

The ESMT Kofi Annan Fellowship Program

Four Fellows of the 2012 class report on their experiences

The Kofi Annan Fellowship provides the opportunity for talented and motivated students from developing countries, who do not belong to a privileged class and lack sufficient financial means, to study management at ESMT in Berlin and graduate with a prestigious MBA from the most international business school in Germany.

Upon return to their home countries, the Fellows are expected to contribute to the strengthening of entrepreneurial capacity and the fostering of a stable market economy as an effective catalyst for their country's development, job creation, and poverty alleviation.

ESMT scouts for these talents, selects them, provides preparation if needed. The business school also gives fair compensation for expenses like travel, accommodation, and program fees and guides the Fellows through their stay at the School. After graduation, ESMT offers support to the Fellows in starting their new careers and building a network among the Kofi Annan alumni.

Under the umbrella of the Kofi Annan Business Schools Foundation, ESMT is joining forces with associated European business schools to create a scalable number of successful Kofi Annan Fellowships.

In 2011, the program started. Two Kofi Annan Fellows, Ms. Berlinda Mkanganwe from Zimbabwe and Mr Nodir Nurimbetov from Uzbekistan, graduated in December 2011. In January 2012, four new Kofi Annan Fellows embarked on their journey to an MBA from ESMT, in December all of them graduated with great success.

Here is what these remarkable students report on their experiences at ESMT.



The 2012 MBA graduates *Malati Khadka*, *Sona Rostomyan*, *Ernest Kwame Gyimah*, and *Bevin Ngara*, together with ESMT Founding Dean *Wulff Plinke*

ERNEST KWAME GYIMAH

Ghanaian, 27 years old

Why I chose to do an MBA at ESMT

My name is Ernest Kwame Gyimah and I am a Ghanaian. Ghana is a West African country and one of the fastest growing democracies and economies in the world. A beautiful country, Ghana sits just on the gulf of Guinea and therefore has some nice beaches, which host top class hotels and recreational facilities. I worked with PricewaterhouseCoopers Ghana Limited from 2007 till I left for my MBA in 2012. At PwC, I mainly worked with financial services clients as an assistant manager in assurance line of service. I always worked in teams and had many opportunities to work in several countries including Senegal, Sierra Leone, Liberia and the United Kingdom.



At some point in 2008, I decided to study for an MBA. Like many other people, leaving a wonderful job with a multinational to return to school did not come easy. Between 2008 and 2010, I had the opportunity to visit one of the top schools in Europe and I also had the chance to talk to a couple of admission managers from schools in Europe and the US. However, for me the turning point was when Nick Barniville, the MBA director at ESMT visited Accra in Ghana for an MBA tour. During this period I had offers from a number of schools especially in the US and Europe with some level of funding. However, I was interested in a school that places considerable emphasis on responsible leadership, as does ESMT.

At ESMT, I have got the privilege to be a Kofi Annan fellow. This gave me the pleasure of studying without bothering about my finances especially when I receive a monthly stipend from ESMT. I also take a personal pride in being a fellow of my country man, Kofi Annan who is a leading Ghanaian figure globally.

What I have learned as a Kofi Annan Fellow at ESMT

I have learned a lot of technical skills in 2012 and have developed my understanding in new fields like marketing, technology development and supply chain management. However, my best learning has come from the people interactions. Working in a group of diverse people who may often have different views on the way forward has broadened my scope of problem solving. I remember in one business simulation, my group went through a couple of stages where we were almost gridlocked, but we eventually found a way out through questioning our assumptions and reasoning.

One of my most memorable days was those days when we worked on our consulting project and individual Master's thesis. At the end of these, I marvelled at how I was able to quickly deal with a range of issues. I will also not forget the memorable award of the Best Delegate at the Berlin International Crisis Simulation. Combining this with my expanded network, overall, I have had a very good year.

Looking forward, I feel very confident. As a Kofi Annan fellow I seek to leverage on my finance background to help build sustainable businesses in developing countries. I believe that a career in development finance or private equity will best serve my ideas in the near future.

