BEBUC Delegation visits Würzburg

A delegation from the Université de Kinshasa (Democratic Republic of the Congo) has paid a visit to its partner institution, the University of Würzburg (UNIWÜ). Their scheduled program included a visit to the President of UNIWÜ and the selection of new scholars to the scholarship program BEBUC.

The NGO fUNIKIN (Förderverein Uni Kinshasa e.V.) organizes the Excellence Scholarship Program BEBUC. It supports brilliant students in the Congo in their academic careers, not only financially but also by an intensive mentoring during their bachelor and master studies, during their PhD studies abroad and for their re-entry to the Congo for attaining a professorship. With the aid of BEBUC, the academic staff will be renewed – an important contribution to the reconstruction of this large country of Central Africa.

The annual assembly of the non-profit NGO fUNIKIN always takes place during the weekend of the Africa Festival in Würzburg so that the participants may attend this cultural event as well. The delegation consisted of Prof. Virima Mudogo, former Vice President of the University of Kinshasa, Alumnus of the University of Würzburg, and Vice Chairman of the NGO, and Dr. Karine Ndjoko from Lausanne, Program Deputy and Manager of the NGO, born in the Congo. Another delegate was Hypolite Mavoko, doctor of tropical medicine and PhD scholar, sponsor, and tutor within the BEBUC program. All three visitors are members of the Managing Board of fUNIKIN.

Meeting with Prof. Forchel, President of UNIWÜ

The delegation also paid a visit to the President of the University of Würzburg, Prof. Alfred Forchel. Apart from the delegates, the group of visitors consisted of Prof. Gerhard Bringmann (Chair of Organic Chemistry I at UNIWÜ), and the two BEBUC scholars Dieudonné Tshitenge Tshitenge and Félix Katele Zongwe. Mr. Tshitenge is the 'Prime Speaker', i.e. the speaker of all BEBUC speakers and thus of all BEBUC scholars in the entire Congo. Mr. Katele is working on his master thesis at the UNIWÜ (like Mr. Tshitenge in 2012).

The scientists and scholars informed President Forchel about their current projects and their visions and plans, and expressed their gratitude for his interest and support. The President promised them his continuing support for the future.

Contacts during the Africa Festival

The delegation also took advantage of the inauguration ceremony of the Africa Festival for successful conversations, i.a. with the Lord Mayor of Würzburg, Georg Rosenthal, who then also received them some days later. In his opening speech he praised the scholarship program BEBUC, its current support of 99 scholars, and the assistance by the University of Würzburg.
Examination of Pierre Shama Busha Pongo at the blackboard for admission to the scholarship program – following the style of the evaluations in Kinshasa. (photo: Gerhard Bringmann)

The objective of Mr. Justin Monsenepwo Mwakwaye’s master work is the harmonization of economic law. The photo shows his examination at the blackboard. (photo: Wolfgang Grieshaber)

Just like the evaluations in the Congo: the permanent members of the Evaluation Committee (from left): Gerhard Bringmann, Karine Ndjoko, Virima Mudogo, and Hypolite Mavoko. (photo: Wolfgang Grieshaber)

Further important contacts were cultivated with Dr. Paul Beinhofer, President of the District Government of Unterfranken, with Dr. Adolf Bauer, Mayor of Würzburg, and with Dr. Peter Motsch, parliamentary chairman of the party CSU.

Members’ Assembly of the NGO fUNIKIN

During the time of the Africa Festival the Members’ Assembly of fUNIKIN took place. According to its chairman, Prof. Gerhard Bringmann, the NGO now, four years after its creation, already has 870 members, among 31 institutional ones.

The NGO organizes the scholarship program BEBUC, which Bringmann and Mudogo started five years ago. The president illustrated the scholarship system and its progress as well as the planning of its future orientation.

During the assembly a new member of the Managing Board was elected: Dieudonné Tshitenge Tshitenge from the University of Kinshasa. He was one of the first BEBUC scholars, finished his bachelor degree in pharmacy with ‘distinction’, obtained his master degree with ‘great distinction’, and has just started to work on his PhD thesis in the group of Prof. Bringmann as a scholar of the Graduate School of Life Sciences (GSLS) of Würzburg. With him the Managing Board of the NGO has now become significantly younger and ‘more African’.

New Master Scholars

During the assembly scholarship certificates were presented to three new scholars. Two of them are master students of law in Würzburg. Their mentor there is Dr. Karin Linhart, Chairwoman of the German-Congolese Jurists’ Association (Deutsch-Kongolesische Juristenvereinigung). Both scholars are, at the same time, assistants of Prof. Jean-Michel Kumbu, who did his studies in Germany as well.

Supported by a DAAD master scholarship, Justin Monsenepwo Mwakwaye works on the harmonization of economic law in Africa – an important issue for the planning security for investors in the Congo.

Pierre Shama Busha Pongo specializes on forensic sciences, which are little developed in the Congo. A long-term objective in this field is a planned Center of Forensic Medicine in the Congo. It shall contribute to the combat against criminality, in particular against the violation of human rights in the Congo.

The third new scholar, Patrick Lusenge, is an economist. He is planning to do his master studies in Antwerp (Belgium), where he intends to develop an integrative concept combining an improved agricultural production with the fight against poverty and the consolidation of peace in his country.

Mentoring during the Event

The meeting was likewise used for the mentoring, and thus advice and support for two further BEBUC scholars currently studying in Germany.
The first one, Célestin Mudogo Nzanzu, is a graduate of medicine. He is working on his PhD thesis at the University of Tübingen, supported by a DAAD PhD scholarship – the first one for a graduate of the UNIKIN for decades. Using methods of molecular biology he tried to identify weak spots of the pathogen of the African sleeping sickness in order to use them as targets for potential new agents against this lethal disease. In this field, cooperations are imaginable with the scientific network SFB 630 ("Agents against infectious diseases"), of which G. Bringmann is the coordinator.

The second scholar, Félix Katele, does his master studies within a "sandwich program" of the Universities of Kinshasa and Würzburg. His field of research is the elucidation of the spatial, three-dimensional structures of biologically active agents from nature. His work is also related to the SFB 630 network.

**Consolidation of Scientific Cooperations**

Likewise fitting with the aims of SFB 630 was the scientific lecture of Hypolite Mavoko from tropical medicine. He reported about a new method for a faster and more accurate diagnosis of malaria. The procedure is based on the different dispersion of laser light by erythrocytes (red blood cells) – depending if they are infected by malaria pathogens or not.

Scientific discussions also took place with Prof. August Stich (tropical medicine) during the meeting of the Africa Center at the University of Würzburg, in which Bringmann and Mudogo are also participating. Both professors have been successfully collaborating for about 20 years on the search of agents against neglected tropical infectious diseases, since 2003 within the network SFB 630. From this cooperation numerous joint publications have resulted, more recently even for a first one with BEBUC scholars as co-authors – and a joint Congolese-German patent.

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Solemn presentation of the certificates for the new scholars (from right): Justin Monsenepwo Mwakwaye and Pierre Shama Busha Pongo. Professor Mudogo accepted the certificate for Patrick Lusenge. Also on the photo: Karin Linhart and Gerhard Bringmann. (photo: Dieudonné Tshitenge)

Célestin Mudogo Nzanzu reported on his progress in the fight against the pathogen of the African sleeping sickness in the context of his PhD thesis in Tübingen. (photo: Gerhard Bringmann)

Hypolite Mavoko gave an exciting lecture on a new method for malaria diagnosis that might help many people in Africa. (photo: Gerhard Bringmann)