

## African-German Network of Excellence in Science

# Report on AGNES 2020 Office activities

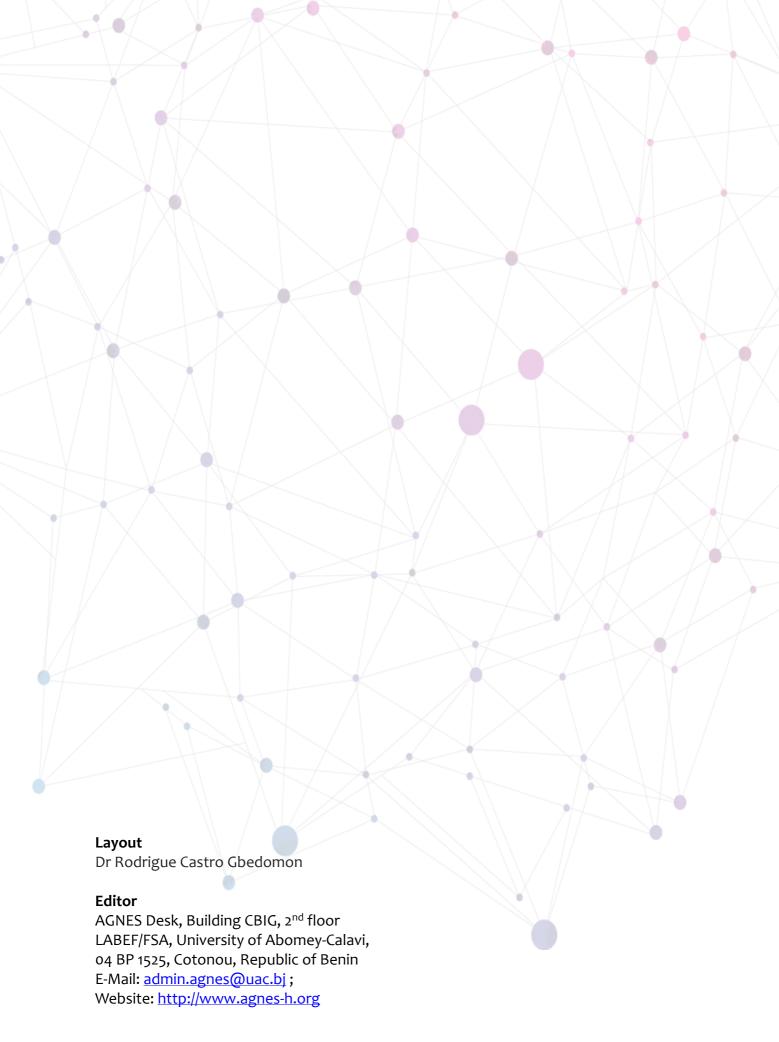
www.agnes-h.org













The year 2020 has been special mainly due to COVID-19 pandemic which affected the whole humanity. Activities of AGNES were also highly affected. This stressful situation led to the cancellation of several meetings of our network. However, adaptive strategies were used to face the situation and allowed us to accomplish our goals.

## 1. Activities

#### 1.1. Memberships' update

In order to make the majority of Humboldtians get involved in the Structure's activities, the membership forms have been shared with potential AGNES members. A total of 40 membership forms were received. These forms will be assessed very soon by the advisory board and a decision regarding their admission as AGNES members will be taken. After this decision, their profiles will be posted on the AGNES website.

#### 1.2. AGNES and AGNES-PAWS Intra Africa mobility grants

#### Call for applications and first steps of assessment

The call for applications was launched on February 1<sup>st</sup> 2020. It was published and launched in French and English via mails to AGNES members and friends (hosts, previous grantees ...). It was also publicized on our website (https://agnes-h.org/), our social media (Facebook and Twitter) and via the broadcasting channel of RUFORUM. The process has been seriously slowed down by the COVID-19 global pandemic. For instance, the lockdown in several countries did not permit applicants to reach their potential host institutions, and because of these difficulties, the deadline was extended from March 31<sup>st</sup> to April 30<sup>th</sup> 2020. As a result, 155 applications were received (108 for AGNES MG and 47 for AGNES-PAWS MG).

For AGNES MG, 87.04 % of the applications were from males (Figure 1a), and Nigeria was the most represented country (26.85%), followed by Cameroon (19.44%) and Benin (17.59%). The least represented countries were Niger, Mali, Kenya and Ghana with only one application each (Figure 1b).

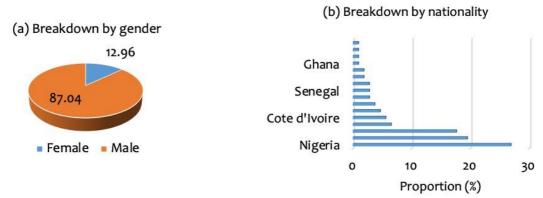


Figure 1. Breakdown of AGNES MG applications by (a) gender and by (b) nationality

For AGNES-PAWS MG, the most represented countries were Cameroon (23.4%), Nigeria (21.28%) and Benin (12.77%). The least represented countries were Uganda, Senegal, Niger and Ghana with only one application each (Figure 2).

