Strong networks

Adina Rom heads ETH for Development (ETH4D) and works as a development economist at the Center for Development and Cooperation (NADEL) at ETH Zurich.

With the ETH for Development initiative, Adina Rom and her team bring ETH forces together to promote sustainable global development. One example is the Master's degree programme that trains highly qualified future leaders in Ghana.

ETH lecturers and their colleagues from Ashesi University in Ghana started training African students in mechatronics engineering in January 2022. How did this collaboration come about?

ADINA ROM – It all started with an idea by Edoardo Mazza, Professor at the Department of Mechanical and Process Engineering at ETH, to create a new engineering degree programme with partners on the African continent. After teaming up with Sarah Springman, who was Rector at the time, and Isabel Günther, Professor of Development Economics, plus a number of industry partners, we developed the idea further and, in 2019, all travelled to Africa to visit various universities and discuss the fundamental idea. We were lucky enough to find the ideal partner in the visionary and innovative Ashesi University in Ghana. Not only does the university offer a high standard of education, but many of our industry partners are operationally present in Ghana too. The programme was made possible by the generous support of donors such as the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO, Adrian Weiss, the Arthur Waser Foundation and the Louis Dreyfus Foundation.

How do both sides benefit from the collaboration?

Africa is a young continent with high economic growth. Young people at the beginning of their careers are called upon to be leaders in emerging industrial sectors. There is great demand not only for technical expertise, but also for knowledge in the field of sustainability, interdisciplinary work and ethical leadership. To meet this demand, educational institutions need to be expanded. And this is where we come in – by offering our experience, we can support and help shape this development. As a result, Ashesi University is now able to train engineers at Master's level for the first time. At the same time, ETH lecturers receive new inputs from their interactions with African students and lecturers, and our industrial partners benefit from talented leaders with an excellent education.

How do you ensure that the value created remains on the African continent?

Many of the graduates will be given job offers from our industrial partners. In addition, the selection process was designed to single out students with particular motivation to contribute to the development of their home countries.

In what other ways does ETH4D promote sustainable development?

While one focus lies on innovation and research for poverty reduction, the other is set on training future leaders with a global perspective, as illustrated by our partnership with Ashesi or the summer school with KNUST, another Ghanaian university. At the moment, we have two new projects in the pipeline: the first is the Doctoral Fellowship for Global Impact, set up to grant scholarships to talented students from low-income countries who will develop solutions for global challenges at ETH. The second project, the Social Entrepreneurship Fellowship, aims to enable the research findings to be implemented and scaled up. Our doors are open to all fields at ETH Zurich and we want everyone together to expand their networks within ETH, and internationally, in order to build a more inclusive and more sustainable world. For this to happen, partnerships need to be forged with universities around the globe and researchers connected with decision-makers from policy, industry and society. Around 40 ETH professors from a

range of disciplines work actively with ETH4D.

What is ETH's role in ensuring effective development and cooperation?

Making a difference requires social and technological innovation, and there's hardly a better place for that than ETH. This is demonstrated by products such as the low-cost and robust transport ventilator "breathe", which was developed for use in low-income countries, or the Engineering for Humanitarian Action initiative launched jointly with EPFL and the ICRC. It's also very important for us to anchor these topics in students' minds through lectures, summer schools and events: when graduates understand what fair global development means, they can contribute to making a difference.

You've been involved in international development throughout your career. What is it that drives you?

Even as a child, I used to think a lot about justice. I'm driven by the urge to understand inequalities and find ways to diminish them. I believe that you can – and should – use your own privileges to create opportunities for others and change the world for the better.

learn more about the partnership Ashesi-ETH

Marriette Mertens, co-programme manager of the partnership with Ashesi University is in regular contact with all participants in Zurich and Accra.
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Introducing

Adina Rom is co-founder of GAIN, a network that supports African students in their academic career, and a spin-off named Policy Analytics that helps organisations assess their social and environmental impact. After studying public policy at the Harvard Kennedy School, she earned her doctorate at ETH in the Development Economics Group. In addition to voluntary work, she spends her free time hiking, in the yoga studio or swimming in the Limmat river.

https://ethz-foundation.ch/en/spotlight/strong-networks/