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Dieudonné Musa Alokpo

## Implementation of a Proposal Writing Workshop in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Challenges, Approaches, and Learning Outcomes of the Participants

**ABSTRACT:** Whilst providing a framework for learning and scientific emancipation, a proposal writing training is confronted with various organisational and didactic challenges, which influence the achievement of the set training objectives. Based on observations made during the workshops for proposal writing organised in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, as part of the NMT Programme, the article raises two main questions: (a) How could these challenges be overcome and successfully addressed in the training? (b) What

is the level of learning outcomes of the participants at the end of the training? The article shows that the success of the training lays in the relevance of the employed training approaches. The use of a participatory approach encouraged constructive exchanges between participants, trainers, and experts, and enabled all participants to finalise coherent projects to apply for national and international funding.

**KEYWORDS:** proposal writing, participatory didactics, national multiplication training

## 1. Introduction

In the world of abundant knowledge (Vink, 2017; Lafrance, 2019), many researchers carry relevant ideas but fail to value them and make the most of them. This failure makes them inaudible in the circles of scientific debate and less present in project spaces. One of the causes of this anonymity is the lack of access to funding to facilitate the conduct and dissemination of their work. The distribution of research and development expenditure in the world from 2014 to 2016<sup>1</sup> shows a great disparity between geographical areas, with Africa lagging far behind, with an annual investment of 0.9%, 0.88% and 0.87%, respectively.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the research and development budget<sup>2</sup> is about 1%. In the academic sphere, only less than 5% of researchers have access to public and private funding, compared to more than 95% who do not, and try to self-finance their projects.

The difficulty in accessing private funding is also due to under-information about the agencies involved, their policies, and requirements. Scarcity in the number of training for multipliers also prevails. This lack makes many researchers less productive and less competitive. Some start initiatives but do not complete them; others submit projects several times without ever obtaining funding. Still, others feed the fear of peer review, as a result of the obsession with a world marked by the cult of competition and performance (Hajji, 2012). They do not undertake much and keep quiet about ideas that could have advanced social or economic causes if they were made available to the community.

Therefore, the main concern shown in this article lies in meeting challenges in such contexts to empower colleagues and make them competitive. In other words, how to help them transform their ideas into proposals (Bergerault & Bergerault, 2019; Cohen, 2016), which meet the real needs of the target groups and scientific standards, and to access funding.

Of the possible answers, training in writing research proposals is the option that can satisfy this double necessity. This training fulfils two functions: scientific and pedagogical. The first, as a process for producing knowledge about the research protocol, writing standards, the internal

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1 Read The 2016 Global R&D Funding Forecast: <http://www.iriweb.org>.

2 Read the breakdown of the national budget by sector: <https://budget.gouv.cd/budget-2020/>.

coherence of the parties, and their prioritisation. The research project is thus conceived as a tool that helps structure thinking and supports autonomy in research (Gordon & Pétry, 2010). The second consists of the transmission or sharing of this knowledge in a multiplying vision.

Accomplishing these functions requires relevant choices at the organisational and didactic levels, for more qualitative interactions. Furthermore, an adequate logistic system and a coherent programme of activities should be developed.

The trainer's role should also be considered, concerning the scope and effectiveness of the approaches used, as well as the resulting learning outcomes of the learners. Three perspectives are presented in this regard:

The first advocates total control of the trainer over the entire training process, a pedagogical unilateralism that centralises the knowledge initiative around the trainer, whose ideas, experiences, and analysis alone count. The trainer initiates everything, following a strict didactic approach to which the participants have to cope with, listening attentively to the trainers' speech, to grasp its meaning and take into account the suggestions made in it. The preferred approach in this context is the lecture.

Whilst it is true that this perspective has the advantage of saving time and simplifying the process of pedagogical communication, it does not encourage the personal initiative of the participants to build knowledge from their own experiences (Zeitler et al., 2012). From this criticism, a second perspective emerges, based on the need for interactive learning, through permanent exchanges between actors in the training process. It stems from the fact that participants have different social and academic trajectories that provide a range of reference points for their learning (Baroni & Jeanneret, 2008). The difference in backgrounds and experiences is a capital that can be mobilised in a pedagogical process, allowing each person to learn from their peers. The principle of mediation underlying constructivist theory finds its full meaning here, as a determinant of the co-construction of knowledge, through vertical and horizontal exchanges.

