

# Change Makers and Future Leaders: How a training and dialogue programme is making a difference for and beyond 2030

An interview with Roland Müller

An interview with Roland Müller

**Date:** February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024

**Interviewer:** Doina Bulearcă

Roland Müller is a Board Member of the Romanian Association for International Cooperation and Development (ARCADIA). Last year, he was a [Managing Global Governance](#) (MGG) Academy fellow at the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS) in Bonn, Germany. This makes him and ARCADIA an integral part of the MGG Network today.

*What is the MGG Academy all about, and how was your fellowship experience?*

The main objective of the [MGG Academy](#) is to support and prepare future change-makers for a life dedicated to sustainable development. It is a highly competitive training and policy dialogue format that brings together outstanding professionals and leaders from government institutions, think tanks, academia, civil society, and the private sector in several emerging countries – Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, South Africa – and the European Union (EU).

The Academy has three components: knowledge, leadership, and

action. Between mid-August and the beginning of December 2023, we were based in Bonn, but we also went to several leadership retreats in idyllic locations of North Rhine-Westphalia, as well as on study trips to Berlin and Brussels. In Berlin, within the International Futures seminar, organized in cooperation with the German Federal Foreign Office, we undertook a full academic module centered on sustainable digitalization and negotiation training, all while being immersed in a diplomatic setting. The leadership retreats were a great opportunity to engage in team-building exercises and to develop soft skills.

In the current context of polycrisis and geopolitical tensions, the Academy represents an oasis for addressing global challenges by building trust, learning from diverse perspectives, and co-creating solutions. On a personal level, the exchange between the participants from eight countries and five continents made me more aware of the value of trust in international cooperation. The programme might have been structured around competence development, leadership, project management, and networking, but, in my opinion, what really lay at its heart was a concerted facilitation for establishing trustful relationships. It would not be an exaggeration to say that, starting last summer and well into the fall, friendships for a lifetime have been forged.

The Academy is organized and hosted by IDOS, one of the world's leading research institutions and think tanks for global sustainable development, and funded by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Germany's full-fledged ministry dedicated to development cooperation. For three and a half months, it provided me and 20 other early to mid-career experts with the opportunity to exchange on global challenges, co-create knowledge, share learnings, and cooperate in diverse teams while growing further as leaders for sustainable development. I am grateful that I was one of the two EU professionals entrusted to

feature in this innovative setting, although I did submit my feedback that Europe should be better represented in this format.

Beyond profound knowledge and leadership qualities, transformative change requires inclusive visionary action. In this regard, I particularly enjoyed how the course blended academic and leadership modules with applied project work. The Change Maker Project was somehow the crown jewel of the Academy because it welded almost everything we had learned before in the final stage of the programme. Focusing on the opportunities and challenges of global cooperation and transformation to sustainability in times of disruptive crisis was a privilege that obliged.

Of course, we also brought our own set of strengths and skills to the table, which benefited everyone. Knowledge cooperation and policy dialogue are two core areas of expertise in my professional profile that contribute greatly to implementing the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. I am happy that our challenge giver brought them up. To conclude, for me, the MGG experience was unique and wonderful because it occurred on a platform where sustainability meets development cooperation. Most of my research interests are to be found precisely at this intersection. IDOS certainly supports in numerous ways future change makers who are dedicated to the path of global cooperation and transformation to sustainability.

*What else can you tell us about the Change Maker Project (CMP)?*

The Academy and, specifically, the CMP enabled the participants to collaborate in small teams to develop and implement real-life sustainability solutions to real-life problems presented to us by different actors, from development agencies to UN entities, from academia to the private sector. Reflecting together and individually on the challenges of

international cooperation and the needs of various stakeholders was the starting point of the project component. As we explored a concrete topic through the sensing journey and moved towards the sounding board – the presentation of the hands-on solutions – I became aware of how working in highly diverse teams played out. In the process, we applied the design thinking method for innovative problem solving, a method I knew little about before and which was a major take from the CMP. However, the action component of the Academy was as much about design thinking, project development, and project management as it was about a specific policy area or the experience of working together in a team.

