‘Who knows tomorrow’ is not only an oft-cited wise saying, but it also provided the title of an art project in Berlin this summer that hosted a number of internationally acclaimed African artists. Their works addressed the connections and correlations between Africa and Europe and revealed once more that the westerners’ claim to a universal value judgement towards the rest of the world is not only unjustified, but also impossible to maintain.

With this impression still fresh in my mind I traveled to Africa in September to participate in the first Barcamp in Ethiopia. The attempt to apply an event-program over there, that had originated under the sunny skies and in the software industry’s palaces of California, seemed questionable to me at first. However, I soon discovered that it was more about the methodological issue of working and learning collaboratively. This, in turn, corresponded to my understanding of the complexity of the important concerns of our times: Our position within and towards the whole. Or, as I recently read: “From I to the intelligent We”. And in this spirit I wish you an exiting and critical viewing of this short documentation.

Tiemo Ehmke
Berlin, November 2010
“Looking at young Ethiopians – who never get the chance to promote themselves and who did amazing sessions – make me to believe that we really can make a difference in the country and in Africa as a whole.”

Biruh Misganaw from Addis Ababa
The Making of Barcamp Ethiopia
by Jörn Schultz

Ethiopian institutions of higher education are full of young people eager to advance and develop, to make something of themselves, for themselves and for their community. Under difficult conditions, they strive to recover lost ground and catch up with the global academic world. Ethiopia may represent a complex environment – a society partly locked in structures, traditions and religious establishments that have existed and grown over thousands of years – a culture where everyone has a predetermined position, where important things don’t and shouldn’t change. While on the other hand, new influences from abroad have seeped in gradually and ever more massively in the latest decades with concepts like “globalization”, “economic growth” and “modern communications” representing the current influential paradigm. Consequently, the reality in which students and teachers live and work today promises them a lot while at the same time holding them back.

Background
Cradle of humanity; nation of three thousand years

Average Ethiopians of today live in simple mud huts without access to electricity, good education or modern health services. They spend most of their meager income on food, cultivating small pieces of land or doing household family chores at home. Men know their role, women their waken time tending to cattle, electricity, good education or modern medicine. Meanwhile, Addis Ababa now hosts a 3D cinema, night clubs with modern sound equipment playing international pop music, shopping malls, internet cafés, improved neighbourhood play-station centres and pre-paid card sellers at every street corner. With a few years’ delay, new developments spread from Addis to the regional capitals of the country and on to the smaller towns. Thirty years ago, Ethiopia’s population measured 40 million, currently it has around 85 million and will within the next decade well exceed 100 million people, most of them young. Ethiopia is also among the world’s largest recipients of foreign aid. The only opportunity for Ethiopia to advance and grow its economy beyond mere coffee export will be through developing its human capital. Therefore, lately the country has seen an important push for education.

The rate of primary school attendance has risen from 30% in 1970 to 45% today and ever more students reach higher education maturity with the hope of continuing on to a University degree.

In University though, academic staff earn an initial salary of 150 per month provided they hold a Master’s degree, with the prospective of earning up to around 300 per month before retirement (administrative staff earn far less). This means that many University teachers need an additional job to be able to support themselves and their families. In general, they receive no or little pedagogical training, have poor access to reference materials and are assigned their courses when semester has already started, leaving them no time to prepare. Laboratories are poorly equipped and few know how to actually use the available equipment. Students live in dormitories on campus wind blowing through without running water or functioning sanitary facilities close by. They are taught by teachers who often have no practical experience in what they are teaching and in many cases only recently achieved a bachelor degree themselves. Often, class is cancelled without previous notice and power cuts are frequent. The amount of new students taken in is in a continuous trend of an enormous rate without facility and faculty development keeping pace. How now, can students and teachers expect to develop under these difficult conditions?

How can be prevented that after a few years not only stay give up emotionally and become a part of the problem instead of contributing with solutions? How to prevent that they not just leave and try their luck in a different country, mobile phone? Why should a teacher or a student or anyone else care about anything but his or her personal short-term benefit?

These questions are basic when trying to improve education in Ethiopian Universities and they formed a large part of the background to Barcamp Ethiopia.

