thinking about the implications of their analyses for development.

The advice is still valuable, and certainly not just for economists. Whatever the academic field you're working in, the ivory tower of academia seems to exert an upward pressure on academic feet, whether booted or not, which takes some effort to resist. Practical knowledge should remain an important standard of reference to judge academic ideas and findings. At the other end of the spectrum, Elmhirst also pointed to the importance of a vision for the future, a practical vision for sure, but a turn of the imagination nevertheless.

The outgoing generation of IOB's Advanced Master students has undoubtedly acquired new theories, concepts and methods, and come to a better understanding of how Western academics think. I am pretty sure too that their imagination was honed by meeting students from other countries and continents. Indeed, our courses are, perhaps more than anything else, opportunities to learn from your fellow students, to learn about other ways of doing and being and about other initiatives and projects, other visions of the future.

Now comes the time to put all these new things into their right place. I hope that Elmhirst's advice can be one of the keys to do this: keep your boots firmly rooted in the soil, and your heads in the skies, not the reverse.



Happy reading!

Tom De Herdt
Chair IOB

Alumni applause



PhD

On 7 June 2018, **Francis Mbunya Nkemnyi** publicly defended his PhD research entitled “In Search of the Environment-Development Nexus in Tofala Hill Wildlife Sanctuary, Cameroon”. The aim of this research was to explore the environment-development nexus with particular interest in wildlife and forest management in Cameroon using a case study approach. Congrats, Dr Mbunya!



On 29 August, **Dimitri Renmans** successfully defended his PhD research “Opening the ‘black box’ of performance-based financing (PBF) in the healthcare sector of Western Uganda”. Dr Renmans, under supervision of Prof Holvoet (IOB) and Prof Criel (Institute of Tropical Medicine) and Prof Orach (Makerere University) aims to contribute to the lively debate on the introduction of PBF for health sectors in LMICs. He set out to unravel the theory of PBF by studying a PBF intervention by BTC/Enabel in Western Uganda. Congratulations, Dr Renmans!



Published!

Daniel Agramont (GOV 2008) co-authored a LSE working paper on ‘The growing Chinese presence in Latin America and its (Geo)political manifestations in Bolivia’ published by LSE IDEAS <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/88088/> in the journal Ecosystem Services (2018)



In the picture...

Eugenio Martín del Campo Guerra (GOV 2016) presented an essay entitled ‘Mexico’s failure to address its refugee crisis’ in the Latina/o Studies Association in Washington DC. The paper is about the refugee situation in Mexico and Central America.



João Antônio Dos Santos Lima (DEM 2017) has successfully completed the first class of the global mentoring program, from EvalYouth, the young and emerging evaluators network after ten months.



Jacinta Okwaro (GOV 2012) was one of the panelists at the Intersessional Expert Meeting on women’s rights at the United Nations Office in Geneva, where she spoke about women’s role in natural resource management, sharing experiences from Africa.



Cassandra Vet (GLOB 2017) presented her IOB dissertation research “corporate tax avoidance” at the Universität Zürich (Switzerland).

On September 1st 2018 she joined IOB as a new Academic Assistant (AAP).



On the 21 August 2018, **Xiaojie Qin** (DEM 2011) was interviewed by Gabriele Corsetti on China Insight CCTV News on her expertise regarding Mental Health concerns in China.



Laura López Muñoz (GOV 2017) attended the HDCA conference, where she presented a poster on “The capacity to aspire of the rural youth and migration to cities: The case of Suan, Colombia.”

Goodbye interview with Prof Germán Calfat

After working for 16 years as a professor at IOB, passionately teaching thousands of students from all over the world, accompanying numerous PhD students throughout their doctoral journey, working together with his IOB colleagues to continuously improve the IOB Master programmes, professor Germán Calfat will retire from his active academic career in October 2018. We – and many students and alumni with us – will miss him (and his cheerful whistling in the corridor early in the morning)! Exchange to change has asked for and been honored with a ‘goodbye’ interview.



E2C: How did you start at IOB?

GC: I ended up at IOB by accident. I did my Master when I was already above the age of 30 at the Catholic University of Leuven and thereafter I was involved in various consecutive projects. As such, my PhD trajectory did not follow the typical path, e.g. start PhD after ending your Masters. It was more an in-between projects and after-hours type of process as I already had a fulltime job and two children. This is probably why I'm not a 'classical' researcher. They do a Masters, then have high expectations to do research and are very competitive right from the beginning. I, on the other

hand, was involved in projects all the time and I was always very thankful if I got another project to supervise. My expectations were never so high in that sense.

E2C: But isn't it very difficult to do a PhD when you already have a fulltime job?

GC: Yes, it is. But I took it as it was. And at that time I was happy to have the possibility to have a job. It was more about just doing the job than thinking about the future.

E2C: What did you like most about being a professor at IOB?

GC: For sure my life with the students. It has been an extremely rich experience. The students at IOB are adults; they are critical, they understand what is going on in the world and pose interesting questions. They are different from young students in the other faculties where I teach. And most importantly, they are really highly motivated to learn. They don't waste your time. They don't have to be here. They want to be here. They work very hard and they are competitive. Overall, the students at IOB are unique.

E2C: You're mentioned many times as the students' favorite professor at IOB in the yearbook. What explains your popularity among the students?