The organizer of the MGG Academy itself brought the challenge my team worked on. The Decolonize working group at IDOS was interested in how they could further contribute to building fair and equal research partnerships, especially with partners from the Global South. I shared a strong interest in this topic because of the importance knowledge cooperation has for inclusive development. With three other colleagues from South Africa, Mexico, and Indonesia (Danai Tembo, Bruno Berthier, and Anta Nasution), I conducted several interviews with IDOS researchers, senior management, and a few external stakeholders to better understand the issue at hand. After reflecting on and reframing the problem tree, we proceeded to shape our sounding board with a list of opportunity areas that IDOS could consider in its research strategy and practice. We opted for an artistic intervention method to create an impactful message for our “recommendations” on more equitable and just research partnerships. After selecting a set of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century paintings depicting colonial scenes, we intervened on them so that the new artwork highlighted our proposed opportunity areas. I take great pride in how well our sounding board presentation was received.

Overall, the CMP was a great opportunity to bond as a team, exchange (sometimes conflicting) understandings, explore new

methods and tools, and engage with a highly relevant theme. It has prepared me to further explore and apply postcolonial theories and perspectives on development in my activity.

*When and where does the MGG Network come into action?*

The Network became relevant in December when the course came to an end. Once you graduate from the MGG Academy, you and your institution will automatically become part of the MGG alumni network. It brings together alumni from all the previous generations – the 17th batch will graduate this year. This gives us access to a wide variety of academic and professional profiles. One of the purposes of the network is to continue to provide a space for collaboration, knowledge sharing, and networking. One's initiative is key in this network, which also has an online platform. Members are encouraged to launch calls for partnerships and propose collaboration ideas, come together in research projects or organize online and offline events. The class of 2023 had a unique chance to get an early glimpse of what this means when the Global Network Conference took place in Bonn at the end of September. We also had the opportunity to interact, maybe not as much as I had wished, with the participants in the IDOS 59<sup>th</sup> Postgraduate Course. This flagship programme was established in 1965 and enhanced the competence of master's graduates aspiring to a career in international cooperation for development and sustainability.

The MGG alumni contribute an international network and a global perspective. We have developed our leadership competencies and possess a profound ability to address global governance issues in our institutions' work. I hope that ARCADIA will benefit from this membership as I will further seek to strengthen its organizational capacity, search for new opportunities and forms of cooperation, respond to innovative ideas and concepts, and expand our partnerships in this vibrant global network. The specificity of the Network is that

it provides a gateway to the so-called Global South, its views, needs, and concerns. It, therefore, provides a legitimate platform for action geared towards implementing the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The EU and the world need more of these platforms where diverse individual and institutional actors who embrace the values of the UN Charter can convene.

*Who is eligible for this programme, and how can they apply?*

The project is addressed to highly qualified *young* professionals working in a partner institution from the MGG Network or an institution interested in future participation. To apply, one must be a national or a permanent resident of one of the MGG partner countries – Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, South Africa – or the European Union. One should be around 25-40 years of age. The candidates should work or be concerned professionally with issues relevant to sustainable development. A minimum of three years of work experience (internships are also considered) is expected, and at least a master's degree is deemed preferable. The application form can be found here: <https://www.idos-research.de/en/training/managing-global-governance/mgg-application/>.

*Can the fellows work while attending the Academy?*

The program is dedicated to people who are employed and professionally engaged. Applying for this program also requires the written support and consent of the employer. While maintaining employment status, one should take a break from the work tasks back home and intensely engage with the Academy programme. It is a full-time format, which is demanding but quite intellectually stimulating. It normally consists of (five) workdays that start at 9:30 AM and finish around 5 PM, with an hour and a half for lunch break. Sometimes, it can get intense, and you must calibrate your effort to avoid energy draining. The study trips and their

rapid succession with academic modules and leadership sessions can be exhausting. The Change Makers Project also completely shifts the dynamic of the Academy from the rather passive end of attending and receiving to a space where one has to be active, independent yet collaborative, and responsible for one's own schedule. If you do not calibrate your efforts well, you can get overwhelmed toward the end of the programme. The good news is that amazing coaches and tutors are available to assist at this stage and throughout the entire duration of the Academy.

*What else do you think is important for potential candidates to know?*

Each selected participant will receive free accommodation in a one-bedroom apartment in Bonn, and the travel expenses to Brussels and Berlin (but not from their home countries to Germany) will be covered. The programme funding also offers a monthly allowance of 800 EUR. The maximum number of participants is 22, with 2 to 4 fellows selected from each country. This year, the application deadline has been extended to March 10th.