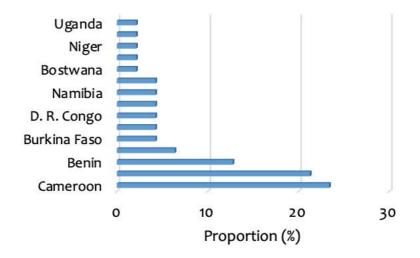


Figure 2. Breakdown of AGNES-PAWS MG applications by nationality

The deskwork (screening of the applications for completeness, eligibility checking based on applicant's performance (BSs, MSc) and identification of assessors to help in evaluation of the applications) kept the secretary busy from May 1st to September 20th, 2020.

After this first screening by the secretary for application completeness and academic performance as required in the call (BSs, MSc), 54 applications (out of 108) for AGNES MG and 25 applications (out of 47) for AGNES-PAWS MG were retained for the following evaluation steps. These applications were sent to assessors for review using a guideline provided by AGNES.

Assessors graded the applications on a 10-scale score basis and these scores were used to rank the applications from the highest score to the lowest. From the ranked lists, 14 applications were shortlisted for AGNES MG and 24 for AGNES-PAWS MG. The shortlisted applicants for both grants were prepared for the AGNES selection Committee.

#### **Selection meeting**

Once again, because of the COVID 19 global pandemic, it was not possible to hold a physical selection meeting. Therefore, the option of virtual selection meeting was preferred. This important virtual meeting was held on September 30th 2020. The meeting was hosted by Prof Dr Alexander Ferrein, using the Webex network of the University of Applied Sciences, Aachen.

Lists of selected candidates to benefit from the AGNES-PAWS and AGNES mobility grants are provided in tables 1 and 2. After this meeting, an award notification message was



prepared and sent to the first 12 AGNES-PAWS grantees and to 7 general AGNES grantees. After analysis of grantees' budget by the AGNES office, AGNES-PAWS was finally granted to the 3 candidates on the waiting list, while budget constraints allowed only 2 of the 3 applicants on the waiting list for the AGNES general to benefit from the mobility grant. Overall, 15 AGNES-PAWS mobility grants were awarded to young female researchers and 8 AGNES mobility grants to young male researchers from Sub-Saharan Africa for 2020.

Table 1: 2020 AGNES-PAWS mobility grantees

Rank	First name	Name	Field of study	Nationality	Host country	Duratio n
			Main list			
1	Christiana Cudjoe	DAPULIGA	Public Health	Ghana	Nigeria	Two months
2	Gosaitse	TUBATSI	Biology and Biotechnological sciences	Botswana	South Africa	Two months
3	Golou Gizèle	ZANH	Ecology and Sustainable Ecosystem Management	Cote d'Ivoire	Benin	Two months
4	Becky Nancy Achieng'	ALOO	Biodiversity and Ecosystems Management	Kenya	Uganda	Two months
5	Hycentha Diengou	NGWENE	Microbiology	Cameroon	Ghana	Two months
6	Moyonda	OMOJUFEHINS I IDOKO	Biochemistry	Nigeria	South Africa	Two months
7	Faith Toluwanimi	OLAYIWOLA	Mycology/Fungal Biotechnology	Nigeria	Tanzania	Two months
8	Ines Atuh	NGOH	Cellular and Molecular parasitology	Cameroon	The Gambia	Three months
9	Olyvia Gwladys	FADEYI	Tropical Mycology and Plant-Soil Fungi Interactions	Benin	South Africa	Two months
10	Affoue Benedicte	KOFFI	Hydrogeology	Cote d'Ivoire	Benin	Two months
11	Hambeleleni	DAVIDS NDIYAVALA	Space physics	Namibia	South Africa	Two months
12	Anna	ALFEUS	Environmental Health	Namibia	South Africa	One month
13	Aude	DOUGUE NGUEGUIM	Biotechnology	Cameroon	South Africa	Two months
14	Jesugnon F.M. Féty	TONOUEWA	Biodiversity Monitoring and Conservation	Benin	Ghana	One month
15	Yolande	FEUDJIO NDEMANOU	Biochemistry	Cameroon	Mauritiu s	Two months

