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Making a difference, thanks to Erasmus Mundus

Geline Alfred Fuko



Geline Alfred Fuko was a graduate lawyer working in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, when she decided to apply for an Erasmus Mundus joint master's programme in Comparative Local Development. At that time (2010), she was working for an NGO as a civil and human rights law specialist, following parliament sessions, analysing bills and laws and informing the public through the media. By taking this master's programme, she hoped to expand her knowledge, first and foremost to learn how to make a difference to her community through policy and legal reforms. She felt that she needed a comparative perspective as well as the local development perspective, to learn from the practices of countries that are doing well in the terms of community development - "I wanted to see what I could learn from their policies and the way they design their laws," Fuko explains.

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Coming from a legal background, the programme offered subjects that she had not studied before. "That master's programme was perfect and the best avenue for me, because it offered an interdisciplinary approach to law, economics, sociology and political sciences," Fuko says, and explains how the mix of different academic disciplines within the course challenged her law-set mind. "It taught me how to deal with local issues in an interdisciplinary way – how would the economists think, and what about the lawyers and the politicians? I wouldn't get this through another course," she continues. "When I arrived I had this legal background.

Erasmus+ Programme is a European Union umbrella programme in the field of education, training, youth, and sports. Within this programme the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Degrees aim to enhance the quality of European higher education and to help promote dialogue and understanding between people and cultures through cooperation with Third-Countries such as the United Republic of Tanzania. The international dimension of Erasmus+ contributes to the development of human resources and the international cooperation capacity of Higher education institutions in Third Countries by increasing mobility and cooperation between the European Union and these countries. The Erasmus + Programme was launched in 2014 and provides support through scholarships and academic cooperation to:

Higher education institutions that wish to implement joint programmes at postgraduate level or to set-up inter-institutional cooperation partnerships between universities from Europe and targeted Third-Countries.

Individual students, researchers and university staff who wish to spend a study, research, or teaching period in the context of one of the above mentioned programmes.

In the field of higher education, Erasmus+ supports the following main Actions targeting cooperation with Third Countries (also called Partner Countries):

International credit mobility of individuals and Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees promoting the mobility of learners and staff from and to Partner Countries;

Whatever came in terms of questions I would approach it in a legal way: if this is what the rule says, this is how it should be.” Over time, she learned to analyse issues from different angles. “The widened perspective was a clear added value to my career,” she says.

In addition to being interdisciplinary, the course was also very international. Fuko spent the first nine months at the University of Trento in Italy, then went on to the Corvinus University of Budapest, Hungary for three months, before doing a three-month internship with the United Nations Volunteers in Bonn, Germany and finally, returning to finalize her master’s thesis and to graduate in Italy. The group of students was very diverse. “I remember we were 25 students from 23 different countries,” Fuko continues. “And this group of students were working in different areas of local development in their countries. So I could learn from Asia, how they were dealing with issues. I could get the American perspective, African, Latin American...” Like Fuko, most of her fellow students had professional experience prior to starting the Erasmus Mundus course. She appreciated that she actually had time to share experiences with her co-students. “We learned about conflict resolution, for example, and had the opportunity to hear from someone from South Africa who had experience with this.”

When asked about the future, Geline Fuko’s plans are clear: she wants to continue engaging in her community for the future. “Now I have the knowledge, the capacity to really engage,” she says. Fuko works today as a researcher specialising in constitutional matters for the NGO “Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC)” in Tanzania, where she manages a Public Constitution Digital Database and a Constitution Information Centre. Furthermore, she has been raising awareness on constitution issues as well as promoting people’s participation in the Constitution making process in different parts of rural Tanzania. She has supported a number of NGOs and Media practitioners and their engagement in regards. “At the beginning when constitution reviewing process started many NGOs, were in demand of legal assistance on understanding how best they can engage in the process. I analyzed a number laws that govern the process and advice accordingly”

“If I see the need for further education in the future, I will go back to Erasmus+ and look for more opportunities,” she says. “Perhaps I will take some time off to study and research, and then come back and continue working within my area again,” she concludes.

Capacity Building projects in higher education promoting cooperation and partnerships that have an impact on the modernisation and internationalisation of higher education institutions and systems in Partner Countries;

Support to institutions that wish to implement top-level joint Master programmes and highly attractive scholarships for students across the world to undertake their studies on these programmes;

Jean Monnet activities with the aim of stimulating teaching, research and reflection in the field of European Union studies worldwide.

Many opportunities are also offered to doctoral candidates and researchers through the Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions: http://ec.europa.eu/research/mariecurieactions/index_en.htm

How to apply:

Students and doctoral candidates from all over the world can apply, and there are opportunities for institutions to partner with European Union Institutions. Kindly consult the links below:

Study mobility:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/opportunities/higher-education/study-mobility_en.htm

Staff mobility:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/opportunities/higher-education/staff_en.htm

Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/library/emjmd-catalogue_en

General Information on cooperation outside the EU: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/international-cooperation/education-quality_en.htm

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/EUErasmusPlusProgramme?fref=ts>

Twitter: @EUErasmusPlus

Erasmus Mundus Network in Tanzania:

Several Tanzanians are recipients of the Erasmus Mundus scholarship. They are part of EMA (Erasmus Mundus Students and Alumni Association) - <http://www.em-a.eu/> . The EMA members in Tanzania meet regularly (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Erasmus-Mundus-Association-Tanzania/616404978375219?fref=ts>).

The network members aim at improving professional development and communication among members, and promoting the Erasmus Programme to Tanzanians.

Follow the EYD 2015 campaign in Tanzania

Web: www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/tanzania/index_en.htm



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