

# BERLIN CENTER FOR GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

Openness, Reciprocity, Responsibility

Berlin University Alliance





# Dear Reader,

Welcome to the Berlin Center for Global Engagement (BCGE)!

Research and scholarship in Berlin have always had a strong focus on regional studies, Berlin has long attracted scholars from all over the globe, and the scholars of Berlin's academic institutions are known for exploring every corner of the world (although we all know the world is round). And yet, with the establishment of the Berlin Center for Global Engagement, we, as the Berlin University Alliance (BUA), have entered a new phase of international scientific collaboration.

Since its founding in 2020, the Center has focused on three key areas: intensifying cooperation with the Global South, critically reflecting on trends in internationalization, and engaging in science diplomacy to defend the freedom of scholars. While Berlin remains a hub for international cooperation, we still see that scientific collaboration is not equally distributed around the world and we are also part of that. The BCGE conference in November 2024 brought this issue to light, with more than 120 guests from around the world.

This brochure highlights the key takeaways from the conference and reflects on some of the major outcomes and activities of the BCGE during its first five years of existence, such as the BCGE Signature Projects, the BUA Forum of Diplomatic Resilience, the theater project Hidden Research or the science podcast Meridian. At the conclusion of the conference, the Berlin University Alliance signed the Africa Charter for Transformative Research Collaboration, reaffirming its strong commitment to more equitable research collaboration – a clear message of the growing need for multifaceted international cooperation in a time of geopolitical turbulence.

I cordially invite you to engage with the BUA and BCGE as we work towards more equitable research for the benefit of all, and wish you stimulating and interesting reading.

Professor Günter M. Ziegler  
*President of Freie Universität Berlin &  
Spokesperson of the Berlin University Alliance*

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# What We Stand For

*In a deeply interconnected and increasingly multipolar world, science and research can make a difference and contribute to a sustainable future by adopting a global approach. We, at the Berlin Center for Global Engagement (BCGE), capitalize on the Berlin University Alliance's (BUA) wealth of scientific expertise and extensive global networks to achieve a new level of quality in internationalization by including countries and partners that are structurally underrepresented. We act as a hub to develop and harness opportunities for global scientific cooperation – even in times of growing geopolitical tensions.*

## THREE FIELDS OF ACTION

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### PROMOTING COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH WITH THE GLOBAL SOUTH

*We develop our own funding formats and support networking within the BUA to create joint project initiatives with partners in the Global South.*



### REFLECTING CURRENT TRENDS OF INTERNATIONALIZATION

*We seek to make a substantial contribution to emerging debates in the field of internationalization of higher education.*



### ENGAGING IN SCIENCE DIPLOMACY

*We act as a platform networking scientific communities in Berlin and stakeholders outside of universities to identify the potential of global cooperation and develop recommendations*

# Towards Equitable Science Cooperation

*Inequality between the so-called Global North and Global South is deeply inscribed into the global academic landscape. Four years after its establishment, the Berlin Center for Global Engagement (BCGE) of the Berlin University Alliance (BUA) brought together scholars and experts from around the globe to debate future venues of equitable research cooperation. The ground-breaking conference Negotiating Scientific Cooperation in an Unequal World took place in November 2024 at the Institute for Cultural Inquiry in the heart of Berlin. It marked the culmination of the Center's activities and sketched out guidelines for its future development. During the event, the BUA started a new chapter of cooperation with the Global South by signing the Africa Charter for Transformative Research Collaborations.*



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1. A scene of the hidden research theatre project performed during the conference; 2. Günter Ziegler, president of Freie Universität Berlin and BUA spokesperson; 3. Moderator Yolanda Sylvana Rother; 4. Keynote speaker Patrício Langa (Eduardo Mondlane University, University Alliance Ruhr); 5. Hanzhi Yu (Zhejiang University); 6. Isabel Aboderin (University of Bristol); 7. The conference hall at the Institute for Cultural Inquiry at Pfefferberg in Berlin.

Participants came from near and far. When conference moderator Yolanda Sylvana Rother asked the audience where they lived, the answers ranged from the immediate vicinity of Prenzlauer Berg to countries as diverse as China, Mozambique, and Brazil.

The Berlin Center of Global Engagement (BCGE) of the Berlin University Alliance (BUA) has brought together a diverse group of international experts to Berlin to discuss one of the most pressing issues within global academic cooperation: inequality.

The BCGE serves as an interface for cooperation with the Global South within the BUA, and as a platform to advance academic freedom, science diplomacy as well as regional and country-specific expertise in BUA's four partner institutions Freie Universität Berlin, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Technische Universität Berlin, and Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin.

Günter Ziegler, president of Freie Universität Berlin and spokesperson for the Berlin University Alli-



ance, opened the conference by pointing out that the BCGE started out with the intention of helping to balance the global science system. “We want to enter into a fully mutual exchange,” Ziegler said. “We aim at truly understanding what the perspective from the Global South really looks like and how our relations can be taken further.”

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— Günter Ziegler, BUA spokesperson

Ina Czyborra, Senator for Higher Education and Research, Health and Long-Term Care of the city of Berlin, who delivered a welcome address, highlighted the significant progress that Berlin has made in confronting its colonial past and addressing its present responsibilities. Czyborra said. “Support structures like the BCGE are urgently needed to help researchers from Berlin avoid the cultural pitfalls of colonial attitude. As



part of our Berlin University Alliance, the BCGE lifts cooperation between the Global North and the Global South to the institutional level, rather than relying on individual peer-to-peer relationships. This is a clear sign that the Berlin science and innovation ecosystem is in it for the long haul.”

A keynote lecture was delivered by Patrício Langa, Professor of sociology and higher education at Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique and Senior



A day for intense discussions: Audience members fueled the debate (below) and exchanged arguments in the coffee breaks (above).

Research Fellow at University Alliance Ruhr. Langa gave an inspiring overview on the current situation of African universities in the global science system. He presented evidence on the prevailing imbalances and elucidated the historical roots that gave rise to them—from the colonial legacy and neoliberal development schemes to a new era of more equitable knowledge partnerships with the Global North, which has been developing over the past 10 to 15 years.

Langa presented revealing data: African universities represent 9.1 percent of all universities worldwide but the continent contributes only 2.4 percent to the global production of scientific publications. Huge barriers remain on the way towards more equity, for example when it comes to publications. Not only are most publishing houses based in the Global North but standards are still defined there and concrete research collaborations are often excluding African partners or reducing them to data collectors. “From the perspective of African universities there is an urgent demand for a transformative shift in the engagement with the global research community,” said Langa. “We need a new mindset, a robust policy framework and strategies like the ‘Africa Charter for Transformative Research Collaborations’.”

With Patrício Langa’s analysis as a backdrop, the invited experts exchanged their thoughts in four thematic panel discussions on 1) the universal claim of





*“It is a matter of advancing Africa’s political and economic aspirations, of reducing inequalities between regions and countries, but also of enriching our collective global scholarship.”*

— Isabella Aboderin, University of Bristol

the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their ambiguous role in setting the research agenda; 2) how to take into account the perspective of the Global South; 3) how to see health innovation as a cooperative task between North and South; and 4) how academic cooperation can thrive despite geopolitical changes worldwide (see page 11–17 for a summary of each of the four panel discussions). The panels were constituted of universities worldwide, the four BUA member universities, as well as institutions like the Association of African Universities (AAU). “The setting was highly international and interdisciplinary, which allowed for the consideration of a multitude of perspectives—a goal that the BCGE strives to achieve,” stated Romain Faure, the BCGE coordinator.

