

New GPN Guest Professorship named after Kenyan environmental and women's rights activist Wangari Maathai

The international 'Visiting Professorship' of the newly founded Global Partnership Network (GPN) is named after a prominent activist from Kenya: Wangari Maathai is to be honoured as the name giver on the one hand and at the same time stands symbolically for her commitment to justice, environmental and human rights.

The Global Partnership Network (GPN) was founded in 2020 and involves 12 universities and 17 civil society partners* from Burkina Faso, Jamaica, South Africa, Senegal, Uganda, Ghana, Haiti, India, Ethiopia and Germany (<https://www.uni-kassel.de/forschung/global-partnership-network/home/>). The GPN is committed to research, activism and political development in global partnerships from a perspective of mutual respect and historical awareness of the neo-colonial obstacles. These often exist in international cooperation between the global South and North. The GPN focuses on overcoming colonial patterns of thought, on analysing and promoting solidarity-based partnerships and cooperation in development cooperation, global economy and knowledge production.

Each semester, a guest professorship at the Research Institute is intended to promote international exchange and mediation and, within the framework of the GPN, to enable and strengthen the production of knowledge in partnership and mutual cooperation.

In this sense, the GPN guest professorship is named after the Kenyan environmental and women's rights activist Wangari Maathai. In her person, she united strong and diverse qualities that serve as a powerful role model. With this dedication, the Global Partnership Network wishes to honour these qualities. As an international scholar and activist, she stands symbolically for the relevance of the exchange between Global North and Global South. In addition to this work, she was involved in civil society from the very beginning, campaigning for human rights and especially for women's rights and became the central figure of the women's movement in Kenya, whose Women's Council she headed for many years. Under these circumstances, she succeeded in casting an important seed that combines various themes that are also close to the GPN: ecological, social, feminist and democratic concerns. In 1977, she founded the Green Belt Movement, which has since become a pan-African movement. By planting millions of trees, this impressive movement was able to tackle a variety of problems. Not only is reforestation good for the environment, but the working and living conditions of local farmers have also improved and a more conscious approach to nature has been encouraged. However, this success was not achieved through international development programmes, but through local communities and grassroots movements, based on a worldview in which humans do not exploit nature, but recognise it as a source of life. In 2004, she was the first African woman to receive a Nobel Peace Prize for her activist work in the movement.

In the context of the current debate on climate change, Maathai was chosen as a person who has fought for a world that is fair to our climate. She also has fought with a strong sense of justice for the movement that started and grew with the planting of new trees. In her life as an activist, women's struggle and the environmental movement merge and are the roots of a movement that has since become successful. By naming the guest professorship after Wangari Maathai, the GPN draws inspiration from great personality as a role model for its priorities partnership in development cooperation, global economy in the context of climate justice as well as knowledge production and the enabling and strengthening of alternative knowledge from the bottom up.