

BEBUC communication of October 1, 2013

BEBUC: New Scholars and Collaborations in the East Congo

In the frame of the BEBUC Excellence Scholarship System, the University of Würzburg is collaborating with nine institutions in Kivu, in the East of the Democratic Republic of the Congo: with six universities, two high schools, and a primary school. At these institutions, the evaluation of new scholarship candidates and 'prolongers' has now taken place. As a result, 42 scholars are presently being supported in Kivu, and nearly 120 students in the entire Congo. Likewise strengthened were the scientific collaborations in the field of infective diseases within the research network SFB 630 entitled "Recognition, Preparation, and Functional Analysis of Agents Against Infectious Diseases".

For safety reasons the BEBUC Selection Committee had postponed the evaluation of the partner institutions of the University of Würzburg in the East of the country in March during the last visit, this was now made up for.

The well-adjusted team consists of Prof. Gerhard Bringmann, holder of the Chair of Organic Chemistry at the University of Würzburg, Prof. Virima Mudogo, Vice-President of BEBUC and former Vice President of the University of Kinshasa, Dr. Karine Ndjoko, Program Deputy and Manager of the BEBUC System, and Dr. Hypolite Mavoko, Deputy for Public-Relations Work. This time the expert of virology, Prof. Dr. Axel Rethwilm, participated also in the evaluation. He had already been active in a previous BEBUC evaluation and was now happy to join the team in Butembo, also because he holds a personal sponsorship for Mr. Gabriel Bunduki, a student there. Now for the first time they could actually meet in person.

Evaluation in Butembo

Already since 2010, the Université Catholique du Graben (UCG) at Butembo, the second-largest town in the Congolese province of North Kivu, has been participating in the Excellence Scholarship System BEBUC. And from 2012 on, also the Université Officielle de Ruwenzori (UOR) and the high school Institut Kambali have been part of the program, and, recently, yet another university, the Université Libre des Pays des Grands Lacs – Butembo (ULPGL-Butembo), and the primary school Nyuki.

As always, the local BEBUC team of evaluators had already pre-selected the candidates out of numerous applicants, so now, in the final selection, these students were given the opportunity to present themselves personally by a short lecture at the blackboard, with subsequent discussion. While the



Sponsor meets scholar: Axel Rethwilm makes the acquaintance of Gabriel Kambale Bunduki, student of medicine at UCG in Butembo. (Photo: G. Bringmann)



Explains the principle of osmosis and its importance in medicine and biology: Agnès Kavira Katsioto, new BEBUC scholar at UCG. (Photo: G. Bringmann)



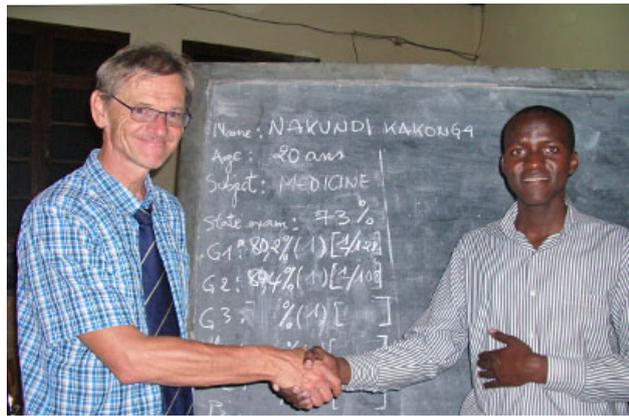
Presents with enthusiasm classical rules and laws of economy: the student Daniella Sivavughe Kavira from the newly included university ULPGL-Butembo. (Photo: G. Bringmann)

new candidates can still be examined in French, the official language of the Congo, the 'prolongers' have to defend their results in English – for some of them a real challenge.

Besides the exams there were also joint discussions with the Speakers of the scholars from the various institutions. Thus, the members of the Evaluation Committee got an impression of the actual problems of the scholars in their studies and the everyday life, and of the possible solutions, and could, for their part, give competent advice.

During a solemn joint ceremony for all five participating institutions in Butembo, the scholarship certificates were given by Gerhard Bringmann, the President of the BEBUC program. In his talk he presented the aims of the scholarship system and explained its importance for the Congolese universities and, in general, for the reconstruction of the entire country.