MALATI KHADKA

Nepalese, 29 years old

Coming from Kathmandu, a chaotic but beautiful and eccentric city in Nepal, Berlin looked like an alien place for the first few days but now it has been my home for the last 12 months while pursuing my MBA at ESMT. I chose ESMT's MBA program because of its international orientation, rich curriculum, and diverse faculty and also because it was located in Berlin, a city whose culture and history always intrigued me.



What I expected at ESMT

My expectation from the MBA at ESMT was to gain skills and knowledge that is directly applicable to my country's need and also equally relevant to the rest of the world. I am happy that my expectations have been exceeded and 2012 has been an incredible and unforgettable year.

Before my MBA, I worked for four years in marketing and advertising although I was educated as a computer engineer. Advertising fascinates me because it is challenging to be creative and effective with constraints and also the variety in the work inspires me. I aim to continue in this field for some time but in roles with more responsibilities and challenges. Through my experience at ESMT, I feel I have grown a lot personally and professionally and I am empowered to choose my direction. After the MBA, I aim to gather some work experience in marketing and distribution in a multinational company. But my long term plan is to start my own service-oriented venture back home.

The truth about the ESMT MBA

The MBA was very demanding with continuous deadlines, intense competition and emphasis on discussions. The participative nature of classes helped me to get out of my comfort zone and express myself freely. The competitive spirit in class inspired me to go the extra mile in everything I do which I believe prepared me to face real life challenges more effectively. The opportunity to interact with colleagues from 23 different countries in team situations helped me understand people and team dynamics better and it also helped me develop my interpersonal skills further.

Among things I appreciated the most were the highly engaging business simulations, group assignments and the consulting project. These projects to me were not just about delivering the best output but also learning to work with diverse personalities, managing the work and stress and identifying my strengths and weaknesses. After each group assignments, I have made effort to incorporate my learning from the past assignments.

The most interesting part of the MBA was working on a real consulting project. The day my team delivered the final presentation for our consulting project at the client's headquarters in Dusseldorf is one of the unforgettable moments. Our work was highly appreciated and we got to spend the day in the beautiful old town singing our favorite Spanish tune all the way.

The last year has been so eventful and intense that it's hard to believe it was just 12 months. Though I feel happy that the year is ending and it's time for new challenges, I am also sad that a remarkable year with remarkable people in high-energy Berlin is ending.

I am going to miss the corridor by our study rooms, the auditorium and the beautiful bench outside where everybody gathered with warm coffees even in the shortest break. Most of all, I will miss my classmates who inspired me every day in their unique ways.

BEVIN NGARA

Zimbabwean, 29 years old

Why I chose to do an MBA at ESMT

I worked in the financial sector in Zimbabwe as a fund manager before coming to ESMT for a full-time MBA. Having worked for over five years and also having risen to a managerial position, I realized that I needed to improve my leadership skills. While the promotions I was getting thrilled me, they led to me to realise the importance of managerial skills in the investments profession. That was the major reason behind the decision to come to Germany to study for an MBA at an international school.

Since I had never worked or lived outside of Zimbabwe, I really needed some international and multi-cultural exposure. ESMT offered this great opportunity, and on top of that, the school offered a different perspective to business studies, in particular that of sustainability. I never understood the sustainability concept and how it could be such a good business idea, so I decided to go for it. Above all ESMT offered a good scholarship that I could not resist through the Kofi Annan Foundation. All of this contributed to the chemistry and I ended up here. My dream was to acquire business skills and go back home to take up more strategic roles in the country. What I got here was beyond my expectations because the program has a lot to offer in terms of personal development. I learnt a lot about myself in one year than I knew before I came here. The program has a good coverage of people issues, and how to work effectively as team.



