

The Right Livelihood College (RLC) at the Center for Development Research (ZEF), University of Bonn, Germany, offers a DAAD-funded PhD research scholarship on:

Land degradation, environmental justice and socio-cultural dynamics in Africa

Project background

The Right Livelihood College (RLC) is a transdisciplinary global research and education initiative of universities and the Right Livelihood Foundation awarding the "Alternative Nobel Prize" (www.rightlivelihood.org). Supported by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), one of the nine RLC Campuses worldwide is based at the Center for Development Research (ZEF), University of Bonn, Germany.

In collaboration with Tony Rinaudo, who developed the Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR) approach and was awarded with the "Alternative Nobel Prize" in 2018, we offer a 3.5-year PhD scholarship for candidates from Africa (and currently residing there), to carry out an empirical applied PhD research project related to the topic "Land degradation, environmental justice and socio-cultural dynamics in Africa".

Research background

Africa experiences the most severe land degradation in the world. Land degradation particularly affects the rural poor, mainly smallholders. Besides many other factors such as climate change, smallholders are also contributing directly to land degradation, e.g. in the form of overuse of soils, over-grazing, or firewood collection. Local land use practices are often linked to socio-cultural practices and are essential for the survival and livelihood of the rural population. But they are also responses to increasing injustices in the access to land and natural resources. In the last decades, many policies and strategies have been designed by national and international agencies to address land degradation in different countries in Africa, however, often with purely technical approaches and with limited success.

Land degradation is caused and influenced by multiple direct and indirect socio-cultural and economic factors as much as tenure systems which cause additional inequalities. Addressing the vulnerability of so-called local people through the lens of environmental justice and socio-cultural dynamics is essential to understand the underlying drivers of land degradation in a holistic way. This also requires the inclusion of local and indigenous knowledge both, on changing agricultural dynamics and on local practices to monitor land degradation.

The call for this PhD research project is aimed at critically addressing some of these concerns and scientific knowledge gaps by empirically assessing questions of land degradation, environmental justice and socio-cultural dynamics in a case study in a selected country in Africa.

Applicants have to develop an individual PhD research proposal narrowing down the research scope, suggesting a case study and outlining a suitable and feasible methodology. The proposal has to be submitted together with the application.

The PhD scholarship call

Qualified applicants should be citizens of a country in Africa, and currently reside there. They should hold an excellent master's or equivalent degree in social sciences, humanities, political sciences, development studies, or related disciplines from recognized institutions of higher education, and have outstanding proficiency in empirical and qualitative research methods. Experience in critical action and interdisciplinary research is an asset. Fluency in English is mandatory.

The scholarship is funded by the DAAD. It covers a scholarship for a two months language course in Germany from August 1, 2025, and a subsequent 40 months of a Junior Researcher position at ZEF, University of Bonn, from October 1, 2025, and respective costs for travel and research. In the first year, the candidate will participate in the ZEF Doctoral Studies Program in Bonn.

The application should consist of:

- ✓ Hand signed checklist
[epos_checklist.pdf \(daad.de\)](#)
- ✓ DAAD application form for research grants and study
https://www2.daad.de/medien/deutschland/stipendien/formulare/forschungsstipendium_en.pdf
- ✓ Letter of motivation
- ✓ CV in EUROPASS format (including current date) – see template under:
<http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/en/documents/curriculum-vitae>
- ✓ Copies of Academic Degrees (certified English translation if necessary)
- ✓ Copies of Academic Transcripts, incl. grading-scale (certified English translation if necessary)
- ✓ Letter of recommendation from your current employer (including current date); the letter must have an official letterhead, a signature and a stamp
- ✓ Certificate(s) of Employment from the employer(s) (including current date) that show proof of a minimum of two years of relevant working experience; the letter(s) must have an official letterhead, a signature and a stamp
- ✓ Recommendation letter from your university
- ✓ Short PhD research proposal narrowing the research scope (max. 5 pages)

All documents are to be submitted in English. Closing date for applications is March 15, 2025. Only shortlisted candidates will be contacted.

Please send your applications via e-mail to:

Dr. Till Stellmacher: t.stellmacher@uni-bonn.de

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