

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

Associate PhD Positions at the International Center for Development and Decent Work (ICDD) in Social and Agricultural Sciences

The ICDD is an interdisciplinary and international scientific network of excellence with the head office located at the University of Kassel (Germany) and partner universities in Latin America, Africa and Asia (see list p.4) It co-operates closely with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and various NGOs. The ICDD is funded by the programme “ex|ceed – Higher Education Excellence in Development Cooperation” launched by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) through the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). In the framework of its Graduate School of Socio-Ecological Research for Development, the ICDD continuously invites PhD students, preferably from ODA recipient countries¹, to apply for association with the ICDD and become a member of the ICDD Graduate School.

Background

The ICDD is making a committed contribution to the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal #8 to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all. One of ICDD's main objectives in this context is to generate and transfer knowledge on creating and improving work and income opportunities in rural and urban regions of developing countries in light of globalization, climate change and urbanization. One of the ICDD's main facilities for the interdisciplinary generation of knowledge is the Graduate School of Socio-Ecological Research for Development. Successful applicants will become associate PhD fellows of this school. While the ICDD encompasses various disciplines such as agricultural science, political science, sociology and economics, it is strongly committed to promoting inter- and multidisciplinary approaches. Hence, it particularly invites applications from PhD candidates seeking to develop or include such a research perspective. The ICDD supports research in five main thematic areas to which PhD projects should relate:

1) Decent work along agricultural value chains

PhD projects within this research area focus on the concept of the value chain (or production networks) in relationship to decent work. This relation has gained increasing attention in international political economy, management studies, and agricultural sciences. Yet, a number of issues remain unresolved. For instance, much research has dealt with the issue of economic upgrading, i.e. the process by which economic actors move from low-value to relatively high-value activities in global production networks. Social upgrading, i.e. enhancing the protection and rights of workers with positive spill-over effects for their dependents and

¹ Countries eligible for Official Development Assistance (ODA) of the OECD as approved by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) according to its list for reporting on 2014, 2015 and 2016 flows (see attachment). PhD candidates with another citizenship can also apply for association with the ICDD, but restrictions to funding opportunities may apply in this case.

communities, has received comparatively little attention up to now. Moreover, much research on agricultural value chains focuses on a particular local context or on a single agricultural commodity. Seeking to enhance this type of research, the ICDD thus invites PhD project proposals developing a comparative research framework and/or looking at various commodity chains.

2) Organizing the informal economy

The informal economy is marked by acute decent work deficits and a disproportionate share of the working poor. It encompasses own-account workers, employers employed in their own informal sector enterprises, contributing family workers, workers in unregistered businesses, and workers who are excluded from standard employment benefits and protection such as pension coverage and medical insurance.

PhD fellows in this research area should be interested in analysing factors underpinning the persistence of decent work deficits in the informal sector, e.g. limited governmental or social resources, in order to contribute to strategies for enhancing social and labour protection. Alternatively, doctoral research projects explore actors, strategies or instruments contributing to the social inclusion (e.g. building social protection nets for specific industries or types of labor) or the organisation of informal workers.

3) Extractivism and rural welfare

Rising commodity prices brought resource-led development strategies back on the political agenda. During the last decade high economic growth was achieved in regions rich in natural resources in Central Africa or Central Asia and linked to the expansion of (innovative) social policies in Latin America. On the downside, the model is based on the exploitation of nature and due to its impact on the environment the intensity of socio-ecological conflicts is rising. Economically, it tends to hamper the diversification of the economy, the volatility of the commodity prices renders the model highly prone to crises, and the expansion of social policies becomes fragile by depending on the income from natural resources.

However, little is known about (neo)-extractivism's impact on labor conditions and productivity gains. Research projects within this thematic area analyse extractivist development models against this background and may touch upon (one of) the following questions: In what way do (neo)-extractivist regimes promote or hinder productivity gains and progress in decent work? How are extractivist policies decided, implemented and regulated by state and non-state actors ("governance of extractivism")? Which best practice policy reforms in extractivist economies can promote the diversification of the economies and the transformation towards post-extractivist economies? What regulations and regulatory mechanisms are necessary to achieve economic and in particular social upgrading in the extractivist sector?

4) Rural-urban linkages: transformation processes, livelihoods, and social protection

The strong dependence of cities on their surroundings in ecological, social and economic terms has long been neglected. Also, little research has explicitly addressed the changes in

agricultural land use and agricultural households' livelihoods associated with urban expansion and their consequences for the surrounding rural agro-ecosystems.

Doctoral research in this thematic area should focus on how poor people's livelihoods are affected by spatial, ecological, agronomic, economic, and social transition processes along the interface spanning from the city to its remote rural hinterland, mainly using the example of cities in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Two more concrete issues stand out in this context and could be addressed in PhD projects:

1. Social Protection in Rural Areas: In many developing countries rural areas are important as an informal form of social protection for urban workers. Rural subsistence production including the care labor of women subsidizes the daily and intergenerational costs of waged labor largely concentrated in urban communities. How do fluctuations in the urban wage market affect the livelihoods of rural households? How can rural households' urban connections be taken into account when constructing policy for rural social protection? What impact do these "shared livelihood" strategies have to union policy and organizing strategies?

2. Access to credit in rural and peri-urban areas: Credit stimulates growth because it bridges the time until investments bear fruits. However, a large body of literature on agricultural lending has highlighted the challenges for providing especially smallholders with financial services. Micro-finance institutions have overcome some of the obstacles but their loans are mainly used for micro-scale activities or family needs and not so much for agricultural machinery. Will communication technology and the ever expanding cities change this situation? Does better access to credit translate into productive investments, given that loans are frequently not used for consumptive uses?

5) Rethinking development cooperation

While development cooperation can be an instrument for promoting decent work, it is in danger of overlooking conflicts of interest. Therefore, a more sensitive perspective is necessary which includes strategies of empowerment. Apparently easy solutions – more market access, more investments, more technology – overlook complex social realities. A rise in productivity for one group may leave the working conditions of another group unaffected or even lead to a deterioration in living standards for this group. The principle that development cooperation should be 'people-centered' requires that their different positions, needs, and interests be taken into account – and that they have the right to articulate them and be heard. Yet, organized interventions in collective affairs according to a standard of improvement have always benefitted some groups more than others, and these others have often complained and protested.

PhD fellows interested in this thematic area could reflect on this fact and engage in rethinking aspects or cases of development cooperation accordingly. If the aim is improving the livelihoods and working conditions of the poor, they could explore the different social groups, their interests and their political conflicts. What is beneficial for the working conditions of middle-class farmers may not be beneficial for smallholder farmers, what is beneficial for them may not be beneficial for landless male labourers, and what is beneficial for the latter group may not be beneficial for their wives and daughters. So, an agenda for development cooperation in rural areas which attempts to improve livelihoods and create decent working conditions may not only perceