

SIA article

Name: Jennifer Provost

Country of origin: Canada (Québec)

Finished SIA: Winter semester 15/16

PhD Studies: International PhD Program for Agricultural Sciences (IPAG)

PhD topic: Marketing Channel Choice Analysis of urban dairy farmers in Mali & Cameroon

This was supposed to be a 2-year adventure. Get on a plane, fly across the ocean, leave family & friends behind, and move to a new continent with two suitcases. My plan was to stay for the SIA program and move back right after. Little did I know that my career would take root and gradually blossom here in charming little Göttingen.

Due to my father's career, my family and I had the chance to move to Africa and live in the city of Bamako, Mali for three years. It changed my life forever. I knew right away that I wanted to come back and work in West Africa and I kept this in mind when I had to choose a bachelor's degree. When I heard about the SIA program in Germany, I was halfway done with my bachelor's, but I already knew this is what I was going to do next.

In 2014 I was accepted into the "International Agribusiness and Rural Development Economics" specialization. In one of the introductory classes of SIA, one professor caught my attention when I realized most of her research takes place in West Africa and focuses on animal sciences. No need to tell you how fast I jumped out of my chair to talk to her after class! Long story short, she introduced me to her work within Urban Food^{Plus} (UFP), a multidisciplinary research project intended to enhance food security in West African cities. Subsequently, I completed both my master's degree and doctoral degree field work with UFP, where I had the occasion to learn how to work with local institutions, lead a team of assistants, organize the various logistics, manage a budget, design questionnaires, carry out data collection, and much more. This professor and this research project were the stepping stones to my academic career.

The workload during the SIA program was much lighter than what I was used to in North America and at first I was disappointed; I thought this was a reflection of the courses' quality. However, with time I realized that this free time enabled me to carve a more refined profile for myself based on my interests. I had time to travel abroad, to participate in international conferences and workshops, to go on educational excursions, to be part of a student group that organized all kinds of activities, to establish relationships with professors and renowned

scientists, to work for the university, and to improve my skills of choice. None of this would have been possible had I been swamped by homework, papers, presentations, and readings. I was given the time and conditions to become the scientist and professional I wanted to become.

Now I am midway into a PhD on a topic that I love, working in countries that I love even more. This is all thanks to the freedom of the SIA master and the opportunities offered at the university. Nonetheless, one must jump on the occasions when they present themselves. If I could give one tip to current and future master students, it is to make good use of that time. Don't be afraid to try new things, meet more people, and go for what you want. Start your network, approach professors, ask questions, and establish yourself! This will be more valuable to your future than anything else.