However, alongside the possibility of promoting participatory didactics, the collaborative approach (Baudrit, 2007) somewhat thwarts the initiative of the participants, whose actions are continually subject to validation by trainers or peers. This criticism has given rise to a third perspective that advocates the full freedom of learners to choose, organise, and conduct their learning according to their interests and aptitudes.

Pedagogical self-determination leads them to take ownership and assume total control of the training. This approach has the advantage of promoting learner autonomy (Zimmerman et al., 2000), which, working at his or her own pace, allows creativity to flourish. However, it is criticised for its *laissez-faire* approach, which leads to incomplete or even perverse learning. Hence, there is a need for a conformity check, based on known referents, to make possible adjustments.

Based on the strengths and limitations of the three perspectives mentioned above, other authors (Anadón, 2019; Ladage, 2016) favour a hybrid or mixed approach that combines the strengths of the two previous ones in a triptych: lecture—participation—autonomy. This trilogy was used during the proposal-writing workshops held in Kinshasa in 2018, 2019, and 2020. The Kinshasa workshops for proposal writing had been organised within the framework of the NMT programme coordinated by the University of Potsdam where, faced with multiple challenges, the team of trainers mobilised a range of consequent strategies.

This article clarifies the challenges that were met at the Kinshasa workshops and the functional mechanisms adopted by the trainers to meet or bypass them. Moreover, it aims to provide a frame of reference on the determinants of success and failure of future training workshops.

The problem addressed in the report is reflected in the following specific questions:

1. To what extent did the writing workshops organised in Kinshasa offer a framework for scientific emancipation?
2. What were the major challenges and how did the team of trainers manage to overcome them?
3. What was the level of learning outcomes of the participants at the end of the training?

The answers to these questions were based on the constructivist model, which allowed the workshop training to be analysed as a framework for knowledge exchange through a participatory process. Details are given in the brief literature review below.

## 2. Literature Review

As a framework for constructive exchanges and personal emancipation, training fulfils a social function, which is analysed from various perspectives: liberation mechanism, empowerment process, a framework for updating knowledge, etc.

For Freire (1986), training is a means of empowering the individual or group by providing them with knowledge and abilities to change their living conditions. In the same vein, Drouin-Hans (1998) argues that knowledge raises the level of culture of the individual, making him or her capable of better thinking about how to organise his or her life and be autonomous. In this knowledge-building process, collaboration with peers is indispensable. This leads Abrami et al. (1996) to introduce into the debate the concept of positive interdependence, whose main characteristic is that the learning of each participant in the training process depends fundamentally on interaction with others.

The same analysis is developed by Lave and Wenger (1991), who describe training or learning as a social process taking place in a context, from which it is influenced. To this end, they refer to the notion of 'community of practice', to stress the need for complementarity between individuals engaged in training, whereby each person builds and improves his or her knowledge in a participatory process.

With the emergence of the knowledge society, learning communities are means of producing forms of societies (Cristol, 2017) where each human being, as a product of personal and collective history (Lamy & Saint-Martin, 2018), makes the whole community benefit from his or her different achievements. Since each person has the opportunity to contribute to the intellectual edification of the other, the claim to a monopoly of knowledge is a pure illusion in the knowledge society. In the same way, any encounter may be a learning opportunity, insofar as it confronts different backgrounds and establishes the synthesis of views as a reference point for collective conduct.

This convergence is the result of a rational contradiction that is constructed from the analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the different alternatives. In this process, and the context of a training workshop, a balance of knowledge must be found at three levels:

First, a balance of knowledge is found between trainers, whose different backgrounds and expertise can be an obstacle to participants' learning, when they develop antinomic theses, and stick to them, without the slightest willingness to compromise. Thus, it is useful to map out possi-

ble divergences to define shared models to be presented to participants. This work is carried out upstream, during the design and preparation of the work. The choice of trainers and experts follows the same logic.

The second level of balance is found between trainers and participants. Indeed, although they are learners, the participants are by no means an empty vessel to be filled. Just as much as the trainers, their academic trajectories are loaded with numerous reference points on which their new learning is built. The questions they ask and the concerns they display reflect the cognitive conflicts (Butera et al., 2019) they experience between their previous acquisitions and the new knowledge presented by the trainers. To this end, rather than imposing authoritative arguments on them, trainers initiate uncomplexed exchanges and create formative interactions that benefit both trainers and participants.