The intense panel debates were suspended by the initial silence of an artistic highlight that was meant to make participants not only think, but also feel. The performance of the theater project “Hidden Research” impressively encouraged the audience to reflect on what it means when scientists must hide their research because academic freedom is not a given. The BCGE developed it in cooperation with the BUA project co2libri and art director Aldo Spahiu.

Microbiologist Adenike Adebukola Akinsemolu from Afe Babalola University in Nigeria contributed the digital photo exhibition “The Women of Aiyetoro: Resilience in the Face of Climate Change”, which invited the audience into a visual exploration of local knowledge systems and resilience of indigenous women.

### The Africa Charter— Agreeing on a Common Way Forward

The conference day culminated in the signing ceremony of the Africa Charter for Transformative Research Collaborations and a round table discussion on its significance and implementation “We believe that the Africa Charter can serve as a pivotal catalyst by fostering transformative changes in research collaborations not only in Africa but far beyond,” said Julia von Blumenthal, president of Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin who signed the Charter on behalf of the BUA, which is one of the first institutions in Germany to do so.

The Charter, which was launched in July 2023 in Windhoek, Namibia, has been co-created by Africa’s major higher education constituencies and bodies. So far, it has been signed by more than 100 institutions including universities in Africa, Europe, North America, South America, Australia as well as major University networks and learned societies. “The Charter stresses the need to think ‘beyond’ equitable partnerships in determining what equity in research collaborations is for, what equity, then, needs to entail—and how it can be ensured,” said Isabella Aboderin, Chair in Africa Research and Partnerships and Director of the Perivoli Africa Research Centre at the University of Bristol.

The document brings forward ten principles confronting the multiple layers of power imbalances like for example the dominance of European epistemologies and theories, in research metrics, and concrete asymmetries in collaboration practices such as the division of labour, decision making and access to rewards. It also formulates six aspirations that call for concrete adjustments in collaboration practices,

for example changes in policy and regulatory frameworks of Higher Education Institutions and guidelines to make sure that a more equitable approach to science cooperation with Africa will become a standard practice. "It is a matter of advancing Africa's political and economic aspirations, of reducing inequalities between regions and countries, but also of enriching our collective global scholarship and find potent solutions to the global and the local challenges that we face collectively," said Aboderin.

One of the challenges discussed during the round table discussion was how to transform discourse into action to implement the Charter's aspirations—and engage more partners. The need for the signatories to define road maps by reviewing current collaboration practices as well as gaps to fill was pointed out. The discussants agreed that there is an urgent need to build up the necessary structures to operationalize the Charter and disseminate its message throughout all disciplines.

"The next step for us is to integrate the principles of the Africa Charter in funding schemes for collaboration with partners in the so-called Global South," said BCGE project lead Florian Kohstall. "We will include it into our system of reviewing projects and highlight examples of best practice to engage into a joint learning process with our partners."

Among the speakers, there was confidence that more equitable partnerships in the global science system will result in a win-win for all by allowing for new perspectives and mutual learning processes — if they do not stay confined to documents. „Implementation now requires personal, institutional and also political commitments and changes in practice," said Beate Kampmann, director of the Institute of International Health at Charité – Universitätsmedizin, who moderated the final discussion. "We are excited about the necessary co-creation opportunities that this brings."

When the participants gathered on the level of the building for an evening reception with an astonishing panorama view over the heart of Berlin, it became evident that the day's proceedings had yielded many useful insights into strategies for enhancing the equity of scientific collaboration in an environment where disparities persist. And the first new networks for future research collaboration were already born.

*"The next step for us is to integrate the principles of the Africa Charter in funding schemes for collaboration with partners in the so-called Global South."*

— Florian Kohstall, BCGE project lead

In a final round table session, experts discussed whether the Africa Charter can be seen as a game changer for Europe-Africa research partnerships. The experts f.l.t.r.: Philipp Dann (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin), Juliet Thondhlana (Association of African Universities, University of Nottingham), Jamil Salmi (tertiary education expert), Beate Kampmann (Charité-Universitätsmedizin), Patrício Langa (Eduardo Mondlane University, University Alliance Ruhr), Isabella Aboderin (University of Bristol).



# Global Challenges and Sustainable Development Goals

*An agenda for international collaborative research?*



The first panel (f.l.t.r.): Moderator Ulrike Hillemann-Delaney (Technische Universität Berlin), Euclides de Mesquita Neto (UNICAMP), Hanzhi Yu (Zhejiang University), Angela Million, (Technische Universität Berlin), Patricio Langa (Eduardo Mondlane University, University Alliance Ruhr).

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) form the core of Agenda 2030, which the UN member states agreed upon in September 2015 to meet global challenges. The first panel of the BCGE conference focused on the question whether the SDGs are suitable for directing international research collaborations towards solving global problems.

“Maybe the SDGs can become a common language for different countries, different universities to push things forward in times of conflicting world politics,” said Hanzhi Yu, Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science at Zhejiang University in Hangzhou. She reported that albeit there are no statistics for China regarding the thematic focus of international research collaborations, she has recently seen more and more calls for proposals that refer to the SDGs.

Yu pointed out that the goals of the SDGs are more often debated than their implementation. She suggest-

ed that scientists should think intensively about how the SDGs can be implemented in light of global difficulties. In the debate about the implementation of the SDGs, the different local circumstances must also be taken into account.

Angela Million, Professor of Urban Planning at the Technical University of Berlin, reported on her practical experiences. She is director of the DAAD-funded Global Center on Spatial Methods for Urban Sustainability (SMUS), in which 50 partners from eight regions of the world work together. “We have partners from very different disciplines, from social sciences and sociology to ethnography, history and art to urban planning,” said Million. “The SDGs have provided us with a framework, a common starting point. We decided to align our work with SDG 11 ‘sustainable cities and communities’. Everyone involved could identify with that.” In Million’s opinion, the SDGs



have the potential to align international cooperation towards a common goal and, based on that, formulate corresponding goals for local contexts. Million argued that interdisciplinarity should be extended to transdisciplinary formats to take up knowledge from society.

Euclides de Mesquita Neto, an engineering scientist at the Universidad Estadual de Campinas (UNICAMP) and until recently Executive Secretary of the Global Research Council (GRC), which includes over 60 research funding agencies from all continents, provided the context from the perspective of global research budgets. “Since 2000, global research spending has increased from 677 billion to 2.2 trillion dollars,” said Mesquita Neto. “But it is worth taking a closer look at the figures. In OECD countries, for example, 74 percent of research spending on science, technology, and innovation (STIs) comes from companies. For public research institutions, access to research funds is much more limited.”

However, research by companies is not always geared towards solutions to global challenges. In addition, there is a lack of global governance that coordinates the activities in the publicly funded research system in line with the SDGs, but without setting them as an absolute framework. Although many global challenges fall into the area of “known unknowns”, future challenges will require new types of knowledge. Mesquita therefore advocated that research funding should also be used for basic research despite the focus on global challenges and that space should be left for research into the “unknown unknowns”.

Patricio Langa, Professor of Sociology and Higher Education at the Eduardo Mondragón University and Senior Research Fellow at the University Alliance Ruhr, emphasized that it is good to have a common language in the SDGs. But he also sees side effects. In many African countries, the SDGs offer important opportunities for research funding. However, these are often tied to research goals that do not necessarily meet the needs of African scientists, but rather “like a teleological prophecy” provide a clear direction that is to be taken for granted. “African universities who depend on the funding have to follow a research agenda, but they are not part of conceiving that agenda, and the financial power makes it difficult to engage in a critical discussion,” says Langa. SDGs must therefore be developed much more collaboratively in the future.

