

2013 IGS North–South Summer School on “Health and Environment”

1–10 September 2013, Grand Bassam, Côte d’Ivoire

The 2013 IGS North–South Summer School offered 29 students and 12 trainers from 11 different countries and numerous disciplines a unique opportunity to familiarize themselves with the inter- and trans-disciplinary approach needed for conducting research for sustainable development in partnerships involving Northern and Southern scientists. The students were at different stages of completing their PhD thesis; all mentioned that they greatly benefitted from this exposure to South–South and North–South exchange, as well as to the conceptual, methodological, fieldwork, and communication modules. The focus of the 2013 IGS North–South Summer School was on “Health and Environment”; strong thematic and methodological inputs were made by different partners of the IGS North–South, such as the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute (Swiss TPH) and the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE). The Summer School was jointly organised by CDE (University of Bern) and the Centre Suisse de Recherches Scientifiques (CSRS, Abidjan). CSRS staff also organized two excellent fieldtrips and provided all the necessary logistics to make the event a full success. The 2013 Summer School was used to refine the Integrative Training Approach developed within the framework of the Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research (NCCR) North–South. Several trainers from the broad Southern network of trainers established by the NCCR North–South were invited to contribute to the following seven modules of the Summer School:

1. Global change and sustainable development concepts (lecture and group exercise)
2. Health and environment (One Health and Ecohealth approaches: lecture and group exercise)
3. Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (lectures, exercises, individual coaching)
4. Inter- and transdisciplinary approach (lecture elements, research assignments, group exercises, joint development of a research design, presentation and feedback)
5. Exploratory fieldwork: case studies on “health & environment” (Abidjan *abattoirs* and Akouédo landfill) and “governance & social services” (post-war Aboisso near the border with Ghana): expert information, guided observation, interview meetings with different stakeholders)
6. Scientific writing and publishing (lectures and group exercises)
7. Communication with the media and with politicians (lectures and group exercises)

The 2013 Summer School was funded through substantial contributions from the Swiss University Conference (CUS, via the Univ. of Basel, Bern, Zurich), the NCCR North–South, the Afrique One Consortium, the IGS North–South Management Centre, and the SDC–funded programme administered by the KFPE; the latter was used to help cover the expenses of the 35 Southern PhD students and trainers. All students were awarded an IGS North–South certificate with 5 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System), certifying that they achieved all learning goals in the 7 modules. According to the evaluation that took place on the last day, participants’ overall experience of the Summer School was unanimously positive; their suggestions on individual aspects of the different modules will be taken up where appropriate in the next Summer School.

My colleagues and I will forever be grateful to the persons who put their energies in not only planning the programme but finding the resources to give us such great opportunity. To the facilitators we simply say we loved every bit of energy you spent to give us such great knowledge. To my class 2013 summer school your diversity and willingness to share gave me all that I expected for my journey. This is one of the programmes I ever attended that met more than 90% of my expectations and virtually all the modules are not only relevant to my studies but my career. Look forward to volunteer my time in assisting in the planning and facilitating trainings the near future and collaborating with all in various research fields towards sustainable development. (Kingsley Pereko, Ghana, 12 Sep 2013)

Some impressions from the 2013 Summer School in Grand Bassam



Preparatory interdisciplinary work

After having received preliminary information about the context and issues they will be encountering during their fieldtrip, students conduct an interdisciplinary exercise: what research questions would be relevant and important in the context explained by the two experts, how should they be addressed (what disciplines should be involved), what might be indicators, and what stakeholders should be consulted during the fieldtrip in order to come up with a transdisciplinary research design?

Two snapshots from one of the fieldtrips

Since the end of the civil war, economic activities have resumed rapidly in the Aboisso region, following paths influenced by globalization already before the war. For example, a boom in rubber plantations (replacing home gardens, pineapple, etc.) has led to wealth for some, but to losses for many others; environmental and social impacts are obvious but ideas for interventions differ. Numerous administrative levels have a say in everyday affairs, including health services. In this complex setting, how do the various stakeholders perceive the situation and their ability to improve the livelihoods and health of the community?



First appointment with stakeholders in Aboisso: students, with support from trainers, consult each other and adapt their interview questions just before they meet with Aboisso officials to discuss governance, land use, land tenure, and health service, and other issues. After this meeting in Aboisso Prefecture, two other meetings took place with completely different stakeholders, revealing how diverse perceptions are of the issues at stake. After the two-day fieldtrip, the groups of students intensely discussed the data they collected, refined their research questions and suggested approach, and adapted their joint research design. (Photos: A. Zimmermann)

Preparing and conducting an Integrative Training on research for sustainable development for a very heterogeneous group of participants is more successful if the co-organizing partners know one another well. In this sense, the 2013 Summer School benefitted a lot from the long-term North-South partnership that was consolidated over the 12 previous years. In turn, the event helped to further strengthen community building and networking between individuals and institutions, both North-South and South-South.

CSRS
Centre Suisse de Recherches
Scientifiques en Côte d'Ivoire



P.O. Box 1303, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire
email: secretariat@csrs.ci

u^b
UNIVERSITÄT
BERN
CDE
CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENT
AND ENVIRONMENT

Hallerstrasse 10, CH 3012 Bern, Switzerland
email: igs-north-south@cde.unibe.ch