He praised the positive development especially in Butembo, where the participating institutions have jointly provided rooms for seminars and exams of the scholars. "It is wonderful that, like already in the capital Kinshasa, the scholars have now obtained a seminar room of their own, and thus the possibility to communicate across all borders of disciplines and institutes. It is a place of excellence – and of their common identity."



Obtained even two times in series the mark 'with great distinction': the student of medicine Vandrome Nakundi Kakonga, who has been supported since 2012 (Photo: K. Ndjoko)



Handing over the signed cooperation agreements between the University of Würzburg and ULPGL in the course of the ceremony in Butembo (from left): Professor Valère Kambale Kandiki, Sister Katungu Mwamini, new Director of the Primary School Nyuki, and Professor Gerhard Bringmann. (Photo: H. Mavoko)



Happy about the prolonged or newly obtained scholarship: 23 students and pupils from three universities, a high school, and a primary school in Butembo, with the typical blue BEBUC folders. (Photo: K. Ndjoko)

Evaluation in the Province of South Kivu

After the ceremony the committee continued the travel to Goma, capital of the province North Kivu, and onward, now by boat, over Lake Kivu, to Bukavu. This part of the trip had been uncertain and decided upon only shortly before the travel began, due to the difficult military situation there. Still, even this time, the evaluation could not take place in Goma itself, but rather all new candidates and 'prolongers' of the Université Libre des Pays des Grands Lacs – Goma (ULPGL-Goma) had to travel to Bukavu.

Thus students and pupils from four partner institutions were evaluated in Bukavu: those of the Université Catholique de Bukavu (UCB), the Université Officielle de Bukavu (UOB), and the high school Collège Alfajiri (this is Kisuheli and means 'dawn') – and the already mentioned ULPGL of Goma. Due to their excellent results and visionary concepts, almost all scholarships were prolonged, here as well – and several new scholars were selected.

In Bukavu, too, a solemn joint ceremony took place with participation of representatives of the four institutions, of fellow students and pupils, and relatives.

In total, there are now, despite the difficult situation in the East Congo, 42 BEBUC scholars there. Together with the 76 awardees in the West, the Center, and the South of the country, their number has thus increased from 99 to now 118 scholars.

In the future the scholarship program will be expanded, step by step, to further universities and, finally, to the entire Congo. "Without the reliable support by the Foundation *Else-Kröner-Fresenius-Stiftung* and our numerous personal sponsors, it would be unimaginable to reach this ambitious goal of the renewal of the academic staff in the Congo", says Bringmann.

Infectious-Disease Research in the East of the Congo

Of particular importance during this trip was also the further development of already existing collaborations in the field of infectious-disease research and the planning of new projects. In the Congo, tropical diseases like malaria, African sleeping sickness and yellow fever demand a high blood toll in the population. In the focus of the



Were surprised during the ceremony by the scholars with a nice BEBUC sash: the members of the International Selection Committee (from left): Hypolite Mavoko, Karine Ndjoko, Gerhard Bringmann, Axel Rethwilm, and Virima Mudogo. (Photo: private)



Joy about the new seminar room for the BEBUC scholars, which still has to be equipped: Gerhard Bringmann thanks Professor Emmanuel Kakule Vyakuno, Vice Rector of UCG. (Photo: K. Ndjoko)



The four speakers of the scholars from Bukavu and Goma (from left): Pacifique Lyabayungu Mwene-Batu from UCB, Sylvie Imani Bisimwa from ULPGL in Goma, Alain Murhimalika Bapolisi from UOB (simultaneously the Main Speaker of all scholars in Bukavu), and Gauthier Murhula Bahizire from the Collège Alfajiri. (Photo: G. Bringmann)



19 BEBUC scholars from three universities and a secondary school in Bukavu and Goma, with their certificates. (Photo: K. Ndjoko)

trip was thus the collaboration with infectious-disease researchers at universities and research institutes in Butembo and Bukavu, the planning and preparation of PhD theses in the frame of the SFB 630 network, of which G. Bringmann is the coordinator, and, increasingly, also guiding pupils and students towards the research on tropical diseases.

Concrete collaborations were started on the screening for new bioactive compounds in Congolese plants and mushrooms. "The unbelievable biodiversity of the huge tropical rainforests and savannahs in the Congo, with its area nearly seven times larger than Germany, is an inexhaustible source for potential new agents against severe infectious diseases", says Bringmann.

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