

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

We are delighted to present our reflections on the planning and significance of the East Africa Hub Summer School in Berlin. Throughout the semester, we embarked on organizing the summer school, adapting and being flexible in our approach as circumstances changed.

The program commenced with the arrival of our esteemed guests from Ethiopia on Sunday. Meticulous preparations were made at the NEO Hostel, where we distributed carefully chosen items to each participant. HTW bags filled with notebooks, pens, shower gel, and thoughtful trinkets were given as a welcoming gesture.

At BER airport, Dorian Zwanzig and Prof. Scholz warmly greeted our Ethiopian guests. Meanwhile, back at the hostel, the summer school team and a representative from the website gathered for a delightful dinner. We enjoyed a delectable three-course student menu, including pasta with pesto, accompanied by cold beverages, and a selection of delightful desserts and snacks.

During the dinner, we introduced ourselves, fostering connections and exchanging our expectations and aspirations for the upcoming week. Eager to rest and recharge, everyone retired to their rooms early after a long and tiring journey.

The exploration began on Monday with an enlightening tour of the Renewable Energy Laboratories, expertly guided by Prof. Dr. Asnakech Laß-Seyoum. The laboratories showcased wind turbines and photovoltaic systems installed on the HTW rooftop. We gained insights into the concept of hydrogen and its sustainable applications, witnessing experiments on renewable heat generation. Presentations by various laboratory personnel provided us with a profound understanding of the vast potential of renewable energy. This experience captivated not only our Ethiopian guests but also students from diverse disciplines at HTW.

Following the lab visit, we had the honour of meeting Prof. Dr. Annabella Rauscher-Scheibe, the esteemed president of HTW at Treskoallee. Engaging discussions with former president Carsten Busch and the communication officer of HTW broadened our understanding of the institution. Our Ethiopian guests then embarked on a memorable boat trip with Prof. Scholz, allowing them to witness the beauty of Berlin from a unique perspective.

The evening concluded with a gathering at the Ethiopian embassy, where Ambassador Fekadu Beyene Ayana extended his gracious hospitality, treating us to a splendid dinner. We took this opportunity to also introduce ourselves, and again sharing our expectations and hopes for the exchange. In a heartfelt moment, Prof. Scholz shared a previous conversation with Dr. Diriba, envisioning an Ethiopian student walking the halls of HTW—a dream that has now become a reality through collaboration and strategic planning. This touching story served as a reminder of the transformative power of partnerships.

The atmosphere was filled with warmth and joy, and the evening was made even more special as we savoured the flavours of traditional Ethiopian cuisine, including the delicious Doro Wot and Injera. This evening epitomized the essence of our cultural exchange, the fusion of Ethiopian and German traditions, fostering bonds that transcend borders. It was a testament to the power of collaboration, bringing together individuals from diverse backgrounds to create a harmonious and enriching experience. Through such interactions, we not only expand our cultural horizons but also strengthen the foundation for future collaborations, as we continue to forge a path towards a more interconnected and inclusive world.

Tuesday began with presentations organised by the summer school team and given by Prof. Böttger and Prof. Lehmann at the HTW. Prof. Böttger gave a very interesting presentation on project management and the PR challenges that arise in large multi-million dollar projects. The topic was particularly well received by our guests from ASTU and aligned with the studies of the industrial engineering students, who have been working on such hypothetical projects for the past three semesters.

Students from the HTW and ASTU also gave short presentations on their degree programmes, future plans, career prospects and the reasons for their choices. Dr Diriba introduced ASTU, followed by an informative and impressive lecture by Prof Lehmann on robotics, its history and its application in industry. We then had lunch together. This was followed by a tour of the HTW campus, including the HTW gardens, the wind research area and the library. The visit concluded with a tour of the "Topography of Terror" museum, which offers insights into German history, and a visit to the Mall of Berlin.

