

Prince Claus Chair

equity and development

GUSTAVO GARCÍA LÓPEZ CHAIRHOLDER 2019-2021

SEYE ABIMBOLA CHAIRHOLDER 2020-2022





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## OBJECTIVES OF THE PRINCE CLAUS CHAIR

The objective of the Prince Claus Chair is to continue the work of His Royal Highness Prince Claus of the Netherlands (1926–2002) in equity and development, by establishing a rotating Academic Chair. Since the Chair was established in 2003, Utrecht University and the International Institute of Social Studies of the Erasmus University Rotterdam have alternately appointed an outstanding young academic from a developing country to the Prince Claus Chair. The objective is to advance research and teaching in the field of equity and development. Candidates for the Chair are nominated by a Curatorium, under the chairmanship of Professor Bert Koenders.

## PRINCE CLAUS, THE INSPIRATION FOR THE CHAIR



His Royal Highness Prince Claus of the Netherlands was strongly committed to equity and development in North-South relations. Through his work, his travels and his personal contacts, he gained a deep understanding of the opportunities for, and the obstacles facing, equitable development. His knowledge, his accessibility and his personality all made an important contribution to his work. As a result, he was – and remains – a source of inspiration to many.

## H.M. QUEEN MÁXIMA OF THE NETHERLANDS, PATRON OF THE PRINCE CLAUS CHAIR



Her Majesty Queen Máxima of the Netherlands served as the first chair of the Curatorium of the Prince Claus Chair from when it was founded in 2003. In May 2014 she graciously agreed to assume the role of Patron. Professor Louise Gunning-Schepers then took over Queen Máxima's role as chairholder of the Prince Claus Chair (until 2021).

## CURATORIUM OF THE CHAIR

The procedure for the appointment of a candidate to the Prince Claus Chair is carried out by the Curatorium of the Chair. The Curatorium consists of the following people:

**Professor Bert Koenders** (chair)

Professor by special appointment of Peace, Law and Security at Leiden University

**Professor Joyeeta Gupta** (vice-chair)

Professor of Environment and Development in the Global South University of Amsterdam

**Professor Henk Kummeling** (member)

Rector Magnificus, Utrecht University

**Professor Inge Hutter** (member)

Rector of the Institute of Social Studies

**Mrs Rianne Giethoorn** LLM (secretary)

Policy advisor student & academic affairs



## FOREWORD

### THE CHALLENGES FACING PRACTICAL WORK

At the end of the 1980s I had the privilege of meeting Prince Claus. He was an inspiration to me with his modern views on international development aid, such as his conviction that the development of a country is always best achieved through the local population. He saw international development aid as a potential catalyst, at least if sufficient intention and effort could be applied. To put it in the words of Prince Claus Chair holders Gustavo García López and Seye Abimbola, you could call it a sort of decolonisation of international aid before its time.

It is an honour to be able to work for an organisation that bears the name and conveys the philosophy of Prince Claus. And it is particularly exciting to get to know a new generation of academics, such as Gustavo and Seye, who are prepared to share their knowledge and experience with us and link their networks to ours.

Prince Claus was an inspiration to both myself and my colleagues in the Curatorium, not least with the practical way in which he thought and worked. The central issue for him then, as it is for us now, is how we ensure that concrete solutions are based on the wishes and the work of the communities and countries concerned. Potentially, that is where the greatest benefit can be obtained from academics who come to the Netherlands.

Practical work was once again a challenge this year due to COVID-19. But Seye and Gustavo have admirably persisted with their research throughout the lockdowns. Their inaugural speeches have their roots in the struggle for opportunities for development in their own countries but, at the same time, address a much wider and global perspective. That makes the connections between our networks and their networks possible. We also discussed the power of science, the risks of fake news and the necessity of always combining truth-finding with concrete and empirically-verifiable research. These aspects also qualify the Prince Claus Chair.



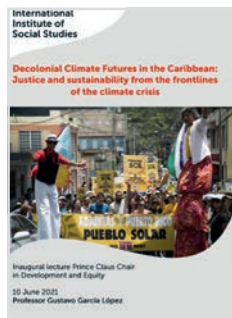
The new holder of the chair, Khayaat Fakier, is someone we have found who has earned her spurs at international level but, at the same time, remains rooted in the local community of, in her case, South Africa.

We are also proud that Alcinda Honwana, a former holder of the chair, has been distinguished with an honorary doctorate at the University of Utrecht. This is another form of recognition of the important academic work that holders of the Prince Claus Chair perform. Certainly at this time, in our fragmented world, we cannot manage without empathy, truth seeking and the exchange of international academics and bridge builders.