## PANEL DISCUSSION 2

# Thinking the World from and with the South

## *Why do we need a truly global and inclusive scientific discourse?*

The dominance of the Global North in international knowledge production has been criticized for many years, said moderator Sarah Wessel, Program Manager at the BCGE, at the beginning of the panel. But continuing the debate is perhaps more important than ever. The asymmetry between North and South is partly due to geopolitical and economic power relations. “In addition, knowledge from the Global South is often marginalized,” she said, referring to the Egyptian sociologist Mona Abaza, who complained about the “academic sightseeing” of Western scholars after the Arab Spring. At that time, according to Abaza’s diagnosis, scientists from Arab countries were



Sociologist and historian Phoebe Sanchez (Deutsches Zentrum für Integrations- und Migrationsforschung (DeZIM)).





Microbiologist Adenike Adebukola Akinsemolu (Afe Babalola University, University of Birmingham).

merely used as knowledge suppliers by their Western colleagues who had flown in for a short time, without dialogue on an equal footing.

Phoebe Sanchez, sociologist and historian at the Consensus and Conflict Department of the DeZIM Institute, placed the asymmetry in the global research landscape in the context of colonial history. “The Philippines have 333 years of experience with colonial administration, first through Spanish rule, and now we are still a neocolonial outpost of the USA,” said Sanchez. In many countries in the Global South, the neo-colonial order does not allow for determining the production of goods and services locally. Many areas, such as mining, are determined by foreign actors.

Also the research landscape is determined in many places by interests from the Global North. “Universities in the Global South continue to produce English-speaking cheap labour for multinational and transnational corporations. They work in jobs that can be attributed to the four Ds: They are dirty, difficult, dangerous and demeaning” said Sanchez. In view of the ongoing inequalities, she called for reparations from the Global North and for research in the countries of the Global South to reflect their own interests much

more strongly. “Only then can we speak of solidarity, mutual respect and real cooperation.”

Robin Celikates, Professor of Social Philosophy and Anthropology at the Freie Universität Berlin, called for a critical examination of one’s own attitude. “The asymmetries in knowledge production are not so easy to recognize from within. That is a sociological fact,” said Celikates. “We need self-criticism. We have to expose ourselves to unpleasant truths. Germany, for example, is not good at taking on its colonial responsibility. This is difficult for many researchers from the South to understand.”

Celikates, who initiated the BCGE-funded project “Critical Theory Under Pressure: Building Networks for Transnational Dialogue”, emphasized that scientists from the global North can benefit from experiences from the global South, for example when it comes to dealing with the threat of authoritarian tendencies. Critical knowledge production in Europe and the USA is increasingly under attack, for example in climate research. “Our colleagues in Brazil, Argentina and elsewhere have already experienced neoliberal restructuring of universities and authoritarian attacks on critical research. They have not only analyzed this,

but have also developed strategies to withstand it.” In Europe, researchers are little prepared for such situations. “It would be good to open up to mutual learning – that can simply mean listening to each other.”

The microbiologist Adenike Adebukola Akinsemolu from Afe Babalola University in Nigeria and the University of Birmingham reported on the asymmetry in knowledge production based on her own research. Akinsemolu researches the interface between the consequences of climate change and gender dynamics, primarily in the Ilaje community in the coastal region of Nigeria. “I learned on site that many women have already adopted strategies to mitigate the consequences of climate change, for example by planting mangroves to ward off floods,” says Akinsemolu. Also strategies for cleaning contaminated water using local resources have been developed by the women.

“But indigenous strategies against the consequences of climate change are often viewed as inferior in the Western academic world. These people are not heard in the debate,” says Akinsemolu. “We see them as victims and recipients of aid, but we must start to see them as co-creators and include them in the discussion.” She sees it as one of the challenges of knowledge production to bring local knowledge into the world, which is sometimes much more effective locally than technical Western solutions but is not documented.



Philosopher Robin Celikates (Freie Universität Berlin).



### PANEL DISCUSSION 3

# Health Innovation with the Global South

*How do we learn from  
each other?*

“Global health is a contested concept” said John Ouma-Mugabe, Professor of Science and Innovation Policy at the University of Pretoria in South Africa. “The question is: does the term mean that innovations are created for the South, or does it go



F.l.t.r.: Daniel Opoku (Technische Universität Berlin), Malek Bajbouj (Charité–Universitätsmedizin), Rebecca Ingenhoff (Charité–Universitätsmedizin).

beyond that? We must see the South as a place that contributes to the global knowledge pool with its innovation – and less as a place to which innovations are brought.” With this, Ouma-Mugabe, who joined via video, summed up the topic of the panel. He saw a crucial deficit in the Global North, whose ability to understand the needs of the South urgently needs to be improved.

For innovations in the health sector to be developed more closely together with the Global South was a key request also from Malek Bajbouj, Professor of Psychiatry and Affective Neuroscience, Managing Senior Physician and Head of the Center for Affective Neuroscience at the Charité Universitätsmedizin. Bajbouj reported an example from the Middle East: After the start of the Syrian civil war, many people fled to Jordan. “The need for mental services was huge. A large number of stressed patients who had developed disorders were faced with a small number of psychologists and psychiatrists.”

“We were called in to help with our expertise and flew to Jordan with the self-confidence that we were the super experts in the field of trauma and stress,” said Bajbouj. There, the team learned that strategies had already been developed locally to respond to the shortage, from peer-to-peer coaching to digital interventions to stepped care approaches, i.e. step-by-step care tailored

to the individual symptoms. “All of these components significantly improved the treatment of patients. We flew back with a suitcase full of ideas.” When many refugees came to Germany a short time later, the Charité team was able to use these ideas to care for the patients much better than they would have been able to before.

Daniel Opoku, research associate in the Department of Health Management at the Technical University of Berlin, is currently involved in the joint project with the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) “Capacity building in Health Systems Research and Management in Ghana”. “There is hardly any industry that is more regulated than the health industry. It is therefore not as easy to bring innovations to market as in the business world.” Many projects, especially in the area of digital innovations, suffer from “pilotitis” – it is difficult to scale and implement them after the end of the funded pilot phase. It is therefore important to actively involve the relevant stakeholders and political decision-makers right from the start. “They must have a sense of ownership and participation for the project to be sustainable.”

Opoku reported on a project he was involved in in Ghana that was made sustainable through ownership. Half of the population there had no health insurance, although this is required by law. “We wanted to trans-



fer an idea that was already working in Madagascar to Ghana – there was a kind of health wallet as a mobile app there,” said Opoku. “The authorities in Ghana showed us that there was already an app that could be used for payments via mobile. So why develop an additional solution from scratch?” For the project’s scientists and funders, this meant a deviation from the original project plan. But they were persuaded to adapt the project accordingly. “We gave the project to the stakeholders in Ghana and said: ‘Guide us, it’s your project!’ And that was the breakthrough. Today, millions of people have access to the health system as a result.”



On screen from South Africa: John Ouma-Mugabe (University of Pretoria, Africa Hub Transformative Innovation Policy Consortium).

