

Press Release: The GPN names its PhD scholarships after Thomas Sankara

Established in 2020, the Global Partnership Network (GPN) consists of university and civil society partners from Burkina Faso, Jamaica, South Africa, Senegal, Uganda, Ghana, Haiti, India, Ethiopia and Germany. The GPN calls attention to the shortcomings, limitations, and problematic aspects of international partnerships that have historically been shaped by colonial relations between North and South and sometimes continue to reflect them. Redressing this historical dynamic requires reconstructing the concept towards a partnership based on mutual recognition and solidarity, adequate to the multi-polar and postcolonial 21st century.

Besides producing e-learning tools, fostering research cooperations and implementing a wide array of workshops, the graduate program is one of the core activities of the GPN. The GPN grants 12 scholarships exclusively to PhD students from the global South in order to back Southern higher education knowledge production.

We are pleased to announce that the family of Thomas Sankara has kindly approved our wish to name the GPN PhD scholarships after him. Until his assassination, Thomas Sankara was president of Burkina Faso (1983-1987). Our desire to name the scholarships after this outstanding personality goes back to his pioneering approach to global partnerships, which we consider as an inspiration for our own critical engagement with North-South as well as South-South relations. His resistance against neo-colonialism and his contributions to an emancipation and self-determination of the Burkinabè and further African people still inspires the African and international youth until today. In only four years of presidency, Sankara made the country independent of any food imports, brought numerous women into politics, rigorously fought elitism and corruption, made efforts to decentralize and democratize state power, stood up against odious debts, introduced the building of the great green wall in Burkina Faso and replaced the government fleet of Mercedes Benz by compact cars, while riding a bike to work himself.

Considering themselves as an organization and social movement with a Sankarist tradition, our Burkinabè CSO partner, the Balai Citoyen (in English: civic broom) is certainly placed best to provide an outstanding expertise on Sankara's pioneering visions and policies. Therefore, inviting a speaker of the Balai Citoyen to a virtual graduate school seminar will be one of the first actions of our graduate school coordinator. With the naming of the GPN PhD scholarship after Thomas Sankara, we have established a perfect basis for drawing back on his concrete visionary politics when discussing concepts such as food sovereignty, gender equality, neo-colonialism or theories like Post-Development, Dependency and Post-Colonial Theories.

The GPN offers a graduate program in which our PhD students are co-supervised by professors from two GPN partner universities. The selected PhD students are based at the university of their first supervisor but also have the chance to spend six months at the university of their second supervisor.

Our graduate school coordinator organises a regular virtual graduate program together with the members from the different GPN partners: the partner universities as well as the partner civil society organizations (CSO). This allows a wide range of expertise in different theoretical and practical fields to be incorporated into our graduate school and further to establish a link between theory and practice.

The prevalent online format allows a rich international and inter-cultural exchange without fuelling the already ongoing climate crisis too much via flights. The overall orientation of the content being treated in the graduate program is geared towards the three research clusters of the GPN:

Cluster 1: Partnership in development cooperation: access, accountability, and deep participation

Cluster 2: Partnership in the global economy: agriculture, finance, and energy

Cluster 3: Partnership in knowledge production: Eurocentrism and alternative knowledge

Smaller peer groups will be built with those PhD students who do research in the same cluster to encourage peer-to-peer learning across space and different cultures. The doctoral students will be encouraged to actively participate in the design of the graduate school program and thereby can shape parts of it according to their specific needs and wishes.

The GPN provides also the possibility for its partners to develop E-learning tools, which will support the integration of interdisciplinary and diverse knowledge originating from our partners into the teaching of the graduate school.

With our Thomas Sankara doctoral scholarships and our Global Partnership Graduate School, we hope to explore new horizons together with our PhD students and our whole network and to contribute to - as Thomas Sankara used to say - dare to invent the future.