Time of Change
Leaf way for the Cheeta Generation

Ethiopia’s great tradition has been based on stability, continuity and political loyalty formed in the first place. The end result can mean: active, student centred and practically relevant learning. But what motivation to this is technology alone to someone who doesn’t understand how to use it or of what use it can be? Barcamp represents a method for increasing young people access and ability to support themselves and their families. In general, they receive no or little pedagogical training, have poor access to reference materials and are assigned their courses when semester has already started, leaving them no time to prepare. Laboratories are poorly equipped and few know how to actually use the available equipment. Students live in dormitories on campus wind blowing through without running water or functioning sanitary facilities close by. They are taught by teachers who often have no practical experience in what they are teaching and in many cases only recently achieved a bachelor degree themselves. Often, class is cancelled without previous notice and power cuts are frequent. The amount of new students taken in is in a continuous trend of an enormous rate without facility and faculty development keeping pace. How now, can students and teachers expect to develop under these difficult conditions?

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Our Barcamp started out as an idea in a discussion between colleagues of the on.e | eCapacity Development Department in the Ethiopian Engineer- ing Capacity Building Program (ECBIP) sometime in march of 2010. It is not clear how many exactly understood the concept at first, but based on the members’ curiosity to try something new and their promises to contribute we all decided to give it a go. The date was set to 17th–18th September, during summer break between the Ethiopian New Year and the Meskel holiday. As a venue, the campus of the newly inaugurated Ethiopian Institute of Architecture, Building Construction & City Development (EIABC) in Addis Ababa was elected with guaranteed great support from the management and students. The next step was to activate more participants. As part of our trainings in different Universities across the country, we included short an nouncements by those individuals who decide to participate. While the concept of Barcamp is relatively new, it has already been im- pressed by those individuals who are still curious and have a vision – individuals who take risks, as- sociate as equals in a discussion between colleagues of the on.e | eCapacity Development Department in the Ethiopian Engineer- ing Capacity Building Program (ECBIP) sometime in march of 2010. It is not clear how many exactly understood the concept at first, but based on the members’ curiosity to try something new and their promises to contribute we all decided to give it a go. The date was set to 17th–18th September, during summer break between the Ethiopian New Year and the Meskel holiday. As a venue, the campus of the newly inaugurated Ethiopian Institute of Architecture, Building Construction & City Development (EIABC) in Addis Ababa was elected with guaranteed great support from the management and students. The next step was to activate more participants. As part of our trainings in different Universities across the country, we included short an nouncements by those individuals who decide to participate. While the concept of Barcamp is relatively new, it has already been im- pressed by those individuals who are still curious and have a vision – individuals who take risks, as- sociate as equals in a discussion between colleagues of the on.e | eCapacity Development Department in the Ethiopian Engineer- ing Capacity Building Program (ECBIP) sometime in march of 2010. It is not clear how many exactly understood the concept at first, but based on the members’ curiosity to try something new and their promises to contribute we all decided to give it a go. The date was set to 17th–18th September, during summer break between the Ethiopian New Year and the Meskel holiday. As a venue, the campus of the newly inaugurated Ethiopian Institute of Architecture, Building Construction & City Development (EIABC) in Addis Ababa was elected with guaranteed great support from the management and students. The next step was to activate more participants. As part of our trainings in different Universities across the country, we included short an nouncements by those individuals who decide to participate. While the concept of Barcamp is relatively new, it has already been im- pressed by those individuals who are still curious and have a vision – individuals who take risks, as-
It enables people to take responsibility on themselves rather than expecting someone to do it, it cures the pandemic of passiveness among our society.