GC: I actually don't know. Probably it has something to do with seniority as you learn how to interact with students. For example the supervision during dissertation process, which I always did with a lot of pleasure, might explain this. I do ask a lot of them, pushing them to deliver the best quality they can, but I also take care of them and accompany them through the process until the end. For me, that is always a pleasure. In that sense, I regret that there seems to be a tendency to pay less attention and care to supervision of dissertations. The reason is that the overall academic system does not really attribute high returns to dissertation provision, even

though it does require a high investment in terms of time. I'm an outlier, because I still choose between pleasure and something which is a must.

E2C: But you are also popular among students who did not do their dissertation under your supervision. Can you think of any other reason?

GC: It might be because I try to make my classes entertaining. I'm not the best teacher you can imagine, but especially when I teach small groups, I consider my classes as a moment of entertainment. Even if we are working very hard, there is always a time to laugh. Especially Asians seem to enjoy very much working hard and laughing at the same time.

E2C: What is one of the most memorable moments or anecdotes you experienced at IOB?

GC: I don't remember exactly. However, I know that sometimes when I'm giving feedback to a

student, I tend to get straight to the point instead of circumventing what I would want to say and that shocks the students at times. When I give comments I can be very hard. But in the end, they understand what needs to be changed and they accept and appreciate that I am being honest. But being crude when you have so many different cultures in your class is a challenge. Different cultures approach each other in different ways. For instance, the Bangladeshi, Vietnamese and the Ethiopians tend to be very respectful and polite. But sometimes you just need to tell the students the truth and most of them really appreciate this in the end.

E2C: How do you feel you have made most impact?

GC: If I have to make a balance of my activities at IOB, I think I made

most impact through educational cooperation, such as for example the ALFA Programme projects. I know that it is a somewhat neglected area which only tends to be ranked 3rd or 4th after publications. But I believe educational cooperation in an institute such as IOB should be ranked first on the priority list because it creates the most impact. Within this ALFA educational cooperation project, 19 out of the 20 PhD candidates managed to obtain their PhD in different universities and most of them went back to their countries where they have become professors, staff in national banks, research institutes etc. Even though the impact might not be so

recognition within the university system was low. I regret that IOB does not give priority to reproduce similar models. I also think that they should break with the Antwerp tradition of doing a PhD "at home" and instead move in a broader network of universities. It is important because it is a way to establish links with more universities in Europe, not only through institutional cooperation. I think it is a model that is extremely important.

E2C: Was it an Erasmus project?

GC: No, it was an EU-funded project (if I remember well the total amount for the three projects was close to 1 million euros). The success of such cooperation depends a lot on the personal effort that you put into this and I realize that the current academic environment might not allow IOB staff to engage in such efforts... unless the assessment changes, because according to the current rules these kinds of efforts don't have a lot of value. In spite of this, I'm happy that it has had such a big impact. This is what I call development cooperation and I believe the impact is higher than

publishing an article in a good journal that even your mother won't read. (laughs) I always choose things that would make me happy, even though I knew that according to the rules this project had little value.

“Prof Calfat is experienced in making Regression Analysis look like ABC for beginners. His best phrase during classes: “don't despair.” For someone like me, who had no previous regression analysis experience, by the end of the unit I could model, choose the right tests, run, and interpret regression results. Fidelis Eyoh Ukume, Cameroon

visible because it is not concentrated in one country but spread out over several Latin American countries, I believe the multiplier effect of this educational cooperation was huge. The satisfaction I got from this was high, even though the

ALFA programme

Prof Germán Calfat was the promotor of 3 different ALFA programmes, the first one initiated in 1995, ending with the last, and more ambitious one in 2004, under the title 'Programa de Formación Doctoral en Temas de Comercio Internacional y Desarrollo Económico' The ALFA programme of the European Union aimed at supporting capacity building and strengthening the academic cooperation between Latin American and European Union universities. Overall, the project aims contributed to the development of the Latin American Higher Education Area and the EU-LAC Common HE and Knowledge Area through -among other achievements- allowing 19 Latin American PhD students to defend their PhD successfully.

E2C: What would be your advice to your alumni?

GC: I don't know whether it was a joke, but I remember a quote by Groucho Marx "please accept my resignation. I don't want to belong to any club that will accept people like me as a member". What he was saying in the context of IOB would be that he would not trust being a student in a place where all professors come from the same region. It is not to blame IOB that I'm saying this, because IOB has made a lot of effort to diversify their staff. But it does have an impact on the students. It is hard to believe for them to be taught by professors that all come from the same place. This of course doesn't say anything about the quality of the Belgian staff, but it is again about diversity. Diversity is always useful and we have a lot of diversity among our students. We should strive for similar diversity among those who teach, because I have always enjoyed the company of people from different nationalities because it makes the discussions so rich.

E2C: What do you plan to do next, after your retirement?

GC: I will spend time with my four grandchildren. They give me a lot of joy and they keep me busy. I would also like to learn more languages, especially Italian and Japanese. And of course I also have some dreams, such as helping in the 'Restaurant du Coeur' (a charity that distributes food packages and hot meals to the needy, cfr. E2C). If they would want me there, I would really like to help in that restaurant at least once a week, preferably in the kitchen because I really like cooking. And when I'm retired I would also like to read a lot and many other things that old people like to do.

E2C: You also plan to follow-up the collaboration with the University of Cuenca in Ecuador.

GC: It is true that I will still be involved, but we should not exaggerate our institutional cooperation either. I think sometimes it is good to disappear after a while and let them fly. When the institutional cooperation becomes permanent, it can become a bit paternalistic. So, I prefer to let future cooperation depend on them. If the people in Cuenca still want me to be

involved, I will be there for them, but it would be a mistake to fly together until the end.