The third balance is established only between the participants, called to the same pedagogical destiny. The diversity of backgrounds and disciplinary fields sometimes impedes constructive dialogue when each uses codes that are inaccessible to the other. Such difficulty calls for a joint effort to build bridges of exchange (Cristol, 2017) from an interdisciplinary perspective. The richness of this experience is observed during the work in small groups, where each participant takes advantage of the criticisms made by peers to improve his or her views and project, an informational shock that sheds light on and validates the preconceptions of participants and trainers. Such is a means of mutual construction of knowledge.

A workshop also promotes the scientific emancipation of the participants (Barbot & Trémion, 2016), through a feeling of positive emulation that pushes all members to produce work of comparable, if not superior, quality to that of their peers. Being concerned with giving a better self-image, the participant invests in continuously correcting his or her project and giving it the recommended form.

If the help of the trainer and peers facilitates such an achievement, the ideal is for each learner to achieve this through his or her approach since it is said that those who truly know can transmit their knowledge to others with ease. This autonomy of knowledge follows a system of pedagogical reproduction, where yesterday's learner becomes today's trainer of a new generation who, in turn, will train the next generation, and so on.

The Kinshasa workshops thus acted as a laboratory, where participants experimented and gauged their knowledge, by presenting themselves to their peers. This process of scientific emancipation is assessed through three indicators: (a) the level of skills before and after the work-



shop, (b) the frequency of post-workshop training carried out for the benefit of third parties, and (c) the proportion of subsequent projects submitted and accepted. Whilst the information on the first indicator is given in the paper, dealing with participants' learning outcomes (a), the other two, (b) and (c), are not assessed in this paper. These will be the subject of future analyses.

### 3. Methods

The information presented in this article was gathered through participant observation. This method involves observing a group without their knowledge or consent (Abercrombie et al., 2000). Its dual characteristic is that it is generally used to observe smaller or closed groups, and the researcher practises it without disclosing the intention to investigate (Bastien, 2007). The target group is fully integrated to better observe it. In this case, the use is justified by the nature of the data collected, which requires immersion in the workshop to grasp the different aspects of its progress. Furthermore, the workshop had a small number of people, twenty-six in total (participants, trainers, and experts).

The author of this article, as a member of the trainers' team, facilitated the implementation of this method. The workshop activities had been participated in, and the essential details of the proceedings observed, progressively noted, and submitted for analysis. This observation was done daily using a structured grid that allowed the major facts of the workshop to be noted, particularly concerning its organisation, implementation and follow-up of activities. The various interactions between the actors involved (trainers, experts, and participants) were also noted. All these elements are presented in the Results section.

Also, data on the characteristics of the participants (gender, status, discipline, and institution) were obtained from their application files. They are presented in the table below and refer to two cohorts of 20 participants in the workshops, held in 2018 and 2019/2020, respectively.

The majority of participants (75%) were men, compared to 25% women. Concerning their status, they were junior and senior assistants<sup>3</sup>, respectively, at the university, and they presented a broad variety of

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3 In Congolese universities, two categories of assistants are recognised: those who are in their first or second year of mandate (junior assistants), and those who have more than four years of career, called in French "chefs de travaux" (senior assistants).

research. Their backgrounds were biology, chemistry, political science, sociology, management, educational science, and psychology. This diversity provided an enormous opportunity for the participants to learn from approaches used in fields close to or distant from their own.

In terms of institutional origin, 75% of the participants in the first cohort (2018) were representatives from the University of Kinshasa and another 25%, from surrounding institutions, whilst all (100%) of the participants in the second cohort (2019/2020) came from the University of Kinshasa. This inequality in numbers was explained by the profiles presented by the participants coming from this university, where the best applications for selection came from.

Table 1: Characteristics of 2018 and 2019/2020 Workshop Participants

Variables	Modalities	Workshops 2018	Workshops 2019/2020
		(n = 20) %	(n = 20) %
Gender	Female	25	25
	Male	75	75
Status	Junior Assistant	15	15
	Senior Assistant	85	85
Discipline	Political Sciences	15	20
	Sociology	10	10
	Education/Psychology	25	75
	International Relations + Law	-	10
	Management	15	5
	Biology/Chemistry/Veterinary Medicine	35	-
Institution	University of Kinshasa	75	100
	Others	25	-

Based on the information analysis gathered from direct and participating observation in the workshops, the results are presented below.

## 4. Results

This section presents the challenges met during the Kinshasa workshops, the approaches used by the trainers, and the participants' learning outcomes at the end of the training.

### 4.1 Challenges in the Proposal Writing Workshops

There were three types of challenges: organisational challenges, implementation challenges, and follow-up challenges.

#### **Organisational Challenges**

These refer to the constitution of the team of trainers and experts, the launch of the call for applications, the selection of participants, and the design of the programme of training activities.

- **Constitution of the Team of Trainers and Experts**

Choosing wisely from among a multitude of colleagues, all of whom possess scientific writing skills, to form the team of trainers, was a huge challenge, coupled with the diversity of their uses. Likewise, relational profiles were also scrutinised to ensure their sense of cooperation, since no work team can accomplish its objectives if the individuals who comprise it do not cooperate and support the team (Chédotel, 2004). To this end, sterile conflicts and contradictions make up the base of organisational and social disintegration. For the various workshops, the trainers were chosen based on their skills and qualifications and previous collaborations in several similar activities.

The availability of potential trainers and experts was another equation to be solved. It was not easy to set dates that met everyone's availability, due to often busy agendas. Fixing workshop dates was a difficult ordeal, which involved various negotiations to get personal agendas rearranged. This had not been easy, considering the professional constraints of everyone involved in the training.

An expected trainer or expert in the field could withdraw shortly before the start of the activities. This is difficult for any organisation staff who will have to find an immediate replacement. The difficulty is particularly great when, for example, what needs replacing is an international expert, because it is never certain whether someone is available to take up the role at such short notice. This was the case at the first NMT workshop in 2018. The European expert announced his unavailability two

weeks before the workshop. Unable to find another international expert in so short a time, the organiser (University of Potsdam) was consulted. Another resource speaker who, fortuitously, was staying in Africa at the moment, was sent to the workshop to serve as the international expert.

- **Design and Development of the Programme of Activities: Choice of Themes**

Designing and facilitating a programme that meets the training objectives (Noyé & Piveteau, 2018; Courau, 2017) is a necessity and a challenge for trainers. According to Chocat (2018), this raises the question of the link between the training of the facilitators and the training devices proposed by them.

After the contents of the training had been specified, the different sub-themes were prioritised and distributed fairly, taking into account the trainers' perspectives and competences. A trainer might sometimes give up a sub-theme assigned to him or her and suggest changing it for another one. This situation could disrupt the execution of the programme, especially if the requested handover takes place the day before the workshop. To anticipate such inconvenience, consultation on the sub-themes should take place several weeks before the workshop. This should enable the training team to ascertain each other's expectations and make the necessary corrections in good time.

Two options are available in the development of the programme activities. One is to entrust one of the trainers with developing the corpus of the programme, which will then be submitted for peer validation. The other is to discuss the entire programme together, before allocating the roles. In either approach, the important thing is to arrive at a coherent programme that meets the expectations of the participants and the objectives of their training. Mutual control of the content helps to avoid improvisation since the trainers need to have the same understanding of the programme.

Such convergence, as long as it results in collective control, also encourages trainers to complement each other during the presentations. In the same context, punctuality, and rigorous time management are essential, so that each activity takes place within the set time frame. If the time limit for one module is exceeded, this inevitably affects the sequence of the activities and all the modules, making it difficult to complete the entire programme. In the case of the Kinshasa workshops, only diligent time management made the overcoming of these hurdles on time management possible.

- **Setting up a Place for the Training**

Finding an appropriate place to organise the workshop was a major challenge that was encountered. The planned activities required a quiet, secure place, which required accommodation for participants (20), trainers (4), and experts (2); and a conference room, equipped with appropriate furniture and sound system. In case the sound system would be missing, it would be rented out from a third party.

However, several hotels contacted in Kinshasa could not offer these conditions. Some had lodging rooms, but without a meeting room; others offered several rooms below the demand; still, others had rooms and activity rooms but at a price much higher than what the available budget could afford. It took a lot of time and effort to finally find a setting that met the desired conditions (adequate workrooms, comfortable accommodation, adequate sound system, etc.).

To deal with this difficulty, during the succeeding workshops, reservations of the training place were made several weeks before the starting date. This had implications on the budget being made available well in advance, at least one month, before the start of the training programme. The University of Potsdam made the necessary arrangements to transfer the funds on time.

- **Launch of the Call for Applications and Selection of Participants**

A call for applications that could attract the target group and get them to apply for the training was a time-consuming task. The training team thought of certain parameters in finding the right way to announce the workshop, which included the best way to reach the audience. Would it be more effective to do this by word of mouth, posters, email, or blog? Once the choice had been made, the content of the announcement was structured, specifying the eligibility criteria, the deadline for submitting applications, etc. The announcement text was of an acceptable size, not too long, so as not to tire the reader, but contained the necessary information about the purpose of the training, the objectives, and related requirements. The clearer and more precise the advertisement was, the better it was understood and potential candidates were better mobilised. On the other hand, a call with non-explicit and confusing content could lose its interest in being read, with the risk of remaining unknown to the target audience, and nobody applying for it.

Faced with a multitude of applications, the selection turned out to be another challenge. Several candidates met the eligibility criteria for

a very limited number of positions, as it was the case for the workshops with only 20 places.

Another question was how to deal with many applications that presented almost complementary profiles. That meant that the required criteria were presented in a shared manner among the candidates, with some participants fulfilling certain criteria that others lacked, and vice versa.

Finally, another matter taken up was that all candidates came from the same institution, gender, or discipline. Arbitration became necessary to strike the right balance.

The advantage of selecting participants with diverse backgrounds (institution, discipline, gender, etc.), was to have fruitful exchanges that could consolidate interdisciplinarity and foster mutual enrichment. However, the gap often observed between what was desired and what was happening made it difficult for the trainers' team to assess the situation, and which required the use of common sense.

The trainers' team was certainly hesitant to select candidates coming from the same institution, even if they objectively met the predefined profile, or selecting only men without any women, and vice versa. This hesitation was motivated by the fear of criticism from donors, who recommended the representation of the participants. In reaction, the trainers' team eliminated some candidates in favour of others, even those less deserving, to create some kind of balance.

In addition to the above-mentioned parameters, setting the timing was also a major obstacle. The issue was to determine a reasonable deadline between the launch of the call and the submission of applications. This period should neither be too short nor too long but had to be sufficient enough to give potential applicants time to compile their documents and submit them.

### **Implementation and Follow-up Challenges**

The main challenge faced during the implementation and follow-up of the workshops was the diversity of the participants' discipline backgrounds and their methodological specificities. In the following, three scenarios are presented.

First, the mixed nature of the participants, coming from disciplines with very different approaches.

Second, a discipline gap between the trainers and the participants. In other words, trainers are faced with participants coming from disciplines different from their own. The methodological and conceptual

specificities require additional efforts to better understand the content of the learners' proposals and to make relevant corrections, which was not always certain.

Third, the diversity of research fields within a single discipline. In other words, participants came from the same discipline but worked on different issues. In this case, the advantage was fruitful complementarity, knowing that a discipline is a whole that articulates the historical and structural dimensions that comprise it (Berthelot, 2018), and the knowledge of the practitioners is linked to each other. However, the difficulty lay in the level of expertise of the trainers and their general culture, depending on whether or not they have had sufficient competence in the areas of proposals brought by the participants. Thus, they might or might not be able to provide useful and satisfactory support.

The challenge of discipline diversity lies in the fact that practices in scientific writing differ from one discipline to another. The so-called 'hard'<sup>4</sup> sciences base their convictions on a controllable approach, using laboratory tests, which lead to the formulation of universal laws. However, the social sciences proceed by a critical and interpretative approach to observed or preconceived reality.

Whilst the 'hard' sciences place experimentation at the centre of their action, the social sciences generally resort to a double interpretative and hypothetico-deductive logic. Whilst the former result in rigorous laws, the latter enact principles that are debatable and can be contextualised.

The ingenuity and pragmatism of trainers (Laot & De Lescure, 2006) are keys to the success of their action, through relevant and conciliatory didactic choices. Faced with participants from the same discipline or group of disciplines, the trainer's task is made easier by the similarity of terminology and methodology. They understand each other and interact more easily, in an open and accessible debate. If the trainers come from the same scientific fields as the participants, they might be able to understand the participants' concerns easier and provide them with useful guidance.

