

**2015 IGS North-South Summer School on
“Institutions, Livelihoods, and Conflicts”
30 August–9 September 2015, Pokhara, Nepal**

After several assessments of the situation in Nepal following the catastrophic earthquakes in April and May 2015, the Board of the IGS North South and their partner for this year’s Summer School, the Nepal Centre for Contemporary Research (NCCR), decided to conduct the event in Pokhara as originally planned. The 2015 Summer School was on “Institutions, Livelihoods, and Conflicts”, directed by lecturers from 3 universities in Switzerland who provided various introductions and seminars. In addition, the NCCR invited 3 nationally renowned key informants, each of whom was responsible for introducing one of the field topics. The field trips were expertly organized by the NCCR, with very dedicated resource persons who accompanied the students throughout the three days of the field work. In addition, the NCCR provided a brief security training.

Thirty students from 12 countries representing about seven disciplines participated in the 10 days learning event (3 ECTS). Their projects were at very different stages, ranging from the initial exploration of research questions to completion of the very last paper or chapter. Participants valued this unique opportunity to learn about and practice research for sustainable development in a North-South context, and they appreciated the introduction to the inter- and transdisciplinary approach. In some cases very strong networking ties emerged, boding well for future potential collaboration between researchers from different countries. The students participated in the following modules:

1. Conceptual and thematic seminars on sustainable development, inter- and transdisciplinarity, livelihood approaches and the Nepalese context, and peacebuilding concepts
2. Methodological workshop, with inputs and group exercises
3. Preparation of fieldwork (introduction into field study concept, inputs from national resource persons, joint development of a research design in separate groups)
4. Exploratory fieldwork (expert information, guided observation, interview meetings with different stakeholders: case studies on “Institutions, Livelihoods, and Conflicts” mostly in the Annapurna Conservation Area)
5. Analysis of fieldwork and plenary presentations (group exercise and presentation to an expert audience)
6. Scientific writing and publishing (lectures and group exercises)
7. Communication with the media and other stakeholders (lectures and group exercises)

Of the 30 students and seven trainers, ten Southern participants were fully financed by the SDC-funded programme administered by the KFPE, and one participant was fully funded by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD). All students were awarded an IGS North-South certificate with 5 ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System), certifying that they achieved all learning goals in the seven modules (see the full outline of the programme [here](#)). The overall feedback on the Summer School was very positive; useful suggestions for improvements were made, which will be taken up in 2016. The comments were all the more pertinent due to the fact that the students designed their own evaluation.

Examples of feedback from participants:

“The social science faculty is very new in our Agriculture and Forestry University, Nepal. So, this new field is challenging as well as interesting for me. I have to study a lot to gain knowledge in this new field. From Pokhara training I came to know that the field of social science is very broad. To the nutshell, I am a new learner and the transdisciplinary knowledge was very appropriate and will add some integration in my field in future.” (Govinda Bahadur K.C, Nepal, 22.9.2015).

“Wonderful - beyond expectations (both in the hotel and in the field!)” (Anonymous feedback, 9.9.2015).

“Pre-communication was good, I felt well informed for the travel and visa etc.” (Anonymous feedback, 9.9.2015).

Impressions from the 2015 Summer School in Pokhara, Nepal

Creating common visions of sustainable development

In the methodological workshop, the students were asked to apply PALS (Participatory Action Learning System) to themselves; with this useful method rooted in Chambers' participatory approach, they raised their consciousness of their own individual vision of a future, then were confronted with their fellow students' visions, and finally tried to work out a *common* vision of sustainability. The exercise introduced the students to the method while at the same time demonstrating its advantages in a context where participants in such an exercise do not yet know one another, let alone one another's worldviews, aspirations, and expectations. Drawing the future together rather than talking about it enables the participants to overcome perceived language barriers and asymmetries in people's ability to express themselves clearly.



(Photo: L. Trechsel)



"Exchanging about ourselves": fundamentally enabling for a transdisciplinary process

Building rapport and trust is essential in a transdisciplinary process. Two groups reported on impressive experiences of how rapport was built unexpectedly through a genuine exchange about everyone's cultural specificities. Here the local women listen intently while a Kenyan student explains that her husband had to pay a high bride price for her because she was educated. Her willingness to share was a door opener to a very interesting insights into gender roles about which the interviewed women may have remained silent.

(Photo: L. Trechsel)

Filming as a research method

During this year's Summer School, one participant with a film studies background and a research approach that includes filming as a method of inquiry, reporting, and interaction with the local people, was entrusted with the task of reporting on the IGS North-South training event. This new approach has innovative potential but requires additional effort as it needs to be properly integrated into the overall approach. The film that resulted from author's efforts can be viewed here:

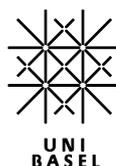
[Link to film.](#)



(Photo: M. Douangphachanh)



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