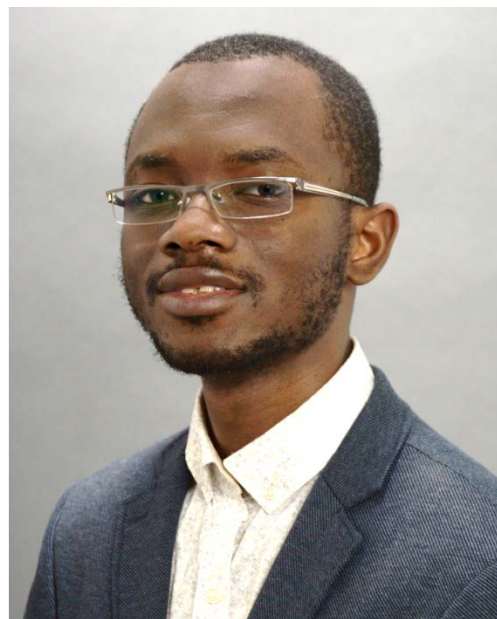## Interview with Ridwan Amoako
(Graduate of the master's programme in Computer Science)

Chief Technology Officer at a startup, Software Solutions Architect, Education Consultant and Coach - Ridwan Amoako, a "Forward Slashie", earned his master's degree from UBT in 2021. He is originally from Ghana and has a range of international experience. He devoted himself to computer vision, technical leadership and STEM education in Africa. After graduating, he decided to stay and work in Germany. Now he would like to share his story with our Bayreuth Alumni & Friends.

Before you came to Germany, you completed your bachelor's degree in physics and computer science in Ghana and worked in Turkey for several years. Can you please tell us more about your story? What made you decide to come to Germany and why did you choose the University of Bayreuth?

I had originally wanted to travel to the US for my master's degree immediately after my bachelor's. I however got a job offer in Turkey with very good working conditions, including a relocation package. After working in Turkey and getting married, I was looking for an alternative to the US, a country where I could get a good technology education but in close proximity to Turkey since my family wasn't coming with me immediately. Germany was an obvious choice.

UBT came across as having a large African community and special programs for African researchers. Even though I wasn't going to read anything relating to African studies, I felt I would have a community to fall back on. The master's program was also in English, with many specialization options. My research revealed that Bayreuth was a relatively inexpensive city, hence my choice to come to UBT.

What was your favourite memory or place at UBT?

There is a small quiet room close the international student's office in the University Administration building. Given that I spent a great deal of time in the library or robotics lab, I sometimes needed a place to take a nap or meditate or pray as a Muslim. After leaving Bayreuth, anytime I am in town or at the office and want to nap or pray, the small quiet room comes to mind.

Graduating from UBT in 2021 during the ongoing pandemic presented unique challenges. Despite this, you successfully secured your first job in Germany beyond the campus. Could you please share your experience, detailing how you navigated this transition? Additionally, could you elaborate on your reasons for choosing to stay and work in Germany?

I completed my thesis at the height of the pandemic (2020), but I decided not to end my enrolment because I wasn't sure what life would be like for me as a job seeker. The good news was, I had several years of experience already, which played a major role in finding a job. I met a woman with a great startup idea who needed a technical co-founder. I hopped onto the idea and helped to build the startup. I moved on to another company afterwards.

How did your time at UBT prepare you for and influence your career?

The computer science program at UBT was a rigorous one. I had the opportunity to work on varied projects and my thesis with the robotics and embedded systems research group really helped me to hone my skills and theoretical knowledge.

You are a technical programme manager at microphotonX and at the same time co-founder and programme coordinator of Ridla Edu Consult in Turkey. Could you please describe what your usual working day looks like and how you balance your career between Germany and Turkey?

I am passionate about helping young people navigate their education and career path. In 2017 I founded an education consultancy in Turkey. I advise on study abroad options based on people's interest and circumstances. I also help people with a non-computer science background to transition into software engineering through a structured self-paced curriculum. Currently my role is just advisory and some few one-on-one sessions with clients in the evening and on the weekends.

My current role at Microphotonx which takes most of my time, is a very critical technical role. I am managing a heavily funded project to build a software that controls a diagnostic medical device. I work with optical engineers, data scientists, microbiologist etc. daily to ensure their requirements are reflected in the software features. My typical day involves talking to different stakeholders to ensure project requirements are being followed, they are on time to meet company milestones and within budget. I also do some software programming when required.

Having worked in both Turkey and Germany, do you notice any cultural differences in the workplace?

There seems to be very little room for error here in Germany and people are not willing to try things they haven't done before due to the fear failing and being criticized. There are, however, very experienced professionals to learn from, and efforts are acknowledged and appreciated.

Turkey on other hand presents more room for trial and error without being judged. People are more friendly at work; however, the work and time culture sometimes lead to delays in finishing projects compared to Germany. Salaries are obviously less than in Germany.

Do you have any tips, especially for our international students, for finding a job or starting a new job in Germany?

Take the German language seriously. If you are in the technology field e.g. software and other IT fields, you may be able to escape the language constraints. However, knowledge of the language will give you more job options. Find native German friends during your studies. It can be helpful as a foreigner to understand the culture better.
Take a semester off from your studies to do an internship in your field. This will provide you with experience before graduating.

Photo: Ridwan Amoako
Interview conducted by Bayreuth International Alumni Services