What my experience at ESMT has meant to me

ESMT has been a good decision in retrospect because I have made friends and learnt a lot about the German people. I tested my soft skills to great levels and saw how it played out in business simulations, in teams, and in giving 360-degree feedback. I have attended MasterClasses from business leaders from Germany and around the world. I have gone to as far as California through the MBA where I got a good first-hand impression of entrepreneurship in the USA. We played soccer and went out for a beer even though we hardly had enough time for anything, due to the program intensity. The careers coaches played an important role in shaping my career goals, and my personal branding. It was all fun, hard work, confusion, new experiences, and all the time full of learnings. The major challenge was mainly that I stayed away from my wife the whole year and missed one full year of watching my daughter grow.

I plan to take the earliest flight back home to focus not only in the finance sector, but also to broaden my perspective to include developmental aspects of business. My first assignment will be a volunteer role in South Africa under the ESMT volunteer fellowship. Upon completion I will then pursue a career in alternative investments with developmental themes. I will of course miss my friends and the warm ESMT family and look forward to come back annually for alumni events.

SONA ROSTOMYAN

Armenian, 27 years old

I come from Yerevan, Armenia. Armenia is a very ancient nation with rich culture and history. From the economic perspective, Armenia is a landlocked country, and the economy is in the developing stage after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Many people still live in poverty, and we definitely need more business leaders with a high quality education who will dedicate themselves to the development of the country, the creation of new jobs and fighting poverty.

I grew up in a family where self-development was highly encouraged. My grandfather was always motivating me to read lots of books and was proudly sharing all my achievements at school with our relatives and friends. My father was challenging me with mathematical and logical problems. My mother was pushing me to take initiative and be self-determined and, at the same time, to help others.



Love at first sight

After finishing secondary school, which focused on sports and math, I received my professional education of a manager-economist at Armenian State University of Economics and

then started my career at a bank. During four and a half years of a banking experience in customer service and back office, I continued my education by becoming an ACCA (Association of Chartered and Certified Accountants) candidate and also an aspirant to do my PhD in the Management field. Simultaneously I was dreaming of getting a high quality practical managerial education from a top business school in the world. Why? To develop my leadership skills and experience and become a business leader in my country. This is how I found ESMT and fell in love at first sight. A business school established by business, young, ambitious, in the heart of Germany, with European value system and focus on the responsible leadership - a perfect combination that made my heart beat faster when I thought I might become a student at ESMT. I applied to the ESMT MBA program and as in a fairy tale received the confirmation of my admission right on my birthday. It was the best birthday gift I had ever received.

An overwhelming experience

Studying at ESMT was an eye-opening experience for me. It was a chain of challenges, fun, learning and personal development. I learnt so many new things about different businesses and also people interaction. Sometimes I had the crazy idea I should make a video to record all my days here at ESMT. After a year at ESMT I feel like a very rich person - rich with new skills and an amazing experience and rich with new friends and connections from all over the world. If I drew a line showing my emotions throughout the year, it would not be a straight line. It would be exactly as one of our professors described MBA life on the very first day of our MBA program, a curve with its highs and lows, with happiness and depression, with the joy of achievement and stressful sleepless nights. One of the special experiences for me during this year was the concept of teamwork. Of course, it is well known that with the team you can achieve $2 + 2 = 5$ effect. But what is less spoken is that you can also have $2 + 2 = 3$ effect if team members are not motivated enough and do not collaborate with each other. What I came to understand is that teamwork sometimes takes more time than if you do the same work individually. Sometimes it can be frustrating to “waste” time discussing every small issue for hours in the team especially when you know you have lots of other assignments to do and haven’t slept longer than four hours a day for the last few months. But what I also understood is that with the “right” team you can have much more solid, high quality and advanced work which goes beyond the obvious assumptions and individual approaches and is based on the different experiences and strengths of all team members. I had a chance to work in very diverse teams comprised of many nationalities with various professional backgrounds, and from each of my classmates I learnt something which I can use in my future work and life.

I am very thankful to the whole ESMT team and the Kofi Annan Foundation for the opportunity to have this amazing experience in one of the best business schools in the world. After graduation I will return to Armenia where I will apply the acquired knowledge and skills in a business setting. I hope to give my little contribution to the development of my country, fighting poverty and showing a good example of a responsible leadership.