John Ouma-Mugabe from the University of Pretoria has analyzed why political concepts in the health sector in Africa are often not implemented. “There are already many concepts and measures on paper. But there is often a lack of policy literacy to implement them,” said Ouma-Mugabe. This is due, among other things, to personnel issues. “In 26 African countries, we have qualified doctors at the top of health policy, for example in South Africa, Botswana and Kenya, who know the scientific side but do not know about policy making.” This means that the scientific side of policymaking is often neglected in practice. Capacity building must therefore aim to support political decision-makers in making better policies.

## PANEL DISCUSSION 4

# Between Transnational Dialogue and Geopolitical Challenges

*How do universities navigate through times of crisis?*

“Just a few years ago, we would hardly have talked about geopolitics at a conference like this,” said moderator Florian Kohstall, principal investigator at the Berlin Center for Global Engagement and program director for “Global Responsibility” at the Freie Universität Berlin, opening the panel. But the crises of recent years have also presented challenges for universities. Since the Russian war on Ukraine, many Western universities have broken off their contacts with Russian universities. The Israel-Gaza crisis has led to conflicts on campuses in many places. And the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and China’s growing ambitions for power are also raising the question for universities of how they should behave in an international context. “We don’t have a magic formula,” said Kohstall, “we’re asking for examples.”

Isabelle Harbrecht, project coordinator of the China Competence Training Center (CCTC) at Humboldt University in Berlin, reported growing concerns about cooperation with Chinese companies and universities. “China is the elephant in the room,” said Harbrecht. On the one hand, the Chinese research landscape is, after the USA, the second best regarding international connectedness. In Germany, students from China form the second largest international group after those from India. Today, China has the largest education system in the world. On the other hand, said Harbrecht, Western actors have concerns about the country that are sometimes





1. Florian Kohstall (Berlin Center for Global Engagement); 2. Left: Layla Al-Zubaidi (Heinrich-Böll Stiftung), right: Isabelle Harbrecht (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin); 3. Jamil Salmi (tertiary education expert).

characterized by exaggerated fear and risk aversion: “The fears range from ‘China is threatening to steal my idea’ to ‘China is technologically superior’. In both cases, risk aversion leads to opportunity aversion.” The CCTC wants to break down barriers and supports university members, among other things, with workshops and training on China-related topics, while also addressing potential problems. Harbrecht: “It is important to know your partners in China well and to build relationships, even over long periods of time. This creates more security than contracts.”

The Moroccan education economist Jamil Salmi, long-time coordinator of the World Bank’s higher education program, has advised over 60 countries worldwide on university reforms. The increasing German reluctance to cooperate with Chinese universities is also an issue abroad. “Some people are asking themselves: does Germany now expect a similar reaction from us?” said Salmi.

Salmi also outlined his own approach in crisis situations: “A valued colleague from Moscow had to give up her position as vice director at the university and ultimately leave her country. I would no longer collaborate with Russian universities as institutions, but I would continue to collaborate with Russian scholars,” said Salmi. As a consultant, for example, he also stopped working for Saudi Arabia after the journalist Jamal Khashoggi died under the well-known circumstances. On the other hand, he continues to work with individuals so as not to abandon them.

From the perspective of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, Layla Al-Zubaidi, head of the International Policy Divisions, finally spoke about the Israel-Palestine conflict, the geopolitical event that triggers great emotions at universities.

“It is important to understand that students are angry. It does not help to write one-sided statements of solidarity with Israel and then remain silent on the subject. It is good to have events that offer discourse,” said Al-Zubaidi. “We have remained silent on Gaza for too long. That has cost us a lot of trust internationally.”

Al-Zubaidi also reported that the recent Bundestag resolutions on anti-Semitism are making cooperation with partners in the Global South increasingly difficult. For example, in Germany it is difficult to talk about the South African human rights complaint for genocide or the term apartheid – even though many international NGOs work with it.

Yolanda Sylvana Rother, main moderator of the conference, found the closing words: “It is very special to be in a room that can endure tension.”

# Hidden Research

*Giving a voice to scientists  
who experience threats to  
academic freedom*

Voices can be heard from behind the curtain—doubting, fearful, but also courageous words. The theater project Hidden Research brings to the stage the stories and conflicts surrounding academic freedom, as told by endangered and exiled scholars from around the world. The performances are based on central themes extracted from in-depth interviews with researchers and developed into theatrical dialogues through an inclusive process with researchers, students, artists, and others. The conversations are performed in public and semi-public spaces—museums, conferences or workshops—, creating points of contact with the anonymous but personal experiences of the scholars. The BCGE coordinates the project in close cooperation with the BUA network co-2libri – conceptual collaboration. living borderless research interaction (see page 30) and with the art director Aldo Spahiu. Hidden Research was funded by the Federal Ministry for Education and Research as part of the Science Year 2024 – Freedom, which focused on the value and meaning of freedom.



Follow the link  
to learn more  
about the hidden  
research project.





# “Wherever We are Partnering, There May Be Power Imbalances”

*An interview with the tertiary education experts Prof Juliet Thondhlana and Dr. Jamil Salmi on the challenges that scientists from the Global South face in the international research landscape and on the power of the Africa Charter on Transformative Research Collaborations to ignite a change.*

**Africa accounts for approximately ten percent of the total number of universities worldwide, yet the share of knowledge produced by academics in Africa represents only two percent of the global total – why is this the case?**

THONDHLANA When we give figures like this, it's important to state that these are the publications that are known or measured and based on big outlets in the Global North like Sage or Elsevier. Some of these organisations really don't know much of what's going on in Africa. That's why it's important for us to find out: Who is really contributing what in Africa and where are they disseminating their knowledge?

But I do agree that even if we were to come up with a little higher

percentage through a broader measurement, the share of the African continent in global knowledge production is still on the short side. Why is that so? African scholars experience a variety of challenges in doing research and publishing, many must cope with financing problems and are not being paid enough for their livelihoods. Because of that, they often tend to do commissioned research for UNICEF, UNESCO, or the British Council which is not always translatable into academic publications.

SALMI Another important dimension is traditional knowledge that is not necessarily captured in the form of published articles in the journals of the so-called Global North and partly not even considered scientif-





ic. But this is also part of the global knowledge production. We know for example, that in medicine or agriculture, there is very important traditional knowledge that can contribute a lot to resolving global health issues, even if it is not being measured.

**Another appalling number is 1.3 percent – Africa’s share of global spending for research and development. What consequences does this lack of resources have for the continent’s development?**

SALMI When I joined the World Bank in the late 80’s, the standard view was that African countries were at such an early stage of development that they should not give any priority to universities, only to basic education. Donor

agencies focussed on that. I have worked for 25 years at the World Bank and part of my work was trying to reverse this notion and getting people to recognize that we need to strive for a balanced development of the education system. We know today that with the acceleration of scientific and technological progress, if you don’t have the capacity to contribute to progress, you will be left behind.

Africa faces big challenges: Food, health, climate change, education and economic developments. All these issues require highly qualified people and research that is relevant to address them can only come from local universities, because solutions that may work in Norway will not necessarily be relevant to the condi-

tions of Nigeria or Chad or any other country in Africa.

**How should the global research landscape, which has its historical roots in colonialism, change?**

SALMI It’s about defining research questions that are relevant for Africa. Bilateral or multilateral donors that give financial assistance should take into consideration the asymmetry of power and decision-making. We need to change the way resources are allocated and focus on what is most relevant to the needs of African countries—not only to the personal interest of researchers in the North.

