Concentrated competence on Africa: university presidents together with the Minister of Education and Sciences. From left: speaker of BRIAS D. Ibrisizimow (Bayreuth), President S. Leible (Bayreuth), President U. Feser (Neu-Ulm), Minister L. Spaenle, President A. Forchel (Würzburg), G. Bringmann (Würzburg), President W. Schober (Ingolstadt), and W. Zörner (Ingolstadt). (Photo: University of Bayreuth)

Bavaria-wide Africa initiative launched

Many Bavarian universities do research activities in Africa and cooperate with African partners there. In a new network, they now want to bundle their activities and to develop, link and communicate them in public. This network was solemnly founded in Bayreuth on Thursday.

Bavarian Research Institute for African Studies (short BRIAS): This is the name of a new network which initially consists of the University of Bayreuth, the Julius Maximilian University of Würzburg, the Hochschule Neu-Ulm University of Applied Sciences, and the Ingolstadt University of Applied Sciences. But these four institutions only mark the beginning, because BRIAS explicitly welcomes further partners from the academic scene in Bavaria.

The initiating and leading role in the network is taken by the University of Bayreuth, which has already a study and research center for African Studies. Moreover, there is a well-established interdisciplinary research on Africa-related subjects, in which all six faculties are incorporated, under the roof of the Institute of African Studies.

The Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies, which is financed by the Excellence Initiative of the German Federal and State Governments, is already active in its second period of funding. Additionally, there is the Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies as well as further networks and initiatives.
African Key Areas in Würzburg

The University of Würzburg has a long tradition with various cooperation projects and scientific studies in Africa, too. Examples are respective projects and contacts in the fields of tropical medicine, tropical ecology, natural products chemistry, geography, and egyptology.

In Würzburg, these activities were initially comprised within the Africa Circle (foundation speaker: Prof. Gerhard Bringmann), from which, in 2011, the Forum Afrikazentrum emerged (speaker: Prof. August Stich). The Forum bundle the Africa activities from all ten faculties.

Another initiative is the Excellence Scholarship System BEBUC, which presently supports about 120 scholars at Congolese schools and universities. Bringmann initiated this program together with his Congolese partners – in particular with Prof. Virima Mudogo, an alumnus of chemistry in Würzburg.

Key Areas in Neu-Ulm and Ingolstadt

The main Africa-related focus at the Hochschule Neu-Ulm University of Applied Sciences lies in the field of health management. At the Ingolstadt University of Applied Sciences, research activities concentrate on future-oriented technologies and renewable energies.

Organization of the network

The directory board of the new network consists of nine representatives from the four foundation members (three from Bayreuth, two each from Ingolstadt, Neu-Ulm, and Würzburg). The two representatives from Würzburg, Prof. Horst Beinlich (Egyptology) and Prof. Gerhard Bringmann (Chemistry), represent the Forum Afrikazentrum and the scholarship program BEBUC.

The cooperation contract was signed last Thursday by the presidents of the four founding universities: the professors Stefan Leible (Bayreuth), Alfred Forchel (Würzburg), Walter Schober (Ingolstadt), and Uta Feser (Neu-Ulm). As representatives of the BRIAS directory board, the professors Dymitr Ibriszimow (Bayreuth), Gerhard Bringmann (Würzburg), and Wilfried Zörner (Ingolstadt) were present.

Minister curious about results

The Bavarian Minister of Education and Scientific Affairs, Ludwig Spaenle, was also present during the signing of the contract: “In the Bavarian Research Institute for African Studies, the competences of Bavarian scientists concerning questions all about the African continent are brought together”, the Minister explains. The close collaboration of the four universities in this field will generate new questions and projects: “I am curious about the results!”

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