

IASS-Blogpost

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Projekt: Die systemischen Auswirkungen der globalen Energiewende (ISIGET)

EXHIBITION

The Lights of Kigali

A brightly coloured dome stands out among the lights of Kigali: The convention centre shines in the Rwandan national colours of blue, yellow and green. For the Rwandan ambassador to Germany, Igor Cesar, its image symbolises progress and the spirit behind it: "When you fly over Kigali at night, you can see how far our electrification efforts have come. Rwanda is characterised by its will to advance technologically, but we don't want to lose our origins, our identity in the process." The architecture of the convention centre represents the Rwandan path between preservation and new beginnings: a modern building whose shape is reminiscent of a traditional hut.

1 Water, volcanoes and a lot of sun

On 2 November, Ambassador Cesar welcomed us, a group from the IASS, at the Rwandan Embassy in Berlin. The embassy was hosting the exhibition "Awaking the Senses", a side event of the DAAD TU Berlin Alumni Online Seminar Energy Transition of Africa. The photographs, taken by Pacifique Himabaza, show the country's progress in improving its energy supply. Currently, only about two thirds of Rwandan households have access to electricity, the government aims for 100 per cent by 2024. Yet Rwanda does not want to repeat the mistakes that industrialised countries have made, stressed Cesar: "Rwanda is blessed with mountains and water, meaning that one of the biggest sources of energy will be hydropower. We also have active volcanoes, so geothermal energy has potential, too. Solar power is another important source of energy."

The photos highlight both small and large, off-grid and on-grid electrification projects. For many modern comforts, electricity is needed: Mobile phones and computers are increasingly widespread, Volkswagen is testing car sharing with an all-electric fleet, a local company is selling electric bicycles. Currently about 62 per cent of electricity is produced from renewable resources.

! Zum Aktualisieren der Textelemente, Zitation markieren und dann F9 drücken !

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Car sharing available in front of the Kigali Convention Centre. TU BERLIN/Pacifique HIMBAZA

2 From zero to somewhere far

The photographer Pacifique Himabaza visited these projects, and he often thinks about the stories behind his photographs. “Everyone captured here has done good work for the energy transition in Rwanda. You see, it is different from Germany, where the transition is going from somewhere to somewhere. In our country, the transition is coming from zero and going somewhere far.” One of the projects that impressed him most was the installation of off-grid boxes – container cubes equipped with solar panels on top and a water purification system inside – around a settlement in the Eastern Rwandan district of Nyagatare. They provide sustainable energy and safe water to the local population.

The off-grid boxes make people’s lives better, but they are only a start. By 2030 all Rwandan households should be connected to the grid. Water provision is also being improved, as is digital infrastructure: In May 2019, the Rwandan government sent its first satellite into space, connecting rural areas to the Internet.

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Batteries can be recharged with solar energy. TU BERLIN/Pacifique HIMBAZA



Local networks provide solar energy in this settlement in the Eastern Rwandan district of Nyagatare. TU BERLIN/Pacifique HIMBAZA



Off-grid boxes equipped with solar panels and a water purification system. TU BERLIN/Pacifique HIMBAZA

3 Space is the limit

A photo showing the night sky over the Convention Centre reminds Ambassador Cesar of the two Rwandan satellites that are now orbiting the Earth: “In Rwanda, we don’t say ‘The sky is the limit’, because our mountains already scrape the sky. Instead, we say ‘Space is the limit’.” With a great deal of ambition, Rwanda’s IT sector is developing innovations for the African market. A particularly successful venture is a digital payment system for local transport which was developed by a Rwandan company. It is now used in many other African countries.

Pacifique Himbaza’s photos convey the sense that Rwanda is on the right path towards a sustainable and secure energy supply. They show many large and small initiatives and much tangible progress in improving people’s lives. And they inspire hope that Rwanda’s future is as bright and colourful as Kigali by night.

More information:

The exhibition "Energy Transition in Africa - Awakening the Senses" was held at the Embassy of Rwanda in Berlin from November 1 to 5, 2021. It was organized and coordinated by IASS Klaus Töpfer Sustainability Fellow, Natalia Realpe Carrillo, director of HEDERA Sustainable Solutions GmbH, in collaboration with the Institute for Advanced Sustainability



Studies. The exhibition took place as a side event of the DAAD TU Berlin Alumni Online Seminar "Energy Transition in Africa" coordinated with the TUB Institute for Energy Engineering in collaboration with the African Center of Excellence in Energy for Sustainable Development of the University of Rwanda.