Solar energy initiative
of the
BERLIN-NAIROBI PHYSICS STUDENT EXCHANGE
www.BerlinNairobi.org

Summary

The DAAD funded physics student exchange between the Freie Universität Berlin and the University of Nairobi promotes in particular research in the physics of solar cells. Besides supporting scientific collaborations in solar energy, we have a strong interest in also making a meaningful contribution regarding the political and socio-economic aspects of solar energy. Our Berlin-Nairobi Physics Student Exchange has unique potentials, and we would be most grateful for your advice and guidance in how to utilize these potentials to help promote solar energy.

History and philosophy of the exchange

During his internship at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris in 1995, Dr. Jürgen Theiss learned that African physicists are not fully integrated into the worldwide physics community. This inspired him to set up an exchange of physics students between Germany and Africa, which led to the Berlin-Nairobi Physics Student Exchange. With financial support from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), two Berlin students were in Nairobi in 1998/99, one in 2000/01, two in 2001/02 and two are currently in Nairobi. Next academic year we have DAAD funding for three Berlin students and, for the first time, for three Nairobi students as well. Our exchange has two major novel aspects. First, it promotes collaboration in physics. This is in contrast to the fact that most scientific collaboration between developed countries and Africa is in areas in which Africa offers unique opportunities, e.g. in tropical medicine or zoology. African scholars often complain that they are just being used for data collection and are then excluded from the fruits of their collaboration with the developed countries. Such abuse is highly unlikely in physics. Second, it eradicates stereotypes of physics in Africa. Physicists in developed countries are largely ignorant about the potential of physics education and research in Africa. Many worthwhile programmes exist which give African physicists the opportunity to study or conduct research in developed countries, but not vice versa, which fuels the stereotype that Africa has nothing to offer in physics. In response to this stereotype, our exchange gives Berlin physics students the opportunity to study and conduct research at the University of Nairobi. Thus, they *learn* from Africa and become advocates of physics in Africa upon their return to Berlin. Guided by the same philosophy, we wish to contribute to the promotion of solar energy.

Our potentials

Our physics exchange students could become familiar with and contribute to various issues of solar energy in Germany *and* Kenya. As they are immersed in the educational systems in both countries, they could join efforts to achieve a greater involvement of the universities in the promotion of solar energy. Also, during their semester breaks they could work as interns in organizations dedicated to the promotion of solar energy. Thus, by gaining valuable experiences in Germany *and* Kenya they would become exactly those young physicists needed for the envisaged "global solar industry" which might be "a chance for Africa".

Request for advice and guidance

Countless efforts to promote solar energy already exist in Germany as well as Kenya. We would therefore be most grateful for your advice and guidance in identifying specific opportunities for the Berlin-Nairobi Physics Student Exchange to utilize its above-mentioned potentials. This would enable it to make a meaningful contribution to the promotion of solar energy.

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