

Leadership for Africa

Interview with Prof Dr Joybrato Mukherjee
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What importance does Africa have for the DAAD?

The countries of the African continent play an important role in our work as an academic exchange organisation, as evidenced by the 50 programmes and almost 250 projects that took place in African countries last year. The around 17,000 supported students and researchers in 2021 also underline that our southern neighbouring continent in its diversity is of great importance to us.

For an intensive exchange with local academia and society, we therefore maintain branch offices in Cairo, Tunis, and Nairobi, information centres in Ethiopia, Ghana, Cameroon, and South Africa, and support more than 50 lectureships at African partner universities. And, of course, the promotion of talented young people from African countries plays an important role in our scholarship work: we provide students and academics with individual support for academic qualification measures in Germany or on the African continent itself. Furthermore, in cooperation with Nigeria or Kenya, for example, we offer scholarship programmes jointly financed and implemented with their respective governments.

We are also aware of Germany's historical responsibility for human rights abuses in its former colonies in Africa. We therefore launched the German Colonial Rule scho-

larship programme in 2021, which is funded by the German Federal Foreign Office. In this programme, we support young academics from former German colonial territories who are working through the legacy of German colonial rule and the violent oppression and exploitation of colonised peoples in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific.

Are there certain priority topics for the DAAD in Africa? How important is the topic of digital transformation?

We have been supporting African universities for many years in improving the quality of their courses, making degree programmes more practice-oriented, and expanding research capacities. With regard to sub-Saharan Africa, we are also involved in pandemic prevention, the fight against climate change, and – with the SDG research training groups funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development – work on the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

And, of course, the importance of digital transformation in the work with partner organisations in Africa has greatly increased – since 2012, we have been offering training in the Nairobi branch office for African scholarship recipients on how to systematically use the digital libraries of international academic publishers for academic work, which are largely free of charge in Africa.

In pandemic and climate change research we established eight interdisciplinary Global Centres last year, which the German Federal Foreign Office is funding with around 22 million euros. Three of the centres are located on the African continent, in Gabon, Ghana, and Côte d'Ivoire. One of the centres, the Central African Infectious Disease and Epidemics Research Alliance in Gabon, focuses on the containment of infectious diseases. Together with partners like the University of Tübingen and the Pasteur Institute in Paris, it is setting up a training and research programme. Within this framework, a master's degree programme in healthcare is being established, joint doctoral training is being intensified, and healthcare professionals throughout Central Africa will be trained in online courses on infectious diseases.

With respect to climate change as a global challenge, we follow the premise that a broad spectrum of measures is needed to research and address the issue. According to IPCC reports, Africa will be hit particularly hard by the negative effects of climate change. Accordingly, we are promoting several programmes on the issue. For example, one of the Global Centres, the African Climate and Environment Centre – Future African Savannas, is working on scientific strategies to protect West and East African savannas from agricultural overuse and rapid climate change.



As regards digital transformation, the focus is on increased integration in African higher education. This is where initiatives like the DAAD project DIGI-FACE come in – this is an online platform that bundles teaching, learning, research, and communication channels for African universities.

Would you like to see more African students at German universities and, if so, how can we achieve this goal? Can you tell us about the best practice models here?

Of course, we welcome the steadily growing number of international students in Germany. At the same time, we at the DAAD want to strengthen local higher education institutions in sub-Saharan Africa. We have therefore been supporting African higher education institutions for around 15 years by setting up centres of excellence to improve the quality of their courses and expand their research capacities. The twelve current centres of excellence are intended to enable the education of future decision makers according to international standards.

Together with our member institutions, we are thus helping to ensure that students receive high-quality courses, can obtain practical and academically sound degrees, and that

the doors to the respective labour markets are open to them. In this way, we want to counteract a brain drain of young African academics and strengthen the academic and economic development of the continent.

In addition, in scholarship programmes in Germany like the Leadership for Africa programme, we combine a master's scholarship with an education programme that focuses on future leadership tasks. Through such measures, we want to encourage young academics to return to their home countries after successfully completing their studies in Germany, and to advance academic, economic, or social development there.

The improvement of the quality of education at African universities and networking with German partners are stated goals of the DAAD. What role does cooperation with (German) companies play in this?

A major challenge in many African countries is the high level of unemployment among university graduates and the lack of practical orientation of the study programmes. The potential of many young people thus remains untapped and often leads to young capable professionals migrating abroad.

In order to narrow the gap between higher education and the requirements of companies, the University-Business-Partnerships programme, funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, has been running for ten years. The programme promotes the transfer of knowledge between academia and business, ensures stronger interlinkage, and supports the design of practice-oriented study programmes at institutions of higher education.

The participation of German companies, chambers, and associations also plays an important role in strengthening the practical relevance of courses. Students are trained in accordance with the needs of the local labour market through practice-based partnerships, while offers such as business incubators and career centres promote their entrepreneurial thinking and activities. •