*„ We need to change the way resources are allocated and focus on what is most relevant to the needs of African countries“*

— Jamil Salmi



Jamil Salmi, Juliet Thondhlana and interviewer Mirco Lomoth (left) at the BCGE conference.

Now, at the country level we have to recognize that there is room for improvement for national policies as well. Out of the 54 African countries, we cannot say that they all have enlightened governments. In many countries military expenditures are prioritized, while the health, science and education sectors lack resources and rely too much on external assistance.

There is a very successful project that the World Bank has supported with technical assistance called the African Centres of Excellence (ACEs). It delivered a lot of very positive results. However,

such projects frequently lack financial sustainability, as donors tend to assume that a five-year investment is sufficient to build up a leading-edge research institute. At the same time the host universities do not see such a project as part of their own budget and national governments do not think in terms of long-term financial viability. Financial sustainability must be taken into consideration to allow for a rebalancing.

THONDHLANA First we really have to identify where knowledge is produced in Africa. The current ways of measuring significance exclude a lot of African journals, they must become broader and accept African outlets instead of just looking at the so-called high impact journals in the Global North. Africa itself needs to have a voice in these conversations about knowledge production and dissemination.

On the other hand, there are a lot of issues around funding. For Africa, we need local investment into research and publishing as well as external investment. Institutional leadership has to find ways of supporting staff to be more productive and start a conversation with policy makers to highlight the significance of research as a contribution to national development.

There's a very clear trajectory here: When African governments set-up budgets for economic devel-

opment, they need to see university work as part of development. We need all key players to understand that relevant research only comes through funding.

**On 20 November 2024, the Berlin University Alliance signed the African Charter for Transformative Research Collaborations, which aims to strengthen Africa's place in the global scientific community. What does this document mean for future academic cooperation between Berlin universities and African partners?**

SALMI I think the Charter is a very useful and positive document because it sets out some basic principles, trying to redress inequalities in funding and power of decision-making. It is about deciding what research should be prioritised in terms of having impact on the living conditions and big challenges that African countries face, how it is funded and how the funding is spent.

Many donor projects still focus expenses on the North, not in the countries where the research takes place. The African Charter is trying to address such imbalances by giving guidelines that have to be complied with by the signatories. The universities that are part of BUA will work together to implement the Charter, which will enhance its impact.

THONDHLANA The Charter is Africa's voice, it is Africa saying: this is how we want to work and improve our relationships. It is important to mention that Berlin has been doing a lot of work in Africa. Currently, there are mutually beneficial projects in several African countries. So, the universities of BUA are already converted in terms of the significance of working with Africa in a fair way. The fact that they have invited us to come here for the endorsement of the African Charter highlights that—it's not Africa asking them to discuss and sign the Charter, it's Berlin that would like to strengthen its collaborations with Africa by working toward inclusivity and equitability.

Having a document that frames such ideas and behaviours in a way that is translatable to other contexts as well, is very important. Because it helps to base the work on the institutional leadership or individual researcher level within concrete parameters that determine research ethics.

The Charter will help current researchers and generations in Berlin to frame their collaborations with African partners. Personally, I see this as a great moment in the history of Berlin's relationship with Africa.

**Could the African Charter also be a blueprint for other regions in the Global South?**

SALMI What do we actually talk about when we say 'Global South'? This is a definition that comes from the North, and a strange one too. You have countries far in the South, like Australia and New Zealand, that are considered as being part of that North. And then you have Asia and the East. The term stems from a good intention to no longer talk about under-developed or developing countries. But the distinction is still very paternalistic.

*„The Charter is Africa's voice,  
it is Africa saying: this is  
how we want to work and  
improve our relationships.“*

— Juliet Thondhlana



In any case, I do think that the African Charter can serve as a blueprint for other regions, certainly Central America and the poor countries in South America and the Caribbean, especially Cuba, but also the Dominican Republic, Bolivia Ecuador, Peru. They have many of the problems Africa faces. For them it would be a good model. Also, for countries in South Asia like Nepal, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. East Asia is really in a different category with perhaps the exception of Laos and Cambodia, but most countries in that region are doing much better than the rest of the so-called Global South.

Whenever you have an asymmetry in terms of decision-making power and resources, a Charter like this could be a good tool to encourage universities to collaborate on a more equal basis.

THONDHLANA I would also hope that the African Charter will not just be a document for Africa in the glob-

al system, but one that becomes a basis for developing strategic partnerships, whether they are global or local. When we are doing research within Africa, we are often collaborating locally. In this context, the Charter can help to develop best practices irrespective of differences as well, for example between higher education and communities or schools.

Wherever we are partnering, there may be power imbalances that need to be overcome, also in the gender dimension. The reason for partnering should be to acknowledge that there's not one person knowing more than all the others but to bring different perspectives to the table.

**Does the implementation of the Africa Charter also require a learning process among African institutions to demand that collaborations with the Global North become more equitable?**

#### DR. JAMIL SALMI

is a policy advisor and tertiary education expert. He is part of the International Advisory Board of the Berlin University Alliance (BUA).

#### PROF JULIET THONDHLANA

is professor and Chair in International Education and Development at the University of Nottingham. She is Coordinator of the Europe Regional Office of the Association of African Universities (AAU).

THONDHLANA As many researchers on the continent have been calling for decolonizing the mind, African institutions need to embrace the Charter as a decolonial process. Sometimes they are the ones who are allowing for an imbalance because of – for lack of a better word – colonial mentality. It is a thinking that you deserve to be treated in the way you're being treated and you put yourself in a position where you are an unequal partner.

Africans need to rise up and take their rightful place. Because unless you have the right mindset, even if



the space is offered to you, you will not take it. A critical point is to operationalize this document because it requires actions. It's not just some abstract thing that is done by signing it. The actions needed are not an easy thing to do. So, the question is, will the African institutions be willing to rise up to the challenge?

**SALMI** Associations and networks like the African Union and the Association of African Universities have an important role in disseminating the Charter on the continent by making sure that all researchers are aware of it. They also need to build capacity on how to do research following the principles of the Charter and defending them.

**THONDHLANA** I hope that once people will have embraced it and understand what it's about, its principles will be applied and built into many other documents. Whenever African researchers are collab-

orating, they will bring it forward. Eventually, it will cease to be a document that Africa has come up with for the world to recognize Africa, but simply become good practice in research.

**The Charter describes research cooperation as entry points for a systemic shift in global knowledge production in favour of Africa – can research cooperation really have such a transformative effect?**

**SALMI** I've done evaluations of bilateral aid programs in different

countries, and I could see huge differences in programs that already reflected the principles of the African Charter and others that were still very traditionally driven by the interests of researchers in the so-called Global North who controlled the resources. Basing collaboration on a document like this has the potential to bring a big structural shift if both sides endorse it.

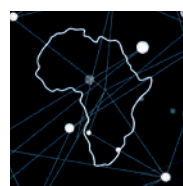
I think it would also be good to have a monitoring system to document good practices and share these, not as rigid models that every university should follow in every partnership, but for showcasing innovative ways of applying the Charter's principles in different fields of research.