**Professor Bert Koenders**  
Chair of the Curatorium

## INAUGURAL SPEECHES: A SUMMARY

### GUSTAVO GARCÍA LÓPEZ, CHAIRHOLDER 2019-2021



Climate change is one of the greatest challenges facing us, today. Professor Gustavo García López argued that the legacy of the colonial era is preventing humankind from solving this crisis. “Colonialism resulted in institutionalised racism as a means of justifying the acquisition of wealth and power.” In Gustavo’s opinion, the differences that emerged as a consequence are reflected in today’s climate inequality between rich and poor. He therefore calls for a decolonised climate approach, in order to bring about a future in which the rich pay their ‘fair share’

and support the communities and countries at the frontline of this crisis. A future in which these communities, organised through mutual support, play a leading role in tackling such issues as the production and consumption of energy, and the response to disaster events.

### SEYE ABIMBOLA, CHAIRHOLDER 2020-2022



“Can we save global health from its origins?” is a question posed by professor Seye Abimbola, during his inaugural speech. “What we know as global health today began as a strategic enabler of European colonisation of much of the rest of the world.” It was not the result of love but of ‘colonial love’; a means of maintaining the existing balance of power. Seye wishes to decolonise healthcare. Only if we take the knowledge available in non-Western countries seriously, and listen to those

people who at present have no voice, can we create a fair and just health system. To make that possible, he is studying the underlying structures of the system on which global health research is based, and calling for the creation of an evolving set of rules for global cooperation.



#### PROFILE

Name: Gustavo García López  
Date of birth: 18 October 1982  
Place of birth: San Juan, Puerto Rico  
Education:  
- Bachelor of Science, University of Puerto Rico  
- Doctor of Philosophy, Indiana University Bloomington  
Position: Researcher, University of Coimbra



#### PROFILE

Name: Seye Abimbola  
Date of birth: 14 February 1982  
Place of birth: Ilesha, Nigeria  
Education:  
- Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery, Obafemi Awolowo University  
- Master of Philosophy, University of Sydney  
- Doctor of Philosophy, University of Sydney  
Position: Senior lecturer public health, University of Sydney

## INTERVIEW SEYE AND GUSTAVO

### “PERHAPS WE SHOULD FOCUS ON TEACHING PEOPLE IN RICH COUNTRIES”

**The COVID-19 crisis brought together the inaugural speeches by Seye Abimbola and Gustavo García López, for the Prince Claus Chair. Their stories not only inspired their audience but also each other. They now plan to work together to make the world a more equal, fair, and ecologically healthy place. “Time and again it is the same institutions and people who decide what happens.”**

Seye Abimbola remembers it as if it were yesterday. The delegations of health specialists from Europe and the United States who visited the Nigerian Ministry of Health, Seye’s one-time employer, to tell them what was good for Nigeria. Their visits may have been well intended. “But these people had no idea what they were talking about,” he explained. “Nonetheless, the overriding belief within our Ministry was that they knew best. And that local knowledge, skills and experience from Nigeria were less relevant.”

Seye himself grew up with that local knowledge. In the village where he was born his mother was the midwife, who offered her services free of charge to her often poor fellow villagers. “From a very young age I learned the meaning of inequality. Years later, as a medical student, I often thought back to my formative years. I realised I had no desire at all to work in a hospital. Instead, I wanted to work somewhere where I could make a difference to persisting inequalities in health so that everyone could enjoy the benefits of good health.”

Some 8000 kilometres away, on the Caribbean island of Puerto Rico, Gustavo García López grew up sharing that same desire for equality and justice. This desire had first been stirred up by his parents, both professors, and in particular by his mother’s stories of the feminist movement in their country.

His personal activist pilot flame ignited fully in 1999, when the bombing exercises by the US Navy, already for years the subject

of heated debate, led to the death of one resident of the group of islands inhabited by his fellow Puerto Ricans. Gustavo took part in the resultant protests, and was sentenced to 45 days in prison. Inside, he spent a large part of his time with his nose buried in books, reading – and discussing with other protesters – about activism and ecology.

The stories of Seye and Gustavo eventually came together on 10 June 2021. The day on which they both held their inaugural speeches as holders of the Prince Claus Chair. United digitally by COVID-19, that one year previously had prevented the oration by Gustavo, the pair became fascinated by each other’s performance.

