Coming together with Nobel Prize Laureates from Würzburg

For the first time after decades, a scientist from the Congo was present at the Nobel Laureate Meeting in Lindau: Blaise Kimbadi Lombe, a PhD student of chemistry from the University of Würzburg. This may be considered as a further success of the BEBUC Excellence Scholarship Program.

The Lindau Nobel Laureate Meeting has deeply impressed him: When Kimbadi Lombe speaks about it, one clearly sees his enthusiasm. He experienced the atmosphere at the meeting, with nearly 30 Nobel Prize awardees, as open and communicative. He proudly reports that he also came to know three Nobel Prize winners that had previously worked at the University of Würzburg: "Klaus von Klitzing, Harald zur Hausen, and Hartmut Michel."

It was a special experience for him not only to discuss with such high-ranking scientists, but also with many outstanding young researchers from all continents. In Lindau, 420 PhD students and post-doctoral fellows were present, from chemistry and related subjects – from about 80 countries. "With colleagues from Hungary and Germany I even discussed about possible research cooperations", says the PhD student from the University of Würzburg.

Natural Products as Potential Agents against Malaria

Blaise Kimbadi Lombe (29) is from the Congo, presently doing his PhD work in organic chemistry in Professor Gerhard Bringmann’s group. He investigates structurally complex natural products from a tropical liana from the genus Ancistrocladus, which might become medical drugs.

In the course of his work, he has already isolated several new compounds from the plant and has assigned their chemical structures; in first tests, some of them have proven to be active against the pathogen causing malaria. For his PhD work, the young chemist is being supported by a scholarship from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).

Support by BEBUC from the Beginning

Because of his always brilliant study records, Kimbadi Lombe has been supported already from his third study year on: "I am a child of BEBUC! For more than nine years already, since April 2008, I have been supported by the program", he says. As a bachelor student in the Congo, he was one of the first four BEBUC scholars, and, at that time, also their first democratically elected speaker.

BEBUC is an excellence scholarship program that currently supports about 190 outstanding young Congolese during their studies at schools and universities, until they have reached their professorship. The program was established in 2008 by Gerhard Bringmann and Virima Mudogo, a chemist and alumnus of the
University of Würzburg. Today Mudogo is a professor at the University of Kinshasa. BEBUC is organized by the non-profit organization Förderverein Uni Kinshasa e.V. (FUNIKIN) and is financed mainly by the German foundation Else-Kröner-Fresenius-Stiftung.

**Contribution to the Reconstruction of the Congo**

The scholarship program BEBUC wants to contribute to the reconstruction of the Congo. Three civil wars during the past 20 years have severely affected the previously excellent universities of the country. "Even worse than the critical situation of the buildings is the over-aging of the academic staff. The up-and-coming young scientists often see no perspective and thus frequently choose a career abroad. We want to break this vicious circle", says Bringmann.

To this, also Blaise Kimbadi Lombe wants to give his contribution. By 2018, he will complete his PhD studies. "After that I want to become a professor in my home country", he says. To teach and support students, to do research in international networks, to help improve the situation of the Congo – for all this he wants to invest his energy.

**No Congolese Traces in Lindau!**

How much the Congolese universities have suffered, became evident in Lindau, too. Kimbadi Lombe learned from the organizers that in the database of the participants of the meeting, there was not a single scientist from the Congo.

And even now, Kimbadi Lombe was the only Congolese among the 34 participants from Africa who were invited to attend this renowned meeting. The PhD student from the University of Würzburg had been nominated for the Lindau meeting by the African Academy of Sciences – following an initiative of Professor Bringmann, who is an elected member of the Academy.

**About Blaise Kimbadi Lombe**

Blaise Kimbadi Lombe was born in 1988 in the town Kabinda, in the Congo - at that time named Zaïre. For his studies of chemistry, he went to the capital city, joining the University of Kinshasa, where, with the support from BEBUC, he got his bachelor and master degrees. In 2014, he came to the University of Würzburg to do his PhD thesis within the Collaborative Research Center SFB 630 titled "Novel Agents against Infectious Diseases".

Some Facts about the Nobel Laureate Meeting 2017

The 67th Lindau Nobel Laureate Meeting took place from June 25 to June 30, 2017. Invited PhD students and post-doctoral fellows had to run through an international multi-step selection procedure, in which 155 scientific academies, universities, foundations, and research institutions participated.

This year it was particularly difficult for applicants to succeed: Only slightly more than 400 candidates (instead of 600, as usual) were selected to come. The reason was the fact that the traditional venue of the meeting, the Lindauer Inselhalle, is presently being renovated. Therefore, the meeting had to take place in the much smaller City Theater.

Blaise Kimbadi Lombe with his 'Doktorvater' (PhD supervisor) Gerhard Bringmann. The molecular model on the table shows how structurally complex the natural products are that the student investigates. (Photo: Robert Emmerich)

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Website of the Lindau Nobel Laureate Meeting:  
www.lindau-nobel.org