**Equity in the international research landscape is also a question of perspectives – why is it time to focus more on the views of previously underrepresented regions of the world, such as Africa, in addition to the dominant perspectives produced and negotiated in the Global North?**

**SALMI** I think there are two reasons. The first one is, like I mentioned before, that traditional knowledge is too often not taken into consideration although it holds valuable insights. The other reason is that by working together with an open mind, both partners learn. It's not always the person, group or institution that seems to have better capacity that teaches the others. By allowing for different perspectives,

*„ It's evident that we need each other. Global challenges increasingly remind us of that.“*

— Juliet Thondhlana



## AFRICA CHARTER FOR TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH COLLABORATIONS

The Africa Charter for Transformative Research Collaborations has been developed in cooperation of diverse African scholars and postulates that inequality can be overcome only if its foundations and deeper layers are investigated, acknowledged, and where needed addressed.

For scientific collaborations this starts with acknowledging the existence of different epistemologies, systems of knowing the world, that may be very different in the Global North and the Global South. These epistemologies are represented in language, therefore, the use of just one language, mostly English, must be queried. Theories and concepts, when emanating from just one side of the

collaboration and unquestioned, also permeate existing inequalities. If one of the partners is by definition seen as “lacking” and positioned in a frame of “needing development”, his potential and contributions can be undervalued, misattributed or even suppressed.

All these mechanisms that perpetuate inequality are often supported by institutional resourcing and capacities and reflected in prevalent concrete collaboration arrangements. The Charter aims at developing ways to address, overcome and develop beyond these inequalities. The Berlin University Alliance has signed the Africa Charter on the occasion of the BCGE Conference on November 20, 2024.

Read the Africa  
Charter here:





you may find new solutions that you wouldn't have looked at.

THONDHLANA It's evident that we need each other. There is no country or person that can claim to know everything. Global challenges increasingly remind us of that. The answers are somewhere out there, and unless we come together and collaborate, we are never going to find them. The cure for cancer could be lying in some little village in the middle of nowhere, where people never suffer from cancer.

Humanity is like a puzzle, and we need all the pieces to be in place for us to resolve global problems like poverty, climate change. A passive partner in a partnership does not add value. It's not something to celebrate when you are dominating your so-called partner because at the same time you are losing out. There is always something that the partner has that can be valuable. Previously Africa was just the recipient and consumer of ideas from elsewhere. I think the world should celebrate hearing Africa's voices now.

**We are observing a worldwide trend towards populist and, in some cases, science-critical governments. Does this political development run counter to the demand for more fairness in the global scientific system?**

SALMI It makes the role of universities and scientists even more important. They must come back to the basics of scientific evidence, truth, and critical thinking. It's very scary to see what's happening with governments appointing vaccine sceptics as Health ministers and extreme right parties working against disciplines like gender studies.

The threats are very close to us and that should push us to be very conscious of the dangers we face, even among the people who make

decisions about funding within rich countries. Unfortunately, the populist trend also stands in the way of recognizing past disparities and trying to make amends and correct them through more equal partnerships.

THONDHLANA As academics, we are the ones who inform governments and policymakers through credible research. Politicians come and go, but ideas stay. I think as long as we have academics who are speaking out, who are doing their research responsibly and disseminating it in a strategic way by partnering with governments and development institutions, contributing to conversations about how to develop in a sustainable way, we have a way forward.

SALMI I would like to be as optimistic as you.

**Are you hopeful that Africa will find a better position in the world through a more balanced global knowledge system in the future?**

THONDHLANA I am very optimistic because it is already happening and there are lots of collaborations that are based on more equitable terms. Now, it's a question of augmenting it.

There is a lot going on in Africa, the human resources are there, the indigenous knowledge is there, which we have not even tapped significantly, yet. So, if we can get the funding and attract researchers to work in Africa equitably and responsibly as guided by the Charter and support those who are there, there is a lot of hope for Africa.

SALMI Africa is going to be the most populated continent, and I think that confronting the most difficult challenges will force the countries to find solutions. If partnerships on an equal basis happen, they will help in this effort. This is why the Africa Charter represents a substantial positive step forward.

# Podcast MERIDIAN

Meridian, the science podcast of the Berlin Center for Global Engagement (BCGE) brings news from international academic cooperation directly to your home. Researchers report on their work between different worlds, from Berlin to Dakar, from Rio de Janeiro to Manila—addressing issues of cooperation between the Global South and the Global North, academic freedom and science diplomacy.

Join the discussion and listen to the BCGE podcast on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, or via RSS Feed.



# Shaping Cooperation in Challenging Times



*In an era of geopolitical tensions, it is crucial to have a good compass for shaping international cooperation. The Forum on Diplomatic Resilience at the Berlin Center for Global Engagement offers members of the Berlin University Alliance important orientation.*

I nternational research cooperation is of central importance in the context of climate change, pandemics and other global challenges. But universities operate in an increasingly tense international environment. In recent years, questions of cooperation with partners in authoritarian regimes and academic freedom in particular have been the focus. The accumulation of diplomatic crises with various countries makes it clear that the problem should not be understood and addressed as a temporary and unfortunate conjuncture, but as a long-term one.

To meet the associated challenges, the BCGE has created a networking platform that supports the four houses of the Berlin University Alliance (BUA) in shaping international partnerships responsibly. The basic idea of the Berlin University Alliance Forum on Diplomatic Resilience, initially funded by the Volkswagen Foundation until 2026, is that universities should pool their regional and scientific expertise and exchange their experiences much more than before in order to navigate independently within a global scientific landscape that is increasingly influenced by geopolitics.

BUA offers a diverse network of expertise and contact points that advise researchers and representatives of university management on complex challenges of international cooperation. There are more recent structures such as export control and commissions for ethics in security-relevant research (KEFs), which specialize in science-relevant aspects of foreign trade law and risk assessments in international research projects. Peer-to-peer exchange within the Forum on Diplomatic Resilience promotes the expansion of network-wide offers for individual scientists. Through workshops and training courses on export control but also, for example, on the topic of "crisis communication", this expertise is specifically incorporated into the internationalization work of the four BUA institutions. Employees can exchange tools and best practices across institutions and departments and strengthen their ability to act in crisis contexts of international cooperation.

The aim is to provide competent support structures when weighing up the scientific opportunities a project offers and the risks, such as political influence or theft of intellectual property. Area Studies, which are strongly represented in Berlin, play a crucial role in this, as they can provide important insights into the development of countries in which academic freedom is restricted. BUA is thus increasingly developing into a resilient ecosystem that makes responsible internationalization and excellent research possible, even with challenging partner countries.

Read more about the  
Forum on Diplomatic  
Resilience here:





# Global Signature Projects

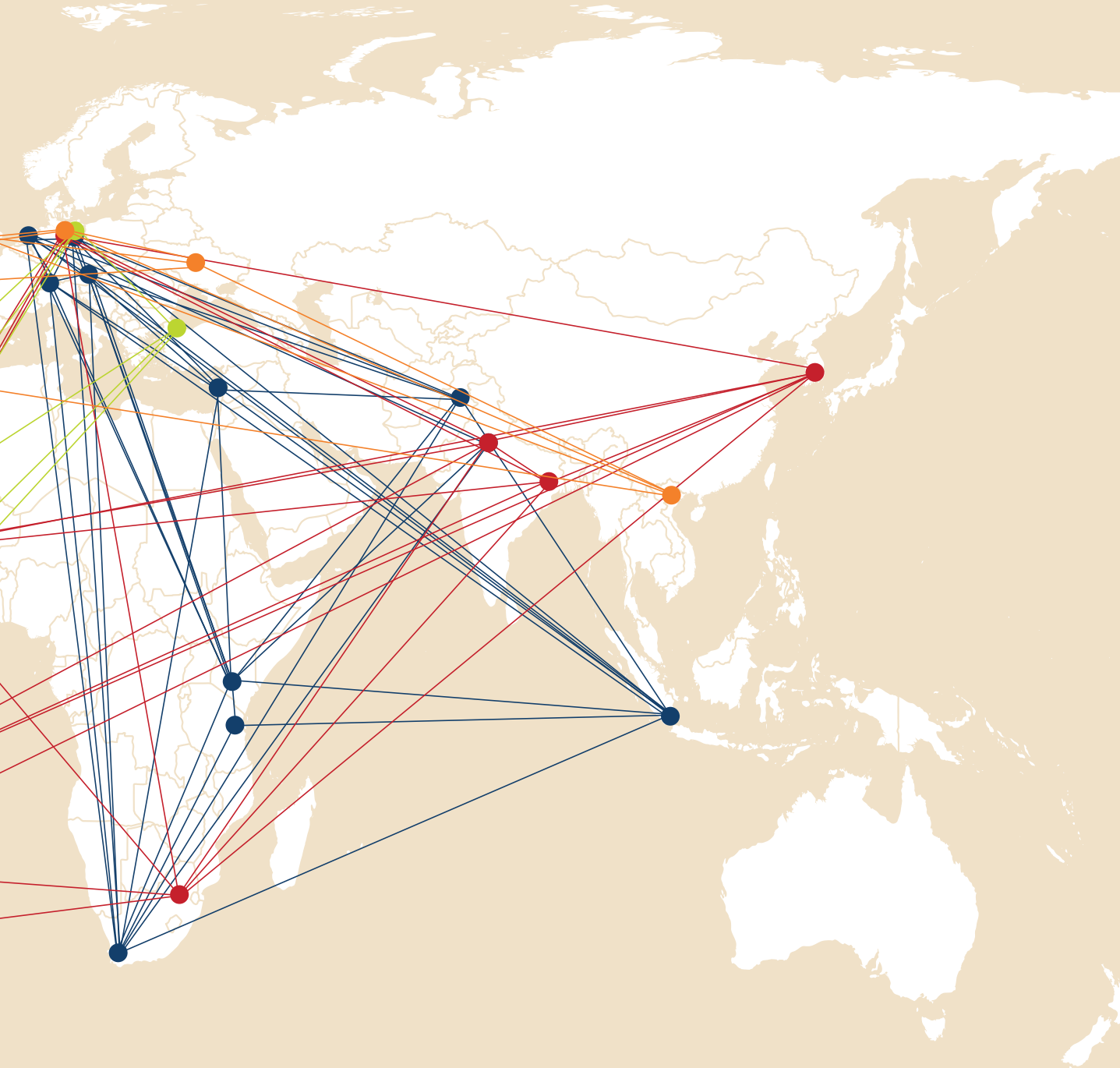
● **Co2libri**  
conceptual collaboration –  
living borderless research interaction  
2022–2025

● **Essential Workers**  
Essential Research. A Global  
Network of Critical Labour Studies  
2023–2024

● **Critical Theory  
Under Pressure**  
Building Networks for  
Transnational Dialogue (CritUP)  
2023–2024

● **PRODIGY**  
Practices of Development and  
International Cooperation with a focus  
on Global Health Engagement  
2023–2024

*Up to date, the BCGE has supported four major projects of global dimension. They are based on trusting cooperation between BUA scientists and their partners in the Global South—and designed to further intensify successful research collaborations.*



# Co2libri

## *How the Global North can learn from the Global South*

How can we rethink Global North–South research collaborations to reach a more decentered, inclusive and decolonial understanding of knowledge production and exchange? The BCGE signature project co2libri – Conceptual Collaboration – Living Borderless Research Interaction envisages a multicentric perspective that integrates positions of Southern theory and praxis into the heart of the academic conversations to counter the asymmetrical geopolitics of knowledge production. “The demand, repeated like a mantra in recent decades, to research together with actors of the global South and not just about them, has not yet led to satisfying concepts for a systematic approach,” says Prof Claudia Derichs from Humboldt–Universität zu Berlin, a co–speaker of the project. Therefore, co2libri fosters a transdisciplinary and transregional network of scholars and scholar activists to contribute to an alternative praxis of theorizing, research methods and research ethics.

The project is co–lead by Prof Kai Kresse (Leibniz–Zentrum Moderner Orient, and Freie Universität Berlin) and coordinated by PD Dr. Andrea Fleschenberg dos Ramos Pinéu (Humboldt–Universität zu Berlin). The co2libri team is working closely with international partners across Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe offering Visiting Fellowships, Training–exchange Workshops, Working Group Sessions, Guest Lectures and Summer Schools. The project publications, such as the edited volume *Thinking with the South*, are open access.



Read more about the project here:

## **Essential Workers, Essential Research.**

### *A Global Network of Critical Labour Studies*

In the project, researchers from all over the world examine the serious changes in the world of work from a historical perspective. Growing inequality and insecure and informal employment conditions have been exacerbated by the pandemic and have become more than ever a global problem. The network aims at including local perspectives from countries such as Argentina, India and South Africa more deeply into international research. The project is led by Prof. Dr. Andreas Eckert from Humboldt University in Berlin. It ended in 2024.



# PRODIGY

## *Psychological assistance for mothers in emotional distress*

The BCGE signature project PRODIGY – Practices of Development and International Cooperation with a focus on Global Health Engagement implements an international joint knowledge exchange platform on maternal mental health, for example postnatal depression. The PRODIGY team develops specific therapeutic procedures for treatment as well as teaching material. It also supports experts in elaborating and disseminating quality criteria in research. PRODIGY follows a patient and public involvement approach. It cooperates with researchers, governmental institutions in Vietnam and Ukraine, as well as with partners at McMaster University in Canada. “Through the cooperation with our partners, we obtain important knowledge on interaction with families from other cultures for the work in our Parent-Child Unit,” says Professor Malek Bajbouj, spokesperson of the Prodigy project, which is co-lead by Prof Thi Minh Tam Ta, (Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin), Prof Daniel Strech (Berlin Institute of Health), Prof Michael Zürn (Freie Universität Berlin), and Prof Isabel Dziobek (Humboldt Universität zu Berlin).



Read more about the Project here:

## **Critical Theory Under Pressure**

### *Building Networks for Transnational Dialogue (CritUP)*

The project promotes international academic exchange on critical theory. To this end, the transnational publication platform critup.net has been developed. Considering the global wave of authoritarian politics, CritUP places particular emphasis on identifying current threats to academic freedom in order to be able to address them better. A competence network is being set up for German and European journalists who are looking for independent and critical voices from South America and Turkey. Researchers and institutions in Brazil, Peru, Chile and Turkey are involved in the project. The project is led by Professor Robin Celikates, Freie Universität Berlin, and Professor Rahel Jaeggi, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin.



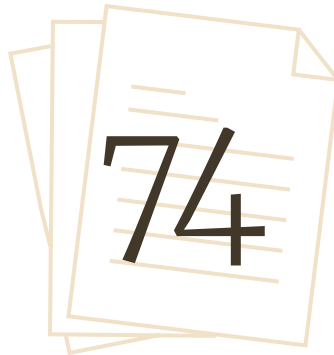
Read more about  
the Project here:

# NEW FORMS OF MOBILITY

*Research funding can exacerbate existing hierarchies. The BCGE has developed funding structures and policy measures that enable greater balance in research cooperations.*

Since its establishment in early 2020, the Berlin Center for Global Engagement has invested time and resources into developing new and innovative funding formats as well as in engaging in Science Diplomacy to address major challenges in global research cooperation, deriving from funding structures. Funding itself is never a guarantee for equitable research cooperation, on the contrary, it may even exacerbate existing hierarchies in knowledge production. Funding and appropriate funding structures are a necessary precondition to enable mobility. And mobility has always been key to developing transnational perspectives in research and innovation. Since the founding of the modern university the free movement of scholars and students remains one of its constituent principles.