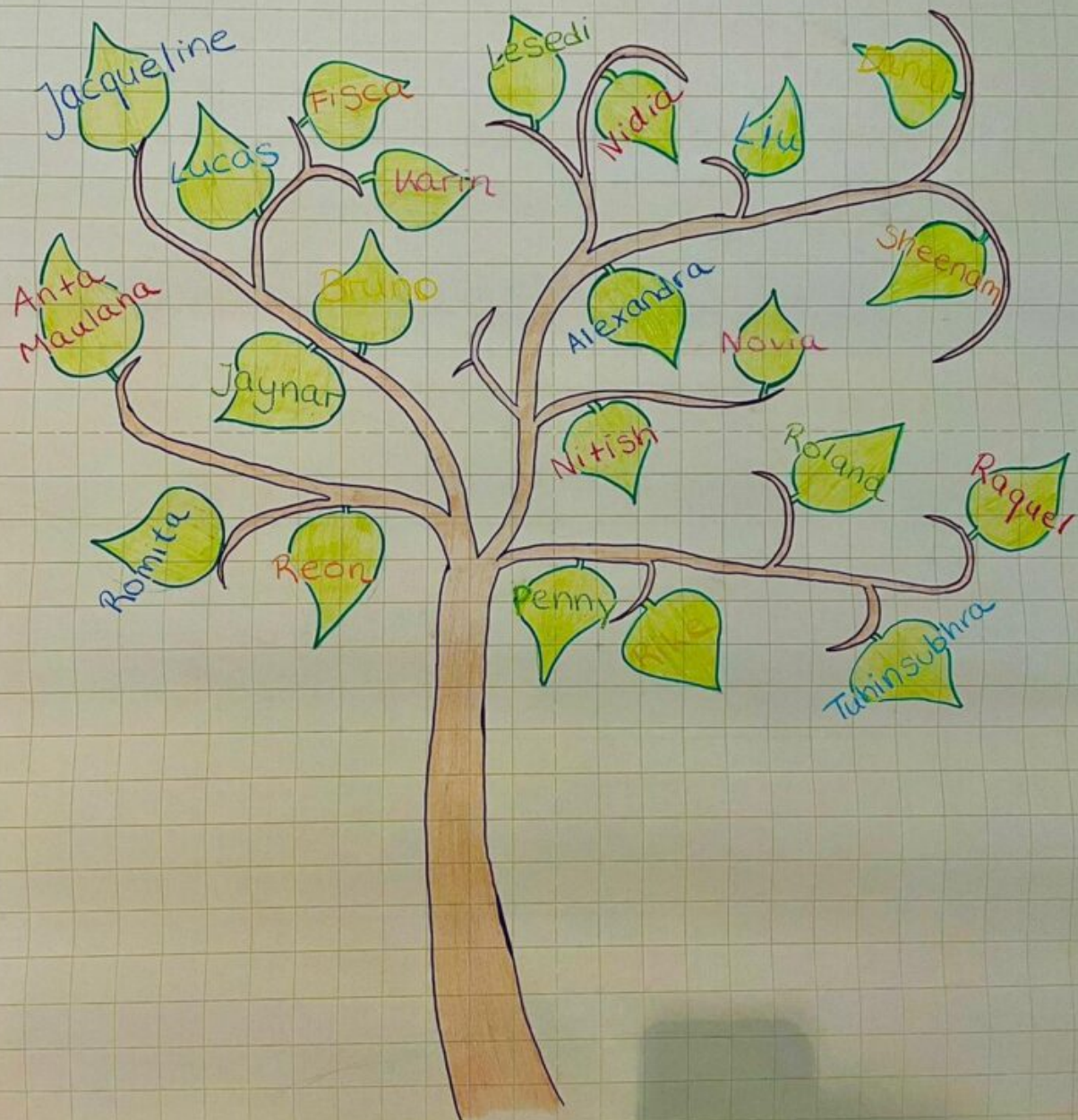






# WELCOME

## MGG Academy 2023











**50 Years**  
Germany in  
the United Nations

Uniting for  
Humanity