E2C: Where did your passion and interest for Ecuador and Philippines originate from?

GC: I accidentally got involved in the collaboration with Ecuador. Trade was my favorite topic at that time and when Geovanna Benedictis was

here, there was an opportunity to lead a project on International Migration and Local Development in Cuenca. I was interested, but I did not really know that much about migration. Once Geovanna agreed to help me out with the administrative side of the project, I decided to take the opportunity. It has been very helpful, because it has been a lab to explore, study and understand migration.

With respect to the Philippines, I think the collaboration originated from my experiences with Filipino students during my classes. They were very hard working and funny as well and this triggered some curiosity. And as migration was getting more importance, it was good to have another location in which I could study this field.

E2C: We have been told that you have a certain fascination for shells. Could you tell us more about this?

GC: Actually, I have always had a fascination for collecting things from nature. When I was about 6 or 7 years old, I had made my own 'museum' at home where my sister and mother came to visit. I started collecting shells from that young age, but when I left Argentina at the age of 25, I needed to leave my collection. Then, almost ten years ago I started collecting shells again, especially the family Spondylidae which belongs to the class of Bivalvia among the mollusks..

E2C: Is there anything else that you would like to share?

GC: I'm very thankful to IOB. I really enjoyed my life here. But there is an evolution that I have observed which worries me a bit. I have always considered the IOB Master programs as the heart of IOB. I'm concerned that there might be some neglect of these programs because the return for investments in education within the current academic system is low. I know that others might not feel the same, but I would regret if less attention would be given to education in the future. So my advice to the IOB staff is that they should be cautious for the mismatch between our 'clients' and the topics we research. Few IOB staff members conduct research in other regions outside the Great Lakes. Yet, we need to ensure diversity and try to better fit the profile of the students, because I think that the students also perceive this.

When there is an opening for staff, for instance, it seems that foreigners always come out worse. This might be due to asymmetric information that Flemish applicants have. Yet, it is also because we need to develop a system that allows foreign candidates with an interesting profile to do a trial run of teaching the courses and living in Belgium for at least two years during which they are allowed to learn the system as well. We should give them more chances because diversifying our staff would change networks and open new doors in the future. And finally, I think the image of IOB depends on the stories of the students. If their stories disappear, IOB disappears. ■



“MY DEEPEST GRATITUDE FOR YOUR MENTORING. MY ADMIRATION TO YOUR ACADEMIC JOURNEY. AND, MY FRIENDSHIP TO AN EXTRAORDINARY HUMAN BEING.”
SILVIA GONZÁLEZ, ECUADOR

“Prof Germán Calfat is one of those professors that you can't easily forget for many good reasons. He has a dry, sarcastic humor in class that we Filipinos get; he makes difficult concepts easy to understand, especially for non-economists; he drives you to think outside of the box and he respects your opinion and position even if he disagrees with you. (...) He truly cares for the IOB students and the Institute. His doors are always open for a student and he will even let you borrow his books (provided you make an appointment). :-) I deeply appreciated that he made time for conversations with students. For that and many more, I thank Prof Calfat for his years of excellent service, for imparting his wisdom, and for the many good life lessons I learned from him. (...), "Maraming salamat po!" (Thank you very much!).”
Mary-Ann Manahan, Philippines

“Saddened because future IOB students will not have the privilege of knowing you. I don't know if IOB will ever be the same without you. You're like the Dumbledore of IOB. Regression students tremble at your presence.”
Kevin Godoy, Philippines

“Prof Germán Calfat teaches with passion and challenges to find the best in their students. He allows to have a conversation and friendly relationship.”
Maria Clara Piedrahita Gutierrez, Colombia



The year 2017-2018



It feels like a blink of an eye. One year flies so fast. A year of trying to remember everyone's name and where do they come from, to embrace the new friendship with others from different countries, to adapt the cold in the winter and the so-called short summer, to wear layer, layer, and more layers of clothes but still feel the cold, to happily getting lost around the city, to hold my breath as not to be tempted by the smell of fresh waffle -every time I passed that little store in the corner, to feel overthrilled every time I got food from my home town, to feel happy to call this city, Antwerp, too, as home.

Epic.
Fun.
Unforgettable.



I enjoyed the interdisciplinary nature of the programme, as much as I appreciated the multi-racial and multi-background mix of participants.

#Critical thinking, independent research and dedication is the hallmark of academic success.

I have sisters and brothers for life now!!
I will soon be visiting Perú, Colombia, Nicaragua, Guatemala and the Philippines!



Opening the black box of performance-based financing in the health sector of Western Uganda

Over the last four years, Dimitri Renmans has been preparing his doctoral thesis entitled 'Opening the black box of performance-based financing in the health sector of Western Uganda'. At the time of this interview, Dimitri Renmans was about to take the last hurdle of his doctoral project, the public defence. Exchange to Change asked him to share his findings and experiences with our IOB community.



E2C: Can you give a short summary of your PhD project?