The roots of that fascination may well have lain in the fundamental differences between their points of departure, further reinforced by the completely different routes they chose to follow. After his experiences at the Ministry, Seye decided to go in search of the underlying cause of inequality as a healthcare system researcher. For his part, as a young man, Gustavo fell in love with nature, while playing in the stream and woodland that effectively formed his back garden, and later participated in a neighbourhood movement to defend and restore this woodland. Now, as a social scientist, his aim is to introduce greater justice in the way in which the climate crisis is tackled, so that rich countries pay their fair share in solving the problem.

Although the professional pathways they followed resulted in different perspectives, they eventually led them to the same point. Or, more accurately, the same problem: the legacy of the colonial era on the world of today. Although, the colonial period was officially put behind us decades ago, independently of each other, both Seye and Gustavo concluded that the process of true decolonisation still has to begin. Standards are still very much set in the Western world. And the inequality that emerged from colonialism is very much intact.

**Seye:** “That fact prevents humankind from tackling major international problems, like access to good-quality health services. Unless we are all involved in producing and using knowledge, we will not all be able to benefit from health services. Unfortunately, the only knowledge that is considered credible by the global





health sector is often knowledge that originates from the West. We have come to believe that no other source of credible, useful, consequential knowledge exists.”

**Gustavo:** “In tackling the climate crisis, we effectively come up against the same problem. We are far too unwilling to listen to people

“TIME AND AGAIN IT IS THE SAME INSTITUTIONS AND PEOPLE WHO DECIDE WHAT HAPPENS IN THE WORLD”

from non-Western countries. Countries which in many cases have suffered far more from the consequences of climate change, while contributing the least to the problem. Time and again it is the same institutions and people who decide what happens in the world.”

**Seye:** “If a small group of powerful people or countries really want to extract something, then it is bad luck for the rest. This one statement effectively summarises Gustavo’s oration for the Prince Claus Chair, and it is a summary with which I fully concur.”

**What is it about your speeches that so appeals to you both?**

**Seye:** “In addition to the similarities, I see a number of interesting differences. I personally focus above all on the importance of knowledge, while Gustavo considers the role of capitalism. I am also fascinated by his close involvement with activists; the people on the frontline. In that respect, we complement one another.”

**Gustavo:** “What I find most appealing is the way in which Seye made love the central focus of his narrative about health. The fact that for

him, love is the only solid foundation for human interaction. For me that was an unexpected message. But a very true one, also in my field of work. Just think about the smiling faces and the hugging that you see during protests against such sad issues. I also see how his message hits home. Seye has succeeded in involving people from the southern hemisphere in the discussions about global health, and he has succeeded in bringing together a diverse group of researchers and involving them in global discussions. Something I have never managed to do.”

**Your tone and working methods are more activist than those of Seye. Could that go some way to explaining why that is?**

**Gustavo:** “I suspect that may indeed be one of the reasons why Seye is more appreciated by an international policy audience. And that is an area in which I hope to develop. But there is a strategy behind the way I speak out. I always adapt to my audience. And I recognise the importance of bridging the gap between the academic and policy worlds and the world of activists. For example, I am currently contributing to a book that reflects, in a collection of essays, on the experience of building intersectional alliances that advance systemic changes for social and environmental justice.”

Following their digital meeting in June, Seye and Gustavo agreed to join forces in their efforts to bring about a fairer world, and to use each other’s knowledge and strengths. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they have not yet fulfilled that undertaking. Even placing video calls is complex for the two men, who are separated by ten time zones. Seye lives in Sydney (Australia) and Gustavo in Coimbra (Portugal).



**Gustavo:** “You can be sure that we will collaborate at some point. The original plan was to meet in the Netherlands, and hopefully COVID-19 will allow us to do just that. The situation in Portugal, at least, is looking hopeful. But of course there are huge differences across the world.”

**One of the causes of those differences is the inequality in vaccination. How do you view this development, Seye?**

**Seye:** “Poor countries like Nigeria are being given vaccines, but not the knowledge to produce them for themselves. To put it mildly, that is a disappointment. The vast majority of knowledge about vaccinations was publicly funded. No single company or organisation can claim the success for itself. Nonetheless, the world is ready to accept that the advantages and the profit should end up in private hands. The Western world does not care enough about people in other parts of the world. It is a difficult thing to say, but it remains the truth. Over the past couple of years, with the COVID-19 response, many

“POOR COUNTRIES LIKE NIGERIA ARE BEING GIVEN VACCINES, BUT NOT THE KNOWLEDGE TO PRODUCE THEM FOR THEMSELVES”

people in Africa have started to see that the West actually does not care about them. The approach to COVID-19 and the vaccination programme have been disappointing. This has always been the case, for example with HIV and TB. The only thing that has changed is the willingness of people to speak up. The voices of protest that are now being raised and the action of African leaders working together to solve their problems give me some hope.”

