

## TESTIMONIAL

This testimonial has been written by Linda Maokomatanda, a doctoral candidate at the Kiel Institute of the World Economy from Zimbabwe. In it she provides information on what a PhD at an institute, as opposed to a university, entails as well as advice on what is needed to succeed should you choose to follow this path.

Hi there! My name is Linda Maokomatanda, and I am a doctoral candidate at the [Kiel Institute for the World Economy](#). I wanted to share some insights with you about what it's like to pursue a PhD at an institute in Germany. Please take the insights I share as my opinion and not as representing the institute I work for.

It's important to understand that there are two types of relevant institutions for PhD students. On the one hand there are universities, on the other are research institutes. I will be focusing on the latter. Institutes can be funded in different ways. Especially in the United States, there are partisan think tanks with a clear political leaning. Furthermore, some institutions may appear to be doing research but may mainly do policy analysis and small-scale work not fit for academic journals and typically not helpful for a PhD. Try to avoid places where you do not have time for research that will benefit you in your PhD. It is fine to ask in the job interview how your distribution of time between research contributing to your PhD and other obligations will be—such a question is not disrespectful but rather shows you are aware of opportunity costs. You can look at what kinds of publications researchers at the institution have and if they publish in international journals, that's a good sign they are oriented toward academic publications.

At research institutes that are indeed research-oriented, PhD candidates are typically hired as part of the research output process for a given research project (e.g. funded by the national science foundation). These positions become available for applications when a call for a PhD employee is announced, usually on the institute's website and/or job distribution channels. Once hired, you would typically spend some of your time working at the institute, usually 50–100 percent, while the rest of your time, if any, is devoted to your university coursework. To complete your PhD at an institute in Germany, you must be enrolled in a formal university in an economics program on the side. This means that for the first two to three years, you will be working on research projects and your academic coursework simultaneously.

Once your coursework is finished, you can focus entirely on your research. However, you still need to submit a dissertation at the end of your PhD, with the terms varying by institute. For my PhD, I am required to submit three papers, two of which can be coauthored with experienced

researchers, and one of which must solely be written by me. With this format, you start doing research from day one. While this may provide a lot of autonomy, freedom, and independence to define your own research path within the framework of the project, it may also pose a challenge for those who require guidance in terms of defining their research path and profile, especially when it comes to the topics they would like to pursue. To be successful in this path, you need to possess several skills, such as taking initiative, being assertive, asking many questions, being a self-starter, and generating good research ideas from the beginning. Additionally, the ability and willingness to work independently at an early stage is essential, along with the willingness to network and meet like-minded scholars.

In my opinion, this PhD track is best suited for candidates who possess some, if not all, of the skills I described above, and who have completed rigorous bachelor's and master's degrees in economics, with a strong understanding of the basic principles of different methods applied in economic research. A solid foundation in mathematics, econometrics, and micro- and macroeconomics is recommended. If you're unsure about the solidity of your foundation, I suggest enrolling in a structured program before embarking on research. This program should be similar to those offered by renowned US and European universities.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss pursuing a PhD in economics further, please feel free to email me at [lindamok899@gmail.com](mailto:lindamok899@gmail.com). I'll do my best to respond to as many questions as possible.

Good luck on your journey to becoming a well-trained African economist!