DR: Over the last 20 years, we have seen the emergence of Performance-Based Financing (PBF) in the health sector in many developing countries. This emergence is in spite of a lack of a thorough understanding of the theory of change of the intervention. With PBF, health providers (facilities and/or health workers) are, at least partly, financed based on their performance. The latter can be defined as the number of verified services according to the relevant quality guidelines. In addition to the specific financing modality, PBF consists of giving more autonomy to the facilities, new management tools, increased monitoring, etc. In my PhD project I studied the implementation of such a PBF intervention in Western Uganda

by the Belgian Development Agency Enabel. I set out to discover the mechanisms that led to the observed outcomes of the intervention. We found that the awakening of the management, the clarification of the guidelines, and the lowering of the user fees were the most important aspects of the intervention, but that institutional barriers remained and jeopardized the effectiveness and efficiency of the intervention.

E2C: Can you briefly explain which methodological approach(es) you used in your PhD? What do you think is the added value of this/these methodological approach(es)?

DR: I used a combination of realist evaluation and systems thinking. More specifically, I used Causal Loop Diagramming as a tool to visualize and to a certain extent analyse the mechanisms and program theory. The added value of realist evaluation is that it looks at the underlying mechanisms instead of (causal) correlations. Instead of investigating how often the ball drops every time I open my hand, it studies gravity. Systems thinking helps to show the bigger picture and explain unpredictable behaviour at the level of the system (1+1=3). Moreover, the

use of causal loop diagrams helps to clearly visualize multiple causal relationships at once and shows you how different parts of the health care system may influence each other.

E2C: Why have you chosen to focus on a case in Western Uganda?

DR: This was a very pragmatic choice. During a seminar a couple of years ago I learned that the BTC (now Enabel) was intending to implement a PBF intervention in Uganda. I saw this as a great opportunity for a PhD research proposal. Moreover, I also knew that Prof Holvoet (my supervisor at IOB) had experience in Uganda, so I contacted her and the rest is history...

E2C: How did you experience your fieldwork in (Western) Uganda over the past few years?

DR: I learned a lot because it was my first time doing research in Uganda or even in Africa. It brought to life the knowledge that I gained through reading and studying. It put everything into perspective. At the same time it tested my persistence, creativity and improvisation because delays, drawbacks and unforeseen situations are more the rule than the exception. All in all it was a very interesting

experience with a lot of ups and downs but also with a lot of nice encounters, insightful experiences, and many learning opportunities.

E2C: What do you consider the most important policy recommendation of your research?

DR: I think my most important recommendation is as simple and general, but still relevant: think before you act. We found that the institutional set-up led to inefficiency and weakened the intervention. It is thus primordial that governments make sure that the intervention they want to implement is actually solving the problems of the health care system. Certainly because PBF tends to exacerbate the good but also the bad things within a health care system.

E2C: How did you experience pursuing a joint PhD in two institutes, namely the Institute of

Tropical Medicine (ITM) and the Institute of Development Policy (IOB)?

DR: It is not really a joint PhD because the ITM is not authorized to deliver PhD diplomas. However, one of my supervisors is professor at the ITM and I work closely together with several people at the ITM. I think being at different institutes is very enriching. We all know the many very intelligent people working at IOB from whom we as PhD students can learn a lot. Now imagine you have two institutes where you can meet intelligent people to learn from. Moreover, you get to know another academic culture and even another research tradition. Especially in my case since the ITM is not an academic institute pur sang but somewhat in between a research institute and an institute of public interest. It also helps you to expand your academic network, which is always important if

you want to continue in academia.

E2C: What was the best, most beautiful moment of your PhD?

DR: There is not one specific moment, it was just a long stretch of meeting interesting people, learning interesting things, challenges, personal development, learning moments, funny moments, drinking moments, partying moments, etc.

E2C: What was the most challenging moment during your PhD?

DR: My first time in Kasese (Uganda): completely alone in the "best" hotel in town, faeces of geckos everywhere and an abysmal service, a cold from the bus drive and food poisoning on top, and a severe lack of a plan. I literally thought: "What am I doing here?". Luckily everything turned out positively.

E2C: What would be your main advice to future PhD candidates?

DR: I had more failures than successes during this PhD, but as long as you learn from your failures and keep on going, your successes will be bigger than your failures. Failure is the first step towards success (but be patient and persistent).

E2C: What are your plans and aspirations for the upcoming year(s)?

DR: Thanks to the IOB bridging fund I have one year of postdoc during which I will try to secure funding for a new research project. There are several funding agencies but it is not easy to get the funding. I, nonetheless, hope to continue to do research.



In the meantime...

Conference “Governance, Peace and Development in Burundi”

Just before the summer holidays, with the support of the international Burundi Research Network, IOB organised the international conference “Governance, Peace and Development in Burundi”, bringing together some 150 researchers and development practitioners to present and discuss academic research related to Burundi. More than fifty presentations in twelve panels covered broad themes of governance, peace and development and the linkages between them. The two-day conference also allowed for interesting discussions between academics, policymakers and practitioners. IOB alumni from Burundi actively participated in the conference.

Alongside the conference, a photo exhibition “Traces of Conflict” was organised. The exhibition shows images and stories collected by Lidewyde Berckmoes (anthropologist, researcher) and Marieke Maagdenberg (photographer, artist), depicting the influence of war and conflict in Burundi across borders and generations through the perspective of Burundian migrants in Belgium and the Netherlands and how the homeland and its history of conflict continues to play a role in their lives.

<https://goo.gl/4BZGpB>

IOB @ the European Development Days

The European Development Days have become an annual event in the IOB students’ calendar. On 5 and 6 June 2018, a small delegation of IOB students and staff went to Brussels to meet the development community, to listen and participate in the current debates and pick up new ideas or share experiences with others. This year’s overarching topic was ‘Women and Girls at the Forefront of Sustainable Development: protect, empower, invest’, framing three major themes emerging as key priorities in today’s development context: ‘Ensuring the physical and psychological integrity of Girls and Women’, ‘Promoting economic and social rights and empowerment of Girls and Women’, ‘Strengthening Girls’ and Women’s voice and participation’. Needless to say that these topics are at the core of the IOB Master programmes.