**Gustavo:** “In respect of the climate crisis, too, we are bogged down in the idea of national sovereignty, so the problems are still not seen from a global point of view. Climate change also has consequences for the rich countries. Take for example mass migration. Nonetheless, we have still not managed to recognise the climate as a shared problem that demands urgent action.”

**How has the Prince Claus Chair helped you raise awareness of these problems?**

**Gustavo:** “First and foremost it made it possible for me to expand the scope of my work and my contacts. The funding has allowed hiring a postdoctoral researcher, Diego Andreucci, to accompany and support this work.

It also supported publications and events that share knowledge about organising just transitions to address the climate crisis with equity. Although the money was useful, ultimately, the position itself has been the most important. It has made it possible for me to get in touch with different people, and being invited to take part in inspiring events, such as the 2021 Degrowth Conference in The Hague. Our voice has now been heard in different places and I am in a position to establish new collaborative ventures, and reinforce existing ties.”

**Seye:** “I’ve noticed that my work as chairholder of the Prince Claus Chair has expanded my focus. It gave me the opportunity to spend more time thinking in terms of justice and injustice. This helps me think more clearly about the intrinsic injustices in the current system of research itself. Efforts to address these global issues are more likely to fail if we don’t put in place governance structures and processes to ensure that every person – and group – is treated equally in their capacity as a knower. What I’ve been doing and will continue to do is work with others to craft new rules of engagement that privilege knowledge that is currently unseen, unused, and unvalued.



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We will have to clearly define which academic and knowledge practices are unfair and unjust, build a consensus around them, identify new rules to prevent them and build knowledge infrastructures that respect the dignity of disadvantaged people everywhere in the world. You can see there's a lot of work ahead.”

**Is it not utopian to think that there will ever be justice and equality in the world?**

**Gustavo:** “I truly don't know. What I have learned is that changes must be measured over a longer period. If you do that, you can see that important steps have in fact been taken over the past few decades in tackling the climate crisis. Local, national and global pressures have forced countries to at least sign up to something. The Paris Agreement, for example. The issue of a just approach has also moved up on the agenda. The tone of the discussions has changed fundamentally, in the past ten years. Time and again, history has shown that social activism, pressure from society itself, is an important force for change. We need to mobilise. Increasingly I am focusing my attention on education. Universities, secondary schools and primary schools. My 6-year old daughter, for example, is taught nothing about climate, health, diversity and gender. There is too much attention for writing and arithmetic and not enough for the huge problems facing the world, and the solutions.”

**Sey:** “I agree entirely. Knowledge is essential to change. We must get right back to the roots of the system. We need to start developing teaching material that trains people to think differently about knowledge. And we need to ensure that knowledge is shared more effectively. As long as so many people in rich countries know nothing about the vaccination apartheid in the world, it will be impossible to build up sufficient political pressure to tackle the issue. In my mind, we need to start thinking differently about change. Perhaps we should really be focusing on teaching people in rich countries who already enjoy a good life, what they owe to people in other parts of the world.”

CHAIRHOLDER 2021-2023

PROFESSOR KHAYAAT FAKIER



Since September 2021 Professor Khayaat Fakier holds the Prince Claus Chair at the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) of the Erasmus University Rotterdam.

As holder of the Prince Claus Chair, Professor Fakier will examine the issue of care in relation to equity and development policies. The research project will examine how to build an ethics of care not only for people, but also for the environment. The intent of the research will be to see in what ways care work is 'the alternative' value to growth. Working in collaboration with Dutch and international networks, Professor Fakier's research will seek to define how we can build equitable economies where care work and care-ful relationships with society and nature are central to social and cultural life. The analysis will specifically take into account local communities' responses to the pandemic.

Professor Fakier is a sociologist with a focus on research in women's care for others and the environment. She is currently a senior lecturer at Stellenbosch University and teaches modules on sociology of work, feminisms and women's engagement in the South African economy. She supervises students on a wide range of feminist topics, including ecofeminism, fatherhood, women in the legal profession and women in prisons. Professor Fakier gained her PhD from the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

Professor Fakier's research examines the value of social reproduction in a global society where the unpaid work and care conducted by women is not recognised. Her research on the impact of social and industrial policy on the lives of women suggests that working class and underemployed women shoulder the burden of care for the young, the elderly, the frail and the environment. Most state and corporate policies ignore this. Her work has featured in renowned international journals such as *Antipode: Journal of Radical Geography*, the *International Journal of Feminist Politics and Capitalism* and *Nature Socialism*.

For further information please visit our website [www.princeclauschair.nl](http://www.princeclauschair.nl).

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