On Wednesday, we had the opportunity to visit the Siemens Energy plant in Berlin. The production facility in Huttenstraße in Berlin Moabit showcased the production of gas turbines and electrolysis modules, serving as a centrepiece for hydrogen technology. The tour of HTW's hydrogen laboratory provided a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. The visit concluded with an impressive interactive presentation in the Siemens Energy showroom, where the impact of renewable energy implementation was made tangible.

Continuing our tour of the campus, we explored more historical aspects of the HTW's history and were introduced to additional buildings and facilities. Later we gathered in Treptower Park for a relaxed get-together with food and drink, and on the other side of the city we also had the opportunity to do some private souvenir shopping with Dr Diriba and Dr Yadessa.

Thursday was dedicated to group work on Heckerton at the HTW, in collaboration with our hosts from Siemens Energy, led by Prof Adam. Through creative thinking and brainstorming, we aimed to find solutions and create a digital twin for data structures to extend the power grid in Africa, enabling power supply through mini-PV modules. This theme built on our previous experiences, the knowledge gained from the HTW laboratory and the insights gained from the visit to Siemens Energy. During a sundowner event at the HTW overlooking the River Spree, we were visited by Ms Chazotte from the DAAD, while we had interesting conversations with the ASTU students about religion, culture and family situations.

Friday began with a visit to the Reichstag building, in particular its dome, which offers a panoramic view of the city, accompanied by an audio tour with information on Berlin's most historic buildings and general historical facts. We then proceeded to the Brandenburg Gate, followed by a visit to the Holocaust Memorial and the Futurium. After a joint lunch at Alexanderplatz, we had the opportunity to do some last-minute souvenir shopping. The long day ended with a farewell party at the Golgatha beer garden, where we said goodbye to our Ethiopian guests. Although it was difficult to say goodbye, we are looking forward to our next meeting in September and the anticipation is already great.

## **The Significance of Cultural Exchange and Effective Communication in International Collaborations**

The recent East Africa Hub Summer School exchange between HTW Berlin and ASTU Ethiopia proved to be a remarkable experience, fostering cross-cultural understanding, personal growth, and valuable learning opportunities. Through effective communication and intensive conversations, participants gained insights into each other's cultures, traditions, and perspectives. Despite challenges in scheduling, the overall success of the program highlights the importance of teamwork and communication in facilitating such exchanges. This article explores the significance of cultural exchange, the benefits of effective communication, and the lessons learned from this enriching experience.

### **Cultural Exchange: A Gateway to Understanding**

The program facilitated meaningful communication and exchange between German and Ethiopian students, allowing them to learn about each other's customs, traditions, and ways of life. This intercultural interaction not only broadened their horizons but also fostered empathy, tolerance, and appreciation for diversity. Embracing different perspectives enabled the participants to develop a deeper understanding of global issues and cultivate a more nuanced worldview.

### **Personal Development and Language Skills**

The exchange program provided numerous opportunities for personal growth. Participants were exposed to new ideas, challenging them to step outside their comfort zones and expand their knowledge. The intensive conversations and presentations improved their English language skills, enhancing their ability to communicate effectively in an international setting. Moreover, the program encouraged self-reflection and personal development, empowering students to become more confident, adaptable, and culturally sensitive individuals.

### **The Power of Effective Communication**

Effective communication played a pivotal role in the program's success. Participants experienced firsthand how open and respectful dialogue can bridge cultural gaps, foster collaboration, and promote understanding. Through active listening and thoughtful expression, they shared their thoughts, experiences, and perspectives, creating a conducive environment for learning and establishing a sense of camaraderie. Effective communication also facilitated efficient coordination among team members, ensuring a smooth flow of activities throughout the program.

### **Lessons Learned: Teamwork and Communication**

While the exchange program was a resounding success, there were challenges in planning the schedule.

As we reflect on the experience, we recognize the importance of learning from any mishaps and enhancing our internal communication for future summer schools. With great anticipation, we eagerly await the upcoming exchange as we prepare to be hosted at ASTU in September. May this journey continue to strengthen our bonds, deepen our understanding, and pave the way for even more remarkable collaborations in the future.