TEACHING STATEMENT

I am of the personal belief that teaching is a high calling as it grants us the rare privilege of contributing to training and preparing the next generation of thought leaders. My teaching objective is to foster academic curiosity in students by transmitting knowledge in a manner that considers that different students will grasp the content I deliver at varying paces. My teaching philosophy has evolved over time to reflect the insights I have extracted from a critical examination of my past teaching experiences and recent events such as virtual classrooms and artificial intelligence (AI). In this document, I detail my teaching philosophy and teaching experience.

1. Teaching Philosophy

My aim in teaching applied economics courses in general, and agricultural and food economics courses in particular, is to foster economic and strategic reasoning in students. My goal in the classroom is to help students develop conceptual frameworks to analyse the causal structure or associations between economic phenomena. Five objectives inspire my approach.

First, the teaching process must empower students to develop their economic reasoning. Every class session should leave students looking for patterns around them that reflect different relationships between economic phenomena. This requires bringing into the classroom real-world examples that depict economic trade-offs. I start each class session by presenting relevant stylised facts, e.g., changes over time in the number of food-insecure people. This offers students a relatable overview of the topic of the class. It also helps develop their ability to identify the economic forces at work. Where relevant, I adopt a combined approach with initial lectures focused on theory and subsequent ones on their empirical application. I update my teaching dossier often to reflect economic events in real-time, e.g., supply chain blockages due to COVID-19 or the closing of the Suez Canal.

Second, university-level education should foster academic curiosity and encourage collaborative work among students. Academic courses should make students ready to meet current industry requirements. With the increasing relevance of data wrangling skills, I view empirical experience as one of the more important pieces in my student's toolkit. I believe based on my own experience and those of master students I have supervised that an abstract familiarity with data analysis is no substitute for practical empirical experience. I expect my students to deal with data access, cleaning, and analysis in a programming language of their choice (e.g., R or Stata) — with difficulty adjusted to class level. Also, students must be exposed to industry practices through guest lectures delivered by professionals and policymakers. I believe that an important part of getting students interested in coursework is introducing them to current economic research and the creative ways in which economists approach these questions.

Third, students in the first lecture session should receive complete information about the teacher's expectations. Students with unclear expectations tend to get frustrated and resist learning. I strive to clarify in my course outlines that I have high expectations for my students. I expect them to master the material for two reasons: (i) so that when they take exams they are confident they will pass, and (ii) so that they feel comfortable enough to tackle real-world problems. This also extends to me informing them of what they can expect from my side. It is very important to me that my students know that I value their questions and comments in and outside the classroom. I strive to be approachable, remember names, actively solicit questions throughout the lecture, and respond to emails quickly. I also make it a point to stay for a few minutes after each lecture to speak with students and to answer any remaining questions. Many students are hesitant to speak up during lectures, especially in large classroom settings. I try to encourage the use of office hours to urge struggling students to seek help early by frequently reminding students of the time and location.

My undergraduate studies in Ghana, my time as a (post)doctoral researcher in Germany, my Fellowship at the World Bank Group in the US and my current role at a Federal Department in Switzerland provides me with a well-rounded experience working with people from diverse academic, research and cultural backgrounds. These experiences highlight the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion in my teaching philosophy. Like real-life workplaces, classrooms are diverse

settings. Students have different learning preferences. This determines how well they perform in class. Teaching and final assessments need to embrace this diversity. When I teach, I account for this student heterogeneity by preparing myself to explain the same content in different ways using policy-relevant examples from different contexts. In student assessments, I promote a mix of mid-term tests, term papers, and group presentations to promote teamwork and enhance group dynamics. A mix of these assessment methods embraces these differences across students giving each one a chance at excelling in an area they feel most comfortable in. I have over the years supervised four master theses, with students from Germany, Ghana, Indonesia and Cameroon. In all these projects, I guided the students to identify their intended research questions taking into account their strengths and weaknesses. One of these students is now pursuing doctoral studies within the Food Systems Economics and Policy Group at ETH Zürich and another is a Junior Professional at the GIZ in Bonn.

Finally, the use of AI is proliferating. How it affects education is a legitimate concern for teachers and policymakers. There are concerns about how students might use AI tools such as ChatGPT to plagiarise and cheat on assignments. Left unregulated, AI will only make it easier for students to gain answers at the expense of knowledge. Since AI has come to stay, university education needs to rethink assessment methods to harness the power of AI rather than shun it. My philosophy is that students need to learn how to think critically, solve problems, and make decisions based on data and not what AI says. Practically, I intend to expose students to these tools and where relevant their ethical and responsible use, while putting in place measures to identify their abuse. On the positive side, I exploit AI to generate real-time simulations and surveys to enhance the teaching experience.

2. Teaching experience

As part of my (post)doctoral training, I was a Teaching Assistant for Prof. Dr. Bernhard Brümmer at the University of Göttingen. Here, I spent four years, from 2017 to 2020, in charge of weekly tutorials and review sessions for three modules: (i) Data Analysis with R in Agricultural Economics, (ii) Agricultural Price Theory and Market Risk and (iii) World Agricultural Markets and Trade. In all these courses we employed different formats for teaching and examination. For instance, in the World Agricultural Markets and Trade course, we offered oral exams. This was fit for purpose in a course on agricultural and food markets where graphs are standard approaches to represent theoretical concepts. This offered us an avenue to assess if students really understand the concepts. In the module on Agricultural Price Theory, we used standard written exams. The module on data analysis is usually a two-week block course that runs for eight hours a day including breaks. The first week of the course covers the essentials of data programming. Students start engaging with common programming problems, e.g., data management and writing functions. The second part of the course invites students to apply the econometric or statistical tools they acquired in Week One to agricultural and food data. For instance, students learn how to perform impact evaluations, create market reports about dairy production and consumption forecasts, or productivity analysis of the dairy sector. Course performance is evaluated based on a data science term paper that retrieves, highlights and interprets relevant data. Students either choose from an econometric problem set or work on a problem that interests them. Many of them use this as a launch pad for their master's thesis. One such student project is published in the Journal of African Trade with another soon to be submitted to Food Policy.

I have also guest lectured at other universities. In 2018 and 2019, I won two Erasmus+ Teaching Grants to guest lecture at the Department of Agricultural Economics of the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa. Here, I deliver a two-week course that includes a week of introducing graduate students to agricultural trade theories and another week of empirical data analysis. In 2021, at the invitation of Prof. Fabio Gaetano Santeramo, I was a visiting professor at the University of Foggia in Italy. In March 2023, I was also at the invitation of Prof. Sylvanus Afesorgbor a guest lecturer at the Department of Food, Agricultural and Resource Economics at the University of Guelph, Canada. On the last two teaching engagements, I introduced graduate studies to the role of food standards as a trade policy measure and their potential to distort agricultural and food markets.