IOB Epistemological and Methodological seminar – 16th of June

Every year, the courses on epistemology and research design make a lasting impression on IOB students. Hence, it would surprise us if our alumni do not remember discussing positivism, socio-constructivism and mixed methods, if only because they struggled hard while writing about their own position within this entire debate. IOB staff and PhD students find it important to be aware of the latest ideas that enrich these debates and therefore invited Giampietro Gobo to guide and stimulate a debate on these issues. In the first part of the seminar, Gobo explored the history of mixed methods approach and methodologies. He eventually argues that the currently used term ‘mixed methods’ rather refers to the application of qualitative techniques while adhering to a positivist epistemology. Additionally, he argues that every method, whether qualitative or quantitative, has its own performativity, agency and way of constructing data. As

such, researchers need to be fully aware of the specificities of the methods before integrating them. Therefore, he concluded that we could reach a more desirable level of integration of methods by creating new, merged methods (e.g. interview, videography) that combine strengths of various methods into a single instrument. In the second part of the seminar, Gobo questioned the seemingly omnipresent assumption that theories are context-bound, while methods are context-free or culturally independent. He discussed and criticized the various scenarios (e.g. globalization, indigenization, glocalization and creolization) through which we could obtain culturally flexible methods. The intense debate that followed Gobo’s presentation testified to the need to keep the debate alive and to keep reflecting on how our context and position shape the way in which we produce knowledge.

Tanzanian alumni network event

IOB alumni policy had identified a number of countries where alumni chapters were going to be established and regular alumni activities will be organised to allow for a more structured and stable alumni-IOB network. Tanzania is one of those countries. At last year’s alumni event, it was agreed that a yearly event would be organised, alternating between bigger ‘content’ events and smaller ones. So after the 2017 alumni seminar, a ‘smaller’ network event was going to be planned in 2018. However, since the Belgian Embassy and the University of Ghent were also interested in organising a network event, it turned out to be a big ‘small event’.

On Friday 11 May 2018, the Belgian Embassy invited all Tanzanian alumni who graduated from a Belgian university Dar-es-Salaam for their first Belgian-Tanzanian alumni event. The evening first started with a separate session for IOB alumni, during which Prof Nathalie Holvoet welcomed the alumni and presented upcoming alumni activities and joint research project.

Afterwards, H.E. Paul Cartier, Ambassador of Belgium to Tanzania officially opened the event and introduced the keynote address by Prof Joyce Ndalichako, Minister of Education, Science, Technology and Vocational training. Finally, alumni had a chance to present their work during the poster reception.

The evening ended with a walking dinner allowing for ample opportunity to meet and mingle with other alumni and embassy staff. It was a wonderful evening!



Richard Temu (GOV 2012) presenting his work at Twaweza to the Ambassador and his wife.

Demonstrations Nicaragua

At the beginning of April this year, protests were initiated out of dissatisfaction with the social security and pension reforms introduced by the Nicaraguan government. But due to the harsh tactics used to curb the demonstrations, people continue to come to the streets, demanding the resignation of President Daniel Ortega. In the meantime, 317 people have died according to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) (2 August 2018). E2C asked the opinion of IOB PhD student Pierre Merlet, IOB student Luz Saavedra (both Nicaraguan) and IOB lecturer Johan Bastiaensen about the current political unrest.



Nicaraguans in Masaya prepare for possible clashes with police in protests against President Daniel Ortega. Photograph by Bienvenido Velasco Blanco-EPA

E2C: What do you see as the most important underlying causes of the current unrest?

Pierre Merlet (PM): In my view, the underlying causes of the current turmoil in Nicaragua can be found in the establishment of an autocratic model of government that is highly centralized, intolerant, lacking in transparency and unaccountable. Within this model, no space for dissonant voices unaligned with the dominant discourse can exist. This has entailed a need for the ruling party to control all spheres of social life (governmental institutions, media, police, army, justice, electoral system, etc.) and to concentrate power within few trustable hands, especially those of the president's family. This model has been generating frustration and discontent among Nicaraguan people. After ten years, this frustration has reached unbearable levels, resulting

in the emergence of a covert and silent demand for justice and freedom. I think that the repression of the demonstration against social security reforms was only the catalyst that transformed this demand into an overt movement aiming at changing the dominant model.

Johan Bastiaensen (JB): Half of the population never supported the Sandinistas. In 2009 Ortega was re-elected with only 38% of the votes. Since then, the democratic system eroded profoundly, undermining the independence of the justice system, Parliament and Electoral Council, in particular making elections a farce. Ortega's regime morphed into an authoritarian system, tending towards a family dynasty similar to the Somoza dictatorship overthrown by the Sandinista revolution in 1979. Independent media (especially in television) were reduced and government propaganda, in particular by the president's omnipresent moralizing wife, invaded the screens. Ortega built upon an alliance with the entrepreneurial upper-class and the Catholic Church. Despite claiming a revolutionary heritage, his economic policies were neoliberal, avoiding tax burdens for and sharing of benefits between the old and new (Sandinista) capital – the latter supported by privilege and corruption. This was partially compensated with social spending paid for by generous cooperation from Venezuela. Despite an initially broader support, this gradually also eroded part of the Sandinista support base, challenging Ortega's claim to a revolutionary heritage.

