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## The pioneering Executive Master's in Taxation degree produces a new breed of young African Tax professionals

*June 2015, by Keamo Mlangeni and Helga Wenhold*



A nine month term of study has given birth to 27 eager Executive Master's in Taxation students who have just completed the first leg of their 15 month journey. Hailing from thirteen different African Tax Administration Forum (ATAF) member countries, the students look forward to start putting into action what they have learnt in Tax Policy and Tax Administration. The group consists of government officials that work in revenue authorities or ministries of finance who have spent an intense time in Germany and South Africa. A first of its kind, the postgraduate programme was developed to help strengthen the ability of professionals and executives in Africa's public sector! It is a joined venture by GIZ's

Good Financial Governance in Africa programme, ATAF and the Berlin School of Economics and Law (BSEL).



Mustapha's first experience of snow.

GIZ caught up with four of the participants, just after finishing their written exam, to discuss what the experience has been like so far: Nancy Chepkorir Kiget from the Kenyan Revenue Authority, Mustapha Ndajiwo from the Federal Inland Revenue Service in Nigeria, Seth Akuffo Anoff from the Ministry of Finance (Tax Policy Unit) in Ghana and Justina Nani Amapulo from the Ministry of Finance in Namibia.

Nancy is a thirty three year old mother of four who will be going home for the first time since the commencement of the course in October 2014.

What attracted her to the programme was the unique tailoring of the content and the fact that the degree was more specialised than the others available. She developed a special bond with the other mothers in the group encouraging each other to keep strong despite missing their loved ones. The participants mainly kept in contact with their families through the telephone and Internet. Some family members came to visit in Berlin during the nine months: “My wife and son joined me over the December holidays and we travelled a bit,” said Mustapha. Quite a few students were able to go home over the Christmas holidays.

Mustapha, a Muslim by religion, was also pleasantly surprised by the country: “I found Berlin to be a cosmopolitan city with a multicultural setting. I was impressed that it was easy for me to find Halaal food and a mosque,” he said.

**“Our first impression of Germany was beautiful; we didn’t experience any of the things we initially feared considering the country’s difficult past,” said Nancy Chepkorir Kiget from Kenya.**

The students echoed the vast educational differences of the BSEL compared to their experiences in their home countries.

“In terms of the technical expertise and the career academic issues I found the institution to be great. However, it was smaller compared to the University of Ghana which has a big community and infrastructure,” said twenty nine year old Seth. “They also had lots of professors, more than 200 compared to where I come from and the classes had smaller groups,” added Justina who supports the notion of an affordable tax system. “Even the level of interaction with the professors and the access to the lecturers was much better (than back home) because the student-lecturer ratio is smaller,” mentioned Mustapha.

The most challenging aspect the students faced was the language barrier, since German is the official language spoken in Berlin. Some students were able to learn basic German through lessons however, shopping in local supermarkets or seeking local services was challenging at times. “It was difficult to acquire books from the library because you would find an interesting book but then it would be available in German only,” said Seth.

What made the experience even greater was the unique opportunities the participants were exposed to which included a study tour to the European Commission in Brussels. The group also visited the European parliament where they spoke with a Member of Parliament on successes and challenges of the economic integration.

In relation to his transfer project Seth was able to go to London to take part in a session with people from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HM Revenue and Customs), a UK government department, "I realised that what I was doing was bigger than I thought. It exposed me to so many things that I want to implement when I go back home, to push to have a similar kind of unit." Further activities included a study tour to the South African Revenue Authority (SARS), an exchange of experiences with representative from the South African National Treasury and an invitation by the German Embassy to an evening reception. Being able to interact with professionals from South Africa and other countries and getting practical knowledge was invaluable.

Having been on full time study leave, the group have returned to their respective African home countries. This entails finalising their Master's thesis as well as their transfer project by the end of the year. They showed interest in the establishment of a public finance alumni network and their most important advice to the next cohort of students would be to form better social cohesion, stay together and build one other. The second Executive Master's programme will begin in September 2015. The final selection of participants is currently underway.

For more information visit the programme's own website <http://www.emtaxation.org/> jointly developed by GIZ and ATAF, and BSEL's Internet page <http://www.mba-berlin.de/en/master-programmes/ma-tax-policy-and-tax-administration/>.



Priscar Hoko (Zimbabwe), Anne Maina (Kenya), Nancy and Fadzai Mukorah (Zimbabwe) in front of the Brandenburg Gate, an 18th-century neoclassical triumphal arch in Berlin, and one of the best-known landmarks of Germany.