Table 2. 2020 AGNES mobility grantees

Rank	First name	Name	Field of study	Nationality	Host country	Duration
1	Stephano	TAMBO TENE	Nutrition and Food Security	Cameroon	South Africa	Two months
2	Innocent Uzochukwu	OKAGU	Biochemistry	Nigeria	South Africa	Two months
3	Moses	KIGOZI	Materials Science and Engineering	Uganda	South Africa	Two months
4	Walter	OJOK	Chemistry	Uganda	South Africa	Two months
5	Akeem Babatunde	SIKIRU	Reproductive Physiology	Nigeria	Egypt	Two months
6	Sunday Juwon	OLATUNJI	Chemistry	Nigeria	South Africa	Two months
7	Abdel Deen Derrick Vital	DAI TOMETIN	Energy	Benin	Ghana	Two months
8	Oyedibu Oyebayo	OLOYEDE	Ecology and Environmental Biology	Nigeria	South Africa	Two months

#### Grantees' research stay and report

In order to guarantee that the mobility will be effective, because of the global sudden crisis due to the COVID-19, AGNES has requested that grantee's host provide official travel authorization letter. After the reception of this letter, the grant was transferred to the grantee's bank account. To date, most of the grantees have joined their host institutions and reported the beginning of their research activities. Still, some are yet to join their host institutions before the end of the first quarter of 2021.

## 1.3. Advisory board meetings

From January 2020 to January 2021 due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, several meetings were held, and most of them were virtual.

- January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020: Selection meeting of grantees for the 2019 AGNES and AGNES-PAWS junior research grant followed by the board meeting at BIUST, Botswana. At the meeting, 13 and 11 nominees were selected to benefit AGNES-PAWS and AGNES GNERAL Junior Research Grants, respectively.
- June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020: AGNES Follow-up Covid Strategic Planning workshop" at the AvH digital meeting. This virtual meeting was held in replacement of the workshop planned on the strategic plan of AGNES at the Humboldt colloquium in Yaoundé Cameroon, March 2020, which was cancelled. Various issues linked to AGNES activities and its network improvement were discussed. The discussion was

organized around four topics:

- Topic1: AGNES in brief (Prof. Dr. Romain Glèlè Kakaï)
- **Topic 2:** AGNES membership (Prof. Dr. Alexander Ferrein)
- **Topic 3:** Visibility of AGNES and financial sustainability, (awareness activities on AGNES and AVH programmes, AGNES ambassador scientists, members fees potential donors) (Prof. Dr. Remi Sonaiya)
- **Topic 4:** Challenges for African research systems and researchers during and after the pandemic (Prof. Dr. Clement Adebooye)
- September 30th, 2020: Selection meeting (online) of AGNES 2020 mobility grantees (AGNES MG & AGNES-PAWS MG). The first item on the agenda of the meeting was the organization of the election of the executive committee members. The second item was the selection of AGNES 2020 mobility grantees. As a result, 15 applicants were awarded the AGNES-PAWS mobility grant while 8 applicants were awarded the AGNES mobility grant for 2020.

## 2. Partnerships and outreach programs

#### 2.1. Partnership with BAYER

A partnership has been concluded with BAYER with the support of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (AvH). In the framework of this partnership, an AGNES-BAYER Research Grant for Biodiversity Conservation & Sustainable Agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa has been developed. This grant is generously funded by the BAYER Foundation with support of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (AvH). This Grant for Junior Researchers (PhD students) aims to strengthen the scientific capacity of young researchers in sub-Saharan Africa. The call for application for this call will be launched very soon. It will enable doctoral students from sub-Saharan African countries to undertake outstanding research activities in the field of Biodiversity conservation and sustainable agriculture. The Grant aims at being a financial support to African PhD students for field work activities. A maximum Grant amount of EUR 7000 will be provided to each selected applicant.

#### 2.2. Publications

As researchers, most of AGNES members undertook initiatives on the COVID 19 pandemic. More than ten research initiatives undertaken on COVID-19 in Africa were carried out by AGNES members. Several scientific papers have already been published by AGNES members from these research activities.



#### 2.3. Challenges and adaptative solutions

The COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected activities of AGNES in 2020. With this global health crisis, it was quite impossible to hold physical meetings, because international travels were not allowed in several countries. This led, for example, to the cancellation of the AGNES meetings scheduled to be held in Yaoundé during the AvH Colloquium (previously planned for March 2020). Also, the pandemic has seriously disrupted the mobility grant process. Indeed, with the lockdowns in several cities, most of universities were closed, and it was difficult for applicants to reach their potential hosts during the application period. In order to allow applicants to be able to apply, the deadlines for calls for applications were extended, particularly for the Intra-Africa mobility grant. In addition, after the award notification to the grantees, AGNES asked hosts of grantees to provide an official statement of travel authorization and confirmation of the possibility of hosting the grantee, with regard to the pandemic, before transferring the amount of the scholarship to the beneficiary. Finally, considering the travel ban, the executive committee found other solutions for interaction among members. For that, online meetings were adopted to ensure the continuation of the network's activities in this context of health crisis.



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