E2C: How does the unrest have an impact on daily life?

PM: The unrest is mainly concentrated in urban areas and has consequences for the life of every person living in the cities. For instance, the daily life of our family has completely changed in the last three months. The presence

of paramilitary armed groups who control the streets in coordination with masked and heavily armed police officers has created a situation of insecurity and lawlessness. This implies that we try to be safe by spending as little time as possible in the streets, especially at night. My children, for example, were not able to go to school or even to the park. In this context what drives our actions and plans are fear (fear of stray bullets, fear of being denounced and kidnapped by pro-governmental groups) and uncertainty for the future.

E2C: Despite the large evidence of its violent repression of the protesters, the Nicaraguan government denies its involvement in these human rights violations. How would you explain this?

JB: We need to understand that the regime's state authority and control is acutely and practically questioned. There is an on-going fight for the control of key roads, neighbourhoods, villages and even towns between the largely unarmed population hiding behind barricades and obstructing traffic, and pro-government police complemented with paramilitaries (apparently formed out of old 'stay behind' guerrilla networks and members of the Sandinista Youth organisation). And the army has chosen to remain on the side-line. In the midst of the ensuing chaos, there are certainly also other – criminal and political – groups meddling in. All groups are infiltrating the other side, perpetrating attacks in the name of others, which the government tries to use to delegitimize the opposition forces.

Luz Saavedra (LS): The government maintains its rhetoric that this is a 'soft' coup d'état, accusing opposition and right-wing groups. The government will never accept its responsibility for these crimes, it seems that it is so clinging to power that it insists on its version to try

to convince the world, or at least a small group, that it is the victim. For me, the government's attitude and actions have no logical explanation, considering the large evidence against it and the repeated mistakes that it is making. However, its political and economic interests are very strong to continue denying its responsibility and hold on to power.

E2C: Proponents of President Ortega argue that under his leadership, the country has benefitted from strong economic growth, poverty reduction programs and low crime rates (Guardian, June 6 2018). What is your opinion about Ortega's realisations/governance?

PM: Some clarifications need to be made about these supposed realisations. First, official poverty data are highly contested because of the lack of transparency in the way official statistics are managed. Second, the myth of Nicaragua as being a safe country has not prevented the reality of the current unrest where we have witnessed more than 300 deaths, most of them by firearms, and the rapid emergence of paramilitary heavily armed groups acting with impunity. Third, economic growth does not equal development and high growth has to be balanced always with issues of sustainability, human rights and equality. In Nicaragua, high economic growth has been the result of an alliance between the ruling party and economic elites to implement a developmental model characterized by the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources, low salaries and taxes, the concentration of resources and power in the hands of a few powerful actors and a lack of democracy and accountability of state actors.

JB: Ortega's regime was based on a Musthaq Kahn-type of elite coalition to safeguard long term stability by a capitalist alliance, also aimed at attracting foreign investors. This

moderately successful growth strategy, however, also generated losers such as dispossessed peasants in key investment zones. As wages and taxes for big enterprises were kept low, popular participation in the benefits of growth were not significant, even when employment grew and poverty decreased, the latter also through social programs (e.g. the rural subsidy package 'Hambre Zero', subsidies for electricity and public transport). The weakness of the strategy, also linked to the need to constitute the Sandinista capitalist group, was its reliance on massive support from Venezuela. With the crisis in that country, this crucial source dried up, forcing the suspension of social programs and a reduction in advantages for big enterprises.

E2C: How do you see the role of youth/students in this process?

LS: Many people were not happy with the authoritarian government, but they did not do anything. As the university students started the protests, they have played a key role in awakening this collective action that seeks changes in Nicaragua. Their courage and daring has made them key actors in this civic struggle. Undoubtedly, the youth have shown that despite their lack of experience they are clear about what kind of country they want to live in. And they are doing everything possible to achieve it and encouraging people to think that a different Nicaragua is possible if we work together.

E2C: And what has been the response of the wider population?

LS: The response of the Nicaraguan population has been impressive. Most of the population has come to the streets to demonstrate in support of the students, who encouraged the collective feeling of demanding respect for rights, justice, democracy and freedom. Also the private sector, civil society and peasant movements

joined the student protests, contributing to transform this cause in a country-wide issue, although there are still differences among sectors.

E2C: What role have the Nicaraguan Church, Army and paramilitary groups played in this crisis?

PM: The Catholic Church has taken an active role in protecting peaceful protestors (e.g. using churches as shelters) and it has been designated as the main witness and guarantor of a dialogue process which could bring a peaceful solution to the crisis. There was a general agreement about this designation because, within the autocratic model of government implemented in Nicaragua, the Church had been the only institution which has been able to maintain a certain level of autonomy from the ruling party. Very recently, however, priests have been threatened by Ortega's supporters and have even been accused by the president of being perpetrators of a coup d'état.

JB: The role of the Catholic Church – as well as that of big business – is quite ambiguous. It marks the rupture of its alliance with president Ortega through cardinal emeritus Obando y Bravo, 'the cardinal in the pocket' who switched from leader of the contra-revolutionary opposition in the 1980s to an active supporter of Ortega in exchange for conservative ethical laws and economic benefits. Tellingly, he died during the crisis and was buried almost in silence despite his status of 'National Hero of Peace and Reconciliation'. Now, the Church tries to frame itself again as the national moral force and mediator, convener of the National Dialogue, but in practice – despite internal differences – it is often close to the anti-Ortega movement.