Conversely, with participants from distant disciplines and fields, exchanges are not readily apparent. No one is immersed in what the other is doing. This difficulty is reinforced when the trainer comes from a different scientific background from that of the participants. This might sometimes be a problem when the participants need help (support) on certain theoretical aspects of their fields.

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4 For example: mathematics, physics, chemistry, cybernetics, etc.

Of the three cases mentioned above, the mixed nature of the participants was the most frequently encountered in the proposal writing workshops. During the workshops in Kinshasa, participants from a wide variety of scientific backgrounds, namely, chemistry, biology, sociology, psychology, educational sciences, management, and political science were brought together.

The team had to deal with a broad spectrum of disciplines with distant and seemingly irreconcilable methodological approaches to scientific writing. This concern was taken into account in the constitution of the trainers' team and in the choice of experts, which were based on interdisciplinarity (natural sciences and social sciences). The pooling of their assets and experience made it possible to respond effectively to the challenge of the diversity of the participants' disciplinary fields.

#### **4.2 Trainers' Approaches and Management of Formative Interactions**

Although the implementation of effective didactics was a concern for all trainers, not all of them showed sufficient proficiency in improving outcomes of the learners, which required experience and common sense (Leroy, 2016). Several factors hindered the choice of the best approaches, including ignorance, or the absence of information about good practices and the use of approaches that are not well mastered.

A culture is built through (a) participation in training for trainers programmes, and (b) self-training. A typical example of training for trainers is the programme organised in 2017 and 2019 by the University of Potsdam for the launch of the National Multiplication Trainings (NMT) programme. Several selected teams from different countries attended a three-day training module on the organisation, preparation, and facilitation of a workshop. The participating teams achieved certain theoretical equipment, which allowed them to gain confidence in the implementation of their future workshops in their countries.

Without such a background, the trainer is limited and is often helpless, unable to imagine innovative processes that can motivate the participants and actively involve them in the programmed activities.

This challenge had been observed in the workshops, albeit in a small proportion, among some members of the team who had not participated as much as the others had in the training of trainers. They had some difficulties in their approach, particularly concerning structuring the presentations, conducting the discussion, and managing interactions with the participants. These difficulties were directly compensated by other



colleagues through the teamwork practice, which favours relay and complementarity between members of the training team.

Without following a formal training course or a seminar, trainers can also self-train (Tremblay, 2019) through personal reading, or by taking part in informal discussions on specific issues of interest to them. This possibility is rarely exploited, though, arguing that society does not offer enough opportunities for this. In so doing, trainers deprive themselves of the initiatives of a liberal self-learning process, which make it possible to satisfy the need for information and personal culture, and which do not respond to any external requirements, but to the sole desire to grasp the meaning of things and develop the capacity for action (Musa, 2018).

This attitude increases the individual's intellectual base, as a knowledgeable subject, and gives him or her the latitude to build a perfect skills profile. This process, and the result it manages, finds its meaning in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, precisely the need for self-realisation that the individual seeks to satisfy for personal prestige and mental balance, without a materialistic or lucrative aim.

However, knowing the didactic approaches is one thing, applying them wisely is still another. The use of an approach should not be hazardous, but instead rational in assessing its advantages concerning the objectives set by the team of trainers. Above all, it should be based on the capacity of the team to use it appropriately.

The experience of the workshops was, indeed, quite illustrative. Arbitration between two or three approaches had been resorted to, so that organisation in certain activities could take place. Participants presented their projects and submitted them for peer review then finally carried them out. Opinions were divided between, for example, dealing with an issue directly within the large group of 20 participants, or dividing the participants into separate small working groups and then pooling them.

At different times, the choice was made between one or the other approach, with significant results. However, there were also times when the chosen approach did not lead to the development of qualitative interactions. This led to the use of another one.

During the above-mentioned workshops, the preferred approach was the skills-based approach, reinforced by the focus group to get the participants to learn from their difficulties. In this framework, the achievement of the workshop objectives is assessed by the quality of the learning outcomes shown by the participants, as outlined below.

### **4.3 Participants' Performance and Completion of Individual Projects**

The interactive approaches that were used encouraged the co-construction of learning (Buchs et al., 2006; Thievenaz, 2018), and consolidated the progress of the participants' projects. These facts were evaluated by an exploratory survey conducted among participants concerning the completion of the action plan, the implementation of individual projects, satisfaction with the programme, and the competence of the trainers.

