The Excellence Scholarship Program BEBUC was founded in 2008 by Gerhard Bringmann, holder of the Chair of Organic Chemistry I at the University of Würzburg, and Virima Mudogo, professor of chemistry and alumnus of the University of Würzburg, at that time Vice-President of the University of Kinshasa. In a first pilot phase, two students each from chemistry and pharmacy were supported - only at the University of Kinshasa and only during their bachelor studies.

Since then, the program has been enlarged considerably: Since the recent evaluation trip in March, it has been supporting a total of nearly 140 scholars of virtually all subjects at 20 educational institutions. The 13 universities, five secondary schools, and two primary schools are all institutional members of the non-profit organization fUNIKIN (Förderverein Uni Kinshasa e.V.) and, at the same time, contracted partner institutions of the University of Würzburg. And fUNIKIN, in turn, is affiliated to the university by a signed contract, too.

The Congolese Partners of BEBUC

After the last evaluation and cooperation trip to the East of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in September 2013, the evaluation and cooperation trip this time included the following institutions: Université de Kinshasa and Université Protestante au Congo, both in the Capital Kinshasa, Université Kongo in Mbanza-Ngungu, and Université de Kikwit in the West of the country, as well as Université Officielle de Mbuji-Mayi in the center and Université de Lubumbashi in the South.

During this trip, most of the scholarships have been prolonged, 22 new scholars were selected, among them ten female students. Again, pupils at secondary schools were evaluated, too – in Kinshasa at the Groupe Scolaire du Mont Amba and in Lubumbashi at the Lycée Tuendelee. Newly included into the scholarship program was the Institut Mpokolo (this expression from the Tshiluba language means “water source”) in Mbuji-Mayi. The primary school Vabatu Ngoma in Kinshasa, built up by the NGO Mbonda Lokito Kongo / Kinshasa Kinderhilfe e.V. from Würzburg, was again involved, too.
For the First Time Participation of another African Country

This time, the Scholarship Program BEBUC took a huge step forward: For the first time, candidates were examined who do not live and study in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, but in another African country: students from the École Supérieure de Technologie des Cataractes in Brazzaville, the capital of the Republic of Congo, which is now also an institutional partner of the University of Würzburg.

"From the beginning, we had the intention that BEBUC will serve as a model for other African countries, too", says Bringmann, "and in fact, several African universities have already announced their interest to participate in program." This has now, for the first time, been put into practice for Brazzaville, which lies directly on the opposite of Kinshasa on the other side of the Congo River: Three candidates from there participated in the evaluation process.

Visit to the Ministry and the German Embassy

During previous journeys already, the Evaluation Committee had always visited important partners in politics and economy. Major topics during the meeting in the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, especially with Prof. Dr. D. M. Kimeny Musaliwa, Directeur du Cabinet, were the inclusion of Kisangani in the north of the country into the BEBUC scholarship program and the collaboration at the evaluation of candidates of other development programs.

A cooperation in the field of the support of young academics was also discussed with Prof. Dr. Yamina Benguigui, the French Minister of the French Speaking Communities (Francophonie), who just happened to come to Kinshasa for a forum on women.
The newly selected scholars from UOM and the Institut Mpokolo in Mbuji-Mayi. (Photo: G. Bringmann)

One of the tasks of the Committee is the examination of the "prolongers" and that of the new candidates who had already been pre-selected by the local teams. Furthermore, they regularly advise them during their studies, in the Congo and abroad, particularly during the difficult return to the Congo, until they have earned a professorship. By this mentoring, BEBUC wants to pave the way for a new generation of excellent young professors in the Congo.

Of particular success was the visit to the German Embassy. The ambassador, His Excellency Dr. Wolfgang Manig, has been supporting the scholarship program for a long time. Moreover, he promotes BEBUC in many places, not only in the Congo, but also in Germany. In Mbuji-Mayi, the BEBUC Committee was received by His Excellency, the Governor of the Province Kasai Oriental. He promised to help with the furnishing of the new BEBUC seminar room at the Université Officielle de Mbuji-Mayi (UOM). A highlight of the ceremony in Mbuji-Mayi was the presentation of the new book "Histoire germano-congolaise" by Prof. Clément Mutombo Bamuanya, in the presence of the Minister of Infrastructure, Honoré Mutombo. Then followed the signing of the partnership agreement of the University of Würzburg with the high school Institut Mpokolo.

About the Evaluation Committee

The core of the Evaluation Committee consisted, as always, of Prof. Dr. Gerhard Bringmann and Dr. Karine Ndjoko from the University of Würzburg, and Prof. Dr. Virima Mudogo and Dr. Hypolite Mavoko from the University of Kinshasa. They were supported by the local evaluation teams in Kinshasa, Mbuji-Mayi, and Lubumbashi, but also by advanced scholars. “Thus they early get acquainted with the active evaluation and, at the same time, come to know and appreciate the transparency and fairness of the process”, explains Bringmann.

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Foundation of Excellence Centers Planned

One important part of the journey were conversations about scientific cooperations concerning central, Congo-relevant research topics, for example on infectious diseases research. This topic is of particular importance because of the enormous blood toll for the population by tropical diseases like malaria and African sleeping sickness.

In the focus of the conversations was the cooperation with the research network SFB 630 “Agents against Infectious Diseases” and the planned foundation of excellence centers involving scholars from medicine, biology, pharmacy, and chemistry, but also from economy and law.
They represented the scholars from Butembo, Goma, and Bukavu in the East of the country during the evaluation and the closing ceremony in Kinshasa (from the left): S. Katungu Nganza and A. Bapolisi. (Photo: G. Bringmann)

Future Visions of the BEBUC Program

Now already, the scholarship program is organized within four major centers in the West, the South, the East and in the inner part of the country. By 2018, the initiators plan to expand the system over the entire Congo by including the city Kisangani as a further center.

"The development of the Excellence Scholarship Program BEBUC is extraordinarily dynamic. It is a great pleasure to work with such outstanding young people, to see their scientific and personal development, and to develop future visions together", says Bringmann enthusiastically. "The most fascinating about it is that the scholars more and more internalize the concept and actively shape it: It thus gets increasingly 'African'."

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