The BCGE's aim, when establishing new funding formats, is to overcome existing barriers and geographical and disciplinary bor-



The BCGE has so far funded 74 projects in total: 4 "Signature Projects," 17 projects in the inaugural call, and 53 mobilities within the "Flexible Travel Funds" call for proposals.



The BCGE budget from BUA funds is approximately 500,000 euros annually. For the 2023–2026 period, the center acquired an additional 410,000 euros from the Volkswagen Foundation for the "BUA Forum on Diplomatic Resilience" project as well as 70,000 euros from the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research for the "Hidden Research" project.

ders. In 2020 we published a first **Inaugural Call**. It aimed at identifying and strengthening the diverse and complex connections scholars of the four partners of the Berlin University Alliance (BUA) entertain with scholars in the so-called Global South across disciplines.

The Call encouraged scholars to apply together with a partner within the BUA in order to connect the rich knowledge on different countries and regions of the four member institutions and to include partners from the Global South. We were able to finance 17 projects out of the high number of more than 40 applications, illustrating the interest in both, collaborating among partners within the Alliance, and strengthening existing projects or exploring new venues for cooperation. Projects included diverse and pressing topics such as climate justice, health provision in Africa and Latin America, urban development in parts of Asia or agency of children in the Middle East.



# 15

The BCGE has organized 15 scientific conferences and panel discussions and conducted 11 trainings on topics like "Global Equity in Open Scholarly Communication". Nearly a thousand people have attended those different types of events.

The Call offered the opportunity to strengthen existing partnership projects. This was also the central aim of the subsequent **Signature Projects Call**, a call particularly geared toward projects that already had received funding in the Inaugural Call. This time project partners could collaborate over a longer period of time in order to deepen their relation and engage in knowledge production, based on reciprocity and equity.

In 2023 the BCGE launched a third format, the **Flexible Travel Funds**. Professors from BUA now could either invite guests from the Global South to Berlin or embark for a short stay abroad, for example to conduct field research. Examples of such projects include the development of a joint policy paper on urban-rural linkages in Kenya, the use of the agile methodology in vocational training with Cuba, the organization of trainings on molecular methods in Uganda, or workshops and presentations on Open Science with Argentina and Brazil.

But BCGE did not limit itself to new funding formats, it also engaged in Science Diplomacy when it facilitated for example procedures for researchers from the "Global South" to receive funding. A new stipend allowed them to organize and plan their travel independently and on their own



# 200

Around 200 foreign researchers from 48 countries have participated in projects funded by the BCGE

responsibility. Oftentimes funding but also visa procedures are de facto barriers that limit the mobility for researchers from the Global South which in turn puts limitations on research cooperation that still needs to be developed. If visas are not granted in time whole projects are at risk. This not only creates great insecurity for the cooperation partner, but also for the home university. Together with BR50, the alliance for non-university research institutions in Berlin, BCGE established a dialogue with the Foreign Office on visa, a dialogue which is de facto in the interest of all sides.

The BCGE also continuously strives to discuss funding formats with key science-policy actors to further promote common goals of global projects: The establishment of long-term funding programs, the option to distribute the budget amongst all partners involved, or the possibility to include south-south funding.

With the three aforementioned funding formats and policy measures, BCGE has undertaken the first step towards more equitable research cooperation, as outlined by the UNESCO and in the Africa Charter. Our discussion with our partners from the Global South will show, if real progress has been made and how we can develop these funding formats further.



# 120

120 BUA scholars have profited directly from BCGE funding (as applicants or project partners).



## OUR TEAM



The team at BCGE (f.l.t.r): Christiane Wolf Suzuki, Romain Faure, Sarah Wessel, Angelika Wilhelm-Rechmann, Florian Kohstall

**Florian Kohstall** is BCGE's Principle Investigator. He worked more than ten years in the Middle East and North Africa before building up Freie Universität Berlin's Global Responsibility Program. Political Scientist by training his passion is to incubate and accompany international collaborative projects.

**Romain Faure** is the coordinator of the Berlin Centre for Global Engagement. Historian by training he did his PhD on international cultural diplomacy. He does believe that innovative ideas are much more equally distributed across the globe than today's global science system would suggest.

**Sarah Wessel** is Research Manager at the BCGE. She is a cultural anthropologist and political scientist with international experience in research as well as in science management and policy consultancy with a regional focus on the Arab region. For her, equitable research cooperation is key to address global challenges.

**Angelika Wilhelm-Rechmann** has trained in veterinary medicine and in European studies. Following her years in Brussels, she completed her PhD in South Africa on social marketing for nature conservation. She represented the BUA in Brussels before joining the BCGE in 2023, where her current focus is on the Africa Charter.

**Christiane Wolf Suzuki** coordinates the Forum on Diplomatic Resilience at the BCGE. She has 15 years of experience in science diplomacy and worked for German science organizations in Brazil. Her passion for international collaboration began during her studies in Latin American and Cultural Studies in Berlin and São Paulo.

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CONTACT US AT [bcge@berlin-university-alliance.de](mailto:bcge@berlin-university-alliance.de)

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## LEGAL NOTICE

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## HOW DOES THE BCGE'S WORK FIT WITH THE BERLIN UNIVERSITY ALLIANCE?

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In terms of organization the BCGE falls under the Cross-Cutting Theme Internationalization, which is one of the BUA's eight fields of action. The Center works in close collaboration with the four international offices of the BUA partners, with the aim of interlinking and supplementing global engagement activities. This has resulted in the establishment of an internal forum for science management in sensitive cooperation contexts. BCGE participates in different event series held by BUA member institutions such as Academic Freedom Week at Humboldt-Universität. Events and opportunities offered by the four institutions are publicized together with other notifications and calls for proposals via the BCGE Bulletin.

The BCGE's work is built on the productive synergies with other BUA fields of action. Global engagement is also a key topic in the partnership between BUA and the University of Oxford. The BCGE's science diplomacy activities benefit from cooperation with the German Federal Foreign Office coordinated by the Team of BUA Objective Knowledge Exchange. The expertise pooled in BUA Objective Advancing Research Quality and Value reflects the potential and risks of open science in the Global South. Promoting

exchange with the Global South and tackling the colonial legacy of science are also essential BUA Diversity and Gender Equality measures. Via the BUA Postdoc Academy, BUA shows its commitment to academic freedom by supporting refugees and early-career researchers who are at risk with individually tailored support options.

The first two Grand Challenges defined by BUA, "Social Cohesion" and "Global Health" are perfectly suited to projects with strong global engagement components. For the third Grand Challenge titled "Responsible Innovation in Times of Transformation," the BCGE organized a networking event with a regional focus on cooperation with partners in sub-Saharan Africa.

Global engagement has become one of the most important fields of activity for the BUA and its institutions in recent years. The BCGE has played a significant role in driving this forward. The centre is set to continue its efforts to promote science based on global openness, responsibility, and reciprocity. It benefits from the flourishing global engagement community in Berlin as well as strengthened partnerships with research institutions and researchers in the Global South.

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