#### **Action Plan and Implementation of Individual Projects**

The interest in planning the implementation of the project was to systematise its actions and avoid any form of improvisation. A line of action was defined to specify the activities that were carried out at each phase.

As the participants' projects were essentially academic, the challenge was to transform them into eligible projects to be submitted to funding agencies. Therefore, a re-orientation towards more functional and practical goals was called for, and which related to the solution of a social problem. With this dimension lacking, the project is incomplete and, therefore, unsatisfactory for funders, who wished to make their mark by financing projects with visible impacts.

Two patterns were presented and used by the participants to finalise their project drafts: (a) the pattern of an academic research protocol and that of funding, and (b) the pattern of a research budget. The effectiveness in complying with these models depends, as previously mentioned, on the participants working on their proposals, before submitting them to the team of trainers for conformity assessment. This process takes place effectively in two stages. After the first workshop, checking the conformity of the corrections made with remarks received during the theoretical presentations, and, after the second workshop, assessing the final improvements made.

All the participants (100%) at the Kinshasa workshops completed their projects, with structures and presentations that met the trainers' expectations. The scientific and social goals were adequately mentioned, as well as the gaps to be filled, thus proving the originality of the projects. Most importantly, each participant acquired double expertise: the ability to develop a research project that met the required objectives, and the ability to objectively evaluate a proposal submitted by a third party (another researcher). More concretely, twenty selected and trained researchers set up promising proposals with coherent budgets to apply for national and international funding. The content of the training and

the activities that were carried out strengthened their capacities in designing, structuring, writing, and budgeting an eligible research project.

However, compared to the 2018 projects that are now nearly complete, none of the 2020 proposals is being implemented due to a lack of available funding. Many participants have not yet found donors working in their respective fields. Others are still on waiting lists, standing by for responses to their applications from funding agencies. Despite this, the workshop was a solid intellectual investment that the participants will be able to use throughout their careers.

### **Satisfaction with the Programme and the Competence of the Trainers**

The vast majority of participants (nearly 97%) were very satisfied with the activities carried out during the workshops. They acquired new methodological tools that complemented and reinforced their previous learning outcomes. Many preconceptions were dispelled and preconceived ideas were clarified, allowing the participants to write their proposals following a rigorous approach that respected both scientific principles and requirements of funding agencies.

The foreign initiative of the National Multiplication Trainings programme (coordinated by the University of Potsdam) and the presence of European and regional experts were two factors that gave the workshop an international appeal and motivated a large number of applications. The participants were unanimously satisfied with the quality of the trainers' work. This was the result of the online participant surveys conducted by the University of Potsdam. Nearly 94% of the respondents claimed to have acquired new knowledge that enabled them to better achieve the challenges of setting up a project. A similar number considered the profiles of the trainers and their skills to be very satisfactory.

Finally, all participants (100%) said that they have never taken part in a forum similar to what they have attended, i.e. where they learnt how to write proposals. This gap points directly at the lethargy of their faculties since they had been amiss in equipping participants with skills and knowledge precisely needed in writing proposals. The inferiority complex and the hesitation to apply surrounding projects at the international level need to be broken since these are negative attitudes that, if allowed to persist, reduce the participants' scientific productivity and lock them into anonymity.

## 5. Conclusion

Using participatory and didactic approaches, the workshops organised within the framework of the National Multiplication Training programme contributed to the strengthening of the capabilities of the participants in writing scientific project proposals that meet international standards. This is a context where many researchers show relatively less competitiveness on the market for bankable projects.

The effectiveness of the workshops thus demonstrated calls for a re-orientation of university and research policies in creating frameworks for exchanges between researchers, enabling them to bring ideas and experiences into contact with each other thereby producing shared reference frameworks for reflection and action.

Intellectual competitiveness must be embedded in university culture as a driving force for the production of knowledge and the foundation of progress in modern societies. Universities must constantly consider this need in the intellectual update of their strategic plans. This has direct implications not only on allocating sufficient financial resources in the university's guidelines and policies but also on establishing inter-university co-operation and on enabling less-equipped institutions to benefit from the contribution of those with know-how and expertise.

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