Abel Asrat from Mekelle

Barcamp Ethiopia: The Event
New learning, new thinking, new behavior

The event finally counted around 350 participants on each of the two full days of sessions that ran in parallel in five rooms, including international visitors from Sudan, Europe, Russia and the USA, with an opening party the night before and a closing party on each of the two session days. To give anyone the chance to attend, even a poor student from a remote town, the whole event — including transport, accommodation, food, equipment and printed materials — was financed by sponsors and had no attendance fee. Many participants got little sleep during the last week and final preparations were still ongoing as people started to arrive from everywhere and the first band began playing at opening night. The whole event developed as a constructive chaos in which many decisions had to be made ad-hoc by whomever was faced with a problem. How can we accommodate participants in dorms that are still being renovated? When, where and to whom do we hand out meal-tickets? How do we find enough space for more popular sessions? How do we effectively announce the frequent changes of schedule? Sessions featured a wide range of topics from programming and eLearning to community planning and yoga, with a live skype presentation from Holland and an evening campfire meeting outdoors. Barcamp Ethiopia had airtime before and during the event in all major Ethiopian radio-stations & TV as well as promotion in the national newspapers and magazines. Because a main purpose of Barcamp Ethiopia was to provide participants a space to network, entertainment and fun were important ingredients throughout the event. Starting with socializing during the planning phase, then the opening party, coffee breaks, lunches and dinners together, an art exhibition and bands playing into the night. It is impossible to account for all positive effects that sprung out of Barcamp Ethiopia. To mention just a few concrete examples:

- Student council members and other active students from different Universities have now started exchanging experiences and working together to improve their studying conditions, including delegations visiting each other’s Universities.
- Inspired by sessions and networking around the topics “female role-models” and “peer-pressure”, a girls-club has been established by students at EIABC to promote female stakes in education.
- Collaboration between Universities and an NGO around inclusive education and adaptive technologies for the Blind has been strengthened.
- All participants learned a great amount about the application of different digital technologies, as well as new methods of learning, planning and developing together.
- Many students and faculty gained a clearer picture of what is happening in Universities other than their own, nationally as well as abroad, which helps them to better evaluate, compare and help develop their own educational context.

For all of us, Barcamp Ethiopia, its preparation and the event itself, was an exciting, inspirational and memorable experience that stirred up many new ideas and gave us new acquaintances and friends.

Jörn Schultz & Oliver Petzoldt are CIM-experts from Germany, financed by the Ethiopian Government and working in the ECBP department on eLearning at Ethiopian institutions of tertiary education.

“IT ENABLES PEOPLE TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY ON THEMSELVES RATHER THAN EXPECTING SOMEONE TO DO IT, IT CURES THE PANDEMIC OF PASSIVENESS AMONG OUR SOCIETY.”

Abel Asrat from Mekelle
Workshops

How does a turbine work? How do you illustrate the flow behavior of water through valves or explain cashless payment?

E-learning content improves in quality when it offers explanatory images, animations or interactive graphics in the right places. In order to improve this visualization know-how of the e-learning teams at Ethiopian universities, the one team organized a series of training courses in Ethiopia. They also asked the team of the Usability Engineering Center (UEC) of the OHM University of Applied Sciences Nuremberg and the St.Petersburg Academy of Arts to conduct two workshops following the Barcamp Ethiopia.

Together they identified topics and treated them in small groups. This resulted in sketches, interactive storyboards, logos, graphics, posters and animations. An important consideration was to give the participants a better understanding of the planning process of such a project, and show that the technical resources offer helpful assistance using their own specifications.

To begin with, they consciously drew on paper and whiteboards in order to plan every detail and to highlight the conceptual necessities before working with the computer. This was accompanied by lively discussions on which types of visualization were useful, since not all content needs a sophisticated interactive animation. Furthermore, there was a requirement for cross-cultural communication, because imagery and sign systems of the respective other culture may also require different solutions.

“Barcamp took us into a new mode of thinking about the usefulness of information technology.”

Mukhtar Ahmed from Gadarif, Sudan
“I didn’t expect that much useful social gathering but it was really interesting social gathering. It really was an unconference.”

Awgichew Arega from Adama
This generation, known as Generation Y, is increasingly interconnected, as technological advancements have transformed their way of life. They are more collaborative, entrepreneurial, and mobile than previous generations. However, this generation is also facing new challenges, such as the impact of globalization on their daily lives.

While the benefits of ICT4D actions in developing countries are evident, there are also concerns about the long-term sustainability of these programs. The notion of ICT4D being a tool for development and empowerment is not as straightforward as it may seem. The effectiveness of ICT4D initiatives can be questioned, as they may not always meet the expectations of the people they are intended to help.

In conclusion, the future of ICT4D depends on our ability to adapt and evolve with the changing landscape of global communication and technology. It is essential to consider both the positive and negative impacts of technology on society and to ensure that its benefits are distributed fairly and equitably.