PM: The army has officially taken the position of not intervening in the crisis. Even if there are some elements that could indicate an involvement alongside pro-governmental

repressive forces (e.g. the use of high calibre military weapons by paramilitary forces), there is no clear evidence of an actual army participation in the current crisis. However, when I consider the neutral position of the army, I cannot stop thinking about this famous quote by Desmond Tutu: "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor."

LS: The paramilitary groups are a current threat to Nicaraguan lives, because they are attacking all people against government policies, following an ideology and/or receiving benefits. The future role of these groups is worrying, as they are armed groups that can evolve into criminal groups and try to seek revenge in the future in the event of the president's resignation. It will require a great effort to reintegrate these people in society in the future.

E2C: How do you think that the situation will evolve in the future? Do you think a solution is possible, without the resignation of the President?

PM: What is for sure is that since April 2018 Nicaragua has no longer been the same country: violence is now part of our everyday life and society has become more and more polarized. After months of unrest, the government has shown high levels of resilience (even if mainly through the force of arms)... but that is also the case of the peaceful and civic revolution Nicaragua is experiencing. Unfortunately, I have no clue where this will lead us. But, in a militarized and polarized country I am as preoccupied for the short term necessary solutions as for the medium and long term consequences of the current crisis which will imply the demilitarization and dismantling of paramilitary groups, the creation of trustworthy institutions (especially the police), a real need for justice and at, the same time, the necessity of

achieving peace and reconciliation.

JB: Surprisingly, there is a consensus between all parties (including the President) that the solution lies with anticipated, truly free elections, which in the absence of articulated political parties and an independent Electoral Court are however not easily, nor rapidly feasible. The risk of another would-be dictator to come to power, placed there by big business or another established power group, is high. Whether the president has to resign is not clear as there is some truth to his argument that this would amount to an unconstitutional coup-d'état. Maybe a transitional government with a power-sharing arrangement could provide a solution. One positive element is the political awareness of many Nicaraguan citizens, as they are wary of being high jacked for the interests of particular actors (from both sides!), and their largely shared unwillingness to engage in another devastating civil war.

LS: For me it is difficult to imagine a future with Ortega leading the government. Nicaraguan people do not trust him anymore, actually, we were not happy with his policies before but at least we could live relatively safe and stable lives. Nicaragua gave the President the opportunity for dialogue, but he never showed any political willingness for a real dialogue. The new policies to criminalize protestors, the increasing attacks to barricades, and the hunting down and persecution of protestors. The distrust is a key factor why he cannot continue as a President. ■

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Al Hassan Cisse DEM | Senegal

Where do you work?

I am a Policy Officer at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

How did IOB experience affect your life/ career?

With IOB, I have a wider understanding of development issues and their interlinkages. My IOB experience has contributed to building my ability to carry out development technical and policy analysis. It provided me with a technical capacity that is helping me better approach development issues through different approaches. Personally, the Master I gained in IOB has contributed to building my professional career. I am still in contact with most of my classmates to exchange ideas on various issues.

What would be your good advice to the newly graduated IOB students?

To be dedicated and committed to the work and always strive for performance and effectiveness in the assignments. Something that makes you different is to make sure that your contribution adds value to existing ones.

If you were the director of a research fund, what is a research question that you would agree to finance? In the context of the Africa region, there are some emerging issues that require the attention of students for future research: nutrition, social protection, migration and rural development, climate change and energy for the following reasons:

Nutrition: it is still a big challenge and concern for development actors including governments, despite the efforts invested over the last decades on the issue.



Due to the paradigm shift in Sub-Saharan Africa, the way nutrition was dealt with has changed. Years ago, only the Ministry of Health was dealing with nutrition, today it is accepted as multidimensional. For that reason, a multi-actor approach is promoted to involve the sectors of education, agriculture, livestock, trade, etc.

Social protection: this is a new area where there is a general agreement among actors (government, donors, civil society, development bank, NGO and farmers organizations) for more investment. Social protection is gaining ground and more and more donors as well as governments are increasing their investments in it. Impact studies done until now show that safety net programmes can have impacts on the lives of households if some conditions are met. The impact of such a programme can be different for various reasons (programming, size of transfer, type of programmes, and approaches such as the linkages with other sectors). Based on the variety of issues related to social protection programmes, research can be more focused and tailored to avoid to be generic.

Migration and rural development: for years the issue of migration has been an issue. It has been amplified over the years and rural areas are the most affected. To what extent it affects rural development is a question that should be asked. What are the benefits or negative impacts of migration on rural development?

Climate change: this is a general topic but the farmer's perspective has to be documented more. How do they perceive it? What is the significance of climate change for farmers? What are their solutions? These are some questions that can be addressed through participatory research.

Energy: The issue of energy is key for the development of agriculture in general and the value chains in particular. The lack of energy is really undermining the advancement of agriculture as well as food security. It has the same importance as roads or infrastructure. Research can be focused on the correlation between energy and roads and the development of agriculture or the improvement of food and nutrition security.

International commitments such as SDG and the Malabo declaration have prioritized these issues as fundamental for the growth of Africa and the improvement of livelihoods.

All these issues can be analyzed through policy or programmes prisms.

