BEBUC Scholarship System Extended

At the University of Würzburg: The initiators of the scholarship system BEBUC, the professors Virima Mudogo (center) and Gerhard Bringmann (right), visiting the University President Alfred Forchel. Mudogo and Bringmann donated a map of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the President, on which they illustrated the plans for the extension of the scholarship system. Forchel gave Mudogo a typical Franconian bottle of wine ('Bocksbeutel').

Photo: Robert Emmerich

In the future, the scholarship system BEBUC shall be organized in four university centers in the Congo: Kinshasa, Kisangani, Butembo, and Lubumbashi.

Graphic: Robert Emmerich

The scholarship system BEBUC has been created for excellent students and young academics in the Congo. It has originated from the partnership between the Universities of Würzburg (UNIWUE) and Kinshasa (UNIKIN) – and presently successfully develops further. Prof. Virima Mudogo, who was a guest of the UNIWUE in October, also visited the President of the University, Prof. Alfred Forchel, and presented to him, together with Prof. Gerhard Bringmann, the newest progress and concepts.

Virima Mudogo, professor of chemistry in Kinshasa, is an alumnus of the UNIWUE, where he performed his PhD thesis in physical chemistry in the 1980s. After his return to the Congo, where he later became Vice Rector of the UNIKIN, he never stopped being in contact with Würzburg.

Thus, a fruitful scientific collaboration with the natural products chemist Gerhard Bringmann from the UNIWUE started from 1994. In 2003 the two professors have then jointly initiated the partnership contract between the two universities and have filled it with strength and vitality. In 2008 they have started the scholarship system BEBUC. And now, of course also jointly, they visited the University President Alfred Forchel, in order to present to him the newest plans for the worldwide certainly unique BEBUC scholarship system.

BEBUC gives outstanding Congolese students the chance to study rapidly and in depth, to acquire further knowledge during their studies abroad, and finally to start an academic career in the Congo. The system is financed from donations, which are collected via the "Förderverein Uni Kinshasa" (NGO for the support of the University of Kinshasa), and from generous funds from the Foundation Else-Kröner-Fresenius-Stiftung.

Active to date at two Congolese universities

The scholarship system is as yet active at the University of Kinshasa (UNIKIN) and at the Catholic University of Graben (UCG) in Butembo, which is linked to the UNIWUE by a contract, too. These two Congolese universities were chosen, just because they are so different: The UNIKIN in the West, in the capital, is a state’s university,
with more than 26,000 students, teaching all subjects. By contrast, the UCG in the East of the country is small, private, with just 1,300 students and a restricted number of subjects.

**Extension planned to the entire country**

Presently the scholarship system develops most successfully, already 34 scholars are presently being supported. The Congolese Government has now asked to extend the BEBUC system to all universities of the country – a huge challenge in such a large country: The area of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is nearly seven times larger than that of Germany.

What are the plans for the extension of the scholarship system in more detail? The two existing centers Kinshasa and Butembo shall be further strengthened and extended and shall involve neighboring universities. In addition, two further centers are planned: One in the North, with the University of Kisangani in its center, and one in the South, with Lubumbashi as the main university.

**All excellent Congolese students shall profit**

For a participation with BEBUC, all those Congolese universities can apply who had a good result in their recent evaluation. And yet, no excellent candidate shall be excluded: Even students who study at another (non-accredited) Congolese university, may apply for a scholarship. In that case, the evaluation will take place in one of the four planned centers.

**Stepwise extension planned**

This ambitious program shall be substantiated stepwise during the next years. "Since we have, now already, outstanding scholars in all phases of the 'academic pipeline' – from the bachelor and master candidates via PhD students to young scientist who return to the Congo – we expect, by the time when the program will be fully installed, the first excellent professors originating from the BEBUC scholarship system", says Bringmann. They shall then help support and organize the scholarship system.

The President was impressed by this concept. He wished the two scientists good success in realizing their visions and promised any possible support.

**New plants from the rain forest**

Virima Mudogo was in Würzburg also as a guest of the Sonderforschungsbereich (SFB, Collaborative Research Center) 630 "Recognition, Preparation, and Functional Analysis of Agents against Infectious Diseases". In this network he, together with Gerhard Bringmann, looks for new natural anti-infective products for further development to future medical drugs against malaria, African sleeping sickness, and other tropical diseases.

This cooperation has already led to many nice joint results. High hope is hanging on possibly new plants from the rain forest, which Mudogo had in his luggage. "Maybe there is even a new, botanically as yet undescribed, plant species among them", says Bringmann.

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