

Livelihood Summer School on Transdisciplinary Methods for Studying Social-Ecological Systems in Agro-Pastoral Settings

Dates and Location

- Dates: September 22nd – 26th, 2025
- Location: University of Parakou, Benin

Organized by

- Research Unit on Agro-Pastoral, Humanitarian and Food Systems (UR-SAPHA), University of Parakou, Benin
- University Joseph KI-ZERBO, Burkina Faso
- Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Kenya
- Stellenbosch University, South Africa
- University of Göttingen, Germany
- University of Kassel, Germany

Supported by: Volkswagen Foundation, Germany

Background

The Summer School focuses on the complex challenges facing African agro-pastoral systems, including biodiversity loss, climate change, insecurity, and poverty. These interconnected issues require both practical interventions and conceptual frameworks to understand their systemic nature. Using the Social-Ecological Systems (SES) framework, the summer school aims to promote research that integrates ecological and societal dimensions for actionable knowledge relevant to the local context.

Pastoralism in Africa faces growing pressures due to demographic changes, climate variability, resource scarcity, and restrictive governance. These challenges are exacerbated by insecurity, while at the same time, communities are innovating and adapting to these changes through the mobilization of indigenous knowledge.

Objectives

The summer school aims to:

- Provide PhD students and post-docs with advanced theoretical and practical skills in transdisciplinary research focused on agro-pastoral systems.
- Strengthen their understanding of social-ecological systems, resilience, and sustainability through practical methods.
- Foster networking among junior and senior scientists working on related issues.
- Build capacities for data collection, analysis, and policy communication for societal impact.

Program Overview

The five-day program includes:

- Day 1: Keynote addresses and sharing of research experiences
- Day 2: Theory and methodological sessions on social-ecological systems, focusing on change, innovation, and resilience
- Day 3: Fieldwork where participants apply methods to local agro-pastoral systems
- Day 4: Reflection on fieldwork, data analysis, and presentations
- Day 5: Feedback sessions and scientific communication workshops

Target Group

The summer school is open to:

- PhD students and post-doctoral scientists working on agro-pastoral systems and social-ecological research.
- Priority is given to young researchers, under 40 years old, with interdisciplinary research interests.

Eligibility Criteria

- Applicants must be registered in a doctoral or post-doctoral program at an African or German university.
- Applicants must have a strong interest in agro-pastoral systems and social-ecological research.
- Proficiency in English is required.

Application Process

Applicants must submit:

- An application form (<https://forms.gle/UGebAaMCXSTE4Rjm9>)
- A one-page motivation letter
- A CV (max. two pages)
- A copy of their highest degree
- Proof of thesis registration or post-doctoral employment
- A one-page concept note summarizing their research project

Support and Funding

- Travel, accommodation, and catering expenses will be fully covered for successful candidates.
- The event is free to apply for and fully supported by the Volkswagen Foundation.

Key Dates

- Application Deadline: May 31st, 2025
- Notification of Results: June 15th, 2025
- Summer School Start: September 22nd, 2025

Contact Information

For more information, contact:

The team Lead:

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The team members:

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- Prof. Dr. Nikolaus Schareika (nschare@gwdg.de), UGö, Germany
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