Visit from the Congo and New Cooperation with South Africa

The Rector of the Université Officielle de Mbuji-Mayi has visited, for the first time, the President of the University of Würzburg and the Chairman of the scholarship program BEBUC. And a collaboration agreement was signed between the University of Würzburg, the NGO Förderverein Uni Kinshasa, and the University of Pretoria.

The two events are closely related to each other: The Excellence Scholarship Program BEBUC, which aims at raising a new generation of excellent young professors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and which, meanwhile, supports 192 outstanding young Congolese, has also, since 2013, been present at the Université Officielle de Mbuji-Mayi (UOM), in the homonymous capital of the province of Kasai Oriental. And the University of Pretoria is the first university outside the Congo that now wants to work more closely, based on a formal agreement, jointly with BEBUC and with the University of Würzburg. BEBUC is organized by the nonprofit organization Förderverein Uni-Kinshasa e.V.

Cooperation with the University of Pretoria

The University of Pretoria (UP) in the capital of South Africa was founded 110 years ago. It is a large institution involving nine faculties and a business school, and it has more than 50,000 students. The collaboration started in 2013, with a master student in chemistry and BEBUC scholar, jointly mentored by Prof. Gerhard Bringmann from the Chair of Organic Chemistry I of the University of Würzburg (and Chairman of the NGO) and Prof. Vinesh Maharaj from Pretoria, Head of the Department of Chemistry (and a member of the NGO since 2015). Meanwhile there are two joint PhD students and a master student, who, after their previous training in the lab of G. Bringmann in Würzburg, are now searching, in Pretoria, for new active agents against malaria and other tropical diseases from African plants. The work is embedded in further collaborations in Pretoria, also involving other partners from natural and agricultural sciences. Further BEBUC scholars from other subjects will follow soon.

These joint activities fit well with endeavors of the University of Würzburg to deepen its collaborations with South Africa and to launch a student exchange.

Collaboration with the University in Mbuji-Mayi

The university in the heart of the Congo was founded in 2005. It has six faculties and currently hosts about 3,600 students. Already since 2013, the university has participated in the BEBUC scholarship program and there is a formal partnership agreement with the University of Würzburg. Only recently, in January 2018, there have again been prolongation interviews and evaluations of new candidates for BEBUC scholarships.
Presently nine scholars are being supported during their bachelor studies, mainly in the field of medicine, but also from economics and law.

The guest, Prof. Alexis Mpoyi, is a professor of philosophy and has been the Rector of UOM since 2015. He has, however, been involved in the BEBUC activities there from the beginning, he has even been a member of the NGO since 2012. He was accompanied by Dr. Claude Lukusa, who presently works as a senior physician at Elbe-Elster Klinikum (Finsterwalde), and as a cardiologist in Sana Herzzentrum (Cottbus).

The chairman of the scholarship program, G. Bringmann, profited from the visit of the Rector to present him with letters from two personal sponsors to ‘their’ BEBUC scholars, Alix Ntamba and Felly Nzengu, the previous and present speakers of the scholars at UOM, respectively. Personal sponsorships – and democracy – as practiced by the scholars, are core items of the scholarship program.

The Scholarship Program BEBUC: Increasing Networking

The goal of the Excellence Scholarship Program BEBUC is the support of outstanding young academics in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, aiming at a renewal of the universities, in order to make them again a motor for the development of the country. The program is supported mainly by the German foundation Else-Kröner-Fresenius-Stiftung (Bad Homburg) and, in special cases, also by the foundation Holger-Pöhlmann-Stiftung (Margeshöchheim) and the Bayer Foundations.

Both collaborations initiated by BEBUC are part of the construction of a large network within the Congo, but also with partners in the North (Würzburg) and in the South (Pretoria). Further collaborations with renowned South-African universities, like, e.g. in Cape Town, Grahamstown, KwaDlangezwa, and Port Elizabeth, but also in other countries like Kenya, Tanzania, Morocco, Algeria, Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Malawi are presently being developed.

Future Plans

The network, which is thus further growing and getting more intense, reinforces the internationalization of BEBUC as well as the activities for an increased networking of the University of Würzburg. This aspect was also emphasized in the joint discussions. As a gift, the University President Alfred Forchel presented the guests with a book about the University of Würzburg and a bocksbeutel (a bottle of Franconian wine) as well as a glass of honey home-made by the University.

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www.foerderverein-uni-kinshasa.de

Three BEBUC scholars in Pretoria (from the left): Séverin Muyisa Kavatsurwa, Séphora Mianda Mutombo, and Félix Katele Zongwe. (Photo: N.K. Khorommbi)

During the scholarship ceremony in Mbuji-Mayi in January 2018 (from the left): Prof. Virima Mudogo (Vice Chairman of the BEBUC program), Sister Marie-Françoise Mukadi (Director of the secondary school Institut Kristo Mfumu), Rector Alexis Mpoyi. (Photo: C. Tshibola)