Alumni panel

Rachael Kamande GLOB 2013-2014 | Kenya



Where do you work? I assist NGOs to reach out to African governments to advocate for the adoption and implementation of policies that protect the environment. I am engaged in advocacy work for sustainable development. Together we come up with interesting ways to address government policymakers, seeking their audience and engaging them in progressive discussions.

How did IOB experience affect your life/ career? After my Masters at IOB, I gained a more refined perception of global issues, I learnt the ability to understand global challenges with more ease. I learnt that not everything is what it seems and that truth is a construct. I learnt to be more critical. My experience from IOB also coagulated my belief that the traditional economic models and theories have inherent flaws that have significantly contributed to unsustainable development. I learnt that not all conservation efforts are beneficial socio-economically. I also learnt that migration is circular.

What would be your good advice to the newly graduated IOB students? To keep an open mind, to apply the knowledge and experiences learnt at IOB to their field of work as far as possible. The knowledge we learnt at IOB is very multidisciplinary. It can be applied in many fields of work. Within the development sector, there is a lot of work still to be done. Every effort is appreciated and everybody is - and can be - an active stakeholder. One does not have to be employed (or be part of a large institution) in order to make a difference. In development work, even an individual can make a difference. Just dare to make that difference!

If you were the director of a research fund, what is a research question that you would agree to finance? Solving the current immigration crisis is no doubt daunting but with political will, progress can be achieved. Research into ways to resolve the immigration crisis without so many lives being lost would be very worthwhile in my opinion. People don't need to die in the sea in search of a better life. What home-based, internationally-supported solutions would work? Radical ideas fostered by a united approach could be implemented so that people do not feel the need to take dangerous alternatives. Immigration is inevitable and it should be done in a safe manner that does not endanger one's life. Closing borders does not in itself keep people away from getting into a country. In a way, closing borders sometimes makes it worse. Listening to most immigrants forced by circumstances to migrate, all they want is to go back home to their own countries once the situation back home stabilizes.



Christian Lünstedt Tapia DEM 2007-2008 | Bolivia

Where do you work? I'm working at the Inter-American Development Bank in Bolivia as Operations Associate.

How did IOB experience affect your life/ career? The one-year experience at IOB changed my life in many aspects. Firstly, the chance to get to know so many people from all over the world, different cultures that allowed me to grow up as person. I still keep in touch with some of them. Second, the opportunity to live and travel around Europe opened my mind. And third, I think the Master's degree helped me to get into my current job, where I'm putting into practice what I learned.

Do you have a life motto?

"Success depends on your attitude; happiness depends on your gratitude".

Challenging! Fun! Rewarding! Intense! Life-changing!

These are the top listed words IOB graduates from class 2017-18 use to describe their IOB year. Indeed, it has been challenging: a year of working very hard, tight deadlines, paper writing, managing the dissertation research and writing process, yet also rewarding by inducing new insights, skills and ideas. Last but not least, they also had fun, in class, in Paris, at the kick off weekend, at parties, trips, traveling through Europe and beyond and in everyday life with students from around the globe. And so the academic year 2017-18 comes to an end, and a new one begins...

To mark this important event, IOB organised its annual graduation ceremony on September 17th 2018. Both the graduating as well as the newly arrived students were welcomed by Mr. Rik Röttger, the deputy from the Province of Antwerp, who also awarded the three Prizes for Development Cooperation to Chu Huong Lan (DEM) from Vietnam, Camille Vanderlinden (GLOB) from Belgium and Bethelihem Alwab (GOV) from Ethiopia. The Province of Antwerp has awarded these prizes (a cash price of €850) since 1996 to promote development studies in economic, political, social, legal, cultural and environmental fields.

Afterwards Professor Joyeeta Gupta (University of Amsterdam) presented the keynote address on "Sharing our earth: How climate change and other ecosystems services relate to development."

The livestream can be found on our website: www.uantwerp.be/iob



Opportunities

IOB Master programmes applications open! Spread the news! 1 Nov

The applications for the 2019-20 IOB Master programmes will be open from 1 November 2018 onwards. IOB has 36 VLIR UOS scholarships available for development professionals, from countries on the VLIR UOS list. Interested candidates from other countries can check out the information about other scholarship possibilities on our website.

www.uantwerpen.be/development-studies

Climate change: global challenge, unequal burden?

Every Tuesday in October and November, Debating Development organises a debate between two experts on a development topic. This year's debates focuses on the issue of "Climate change: global challenge, unequal burden?" and sets out to explore the link between development and climate change, to discuss recent advances and obstacles in climate change action and assess the role and responsibilities of science, politics, business and society therein. With experts such as Jochen Markard (ETH Zurich), Kees van der Geest (United Nations University - Institute for Environment and Human security), Aviel Verbruggen (Member of IPCC 1998-2014) and Harald Fuhr (University of Potsdam) lined up as key speakers, this promises to be another very interesting series of Debating Development.

www.uantwerpen.be/debatingdevelopment



IOB Impact Award!

19 Dec

Who has really made a difference? Which alumnus/a has been able to translate what he/she learned at IOB into a genuine added value in 'development'? This is the question that drives the IOB Antwerp alumni impact seminar. Alumni can apply online to present the work they have been doing and what changes this work has brought about in society or in the lives of others. The review committee selects one alumnus/a whose work has really created 'an impact on development'. The selected alumnus/a will receive the IOB impact award and will be invited to come to Antwerp to present his/ her work in person to IOB staff & students and participate in the VLIR-UOS impact event on 19 December 2018. More information about this event and how to apply on the IOB alumni website! <https://goo.gl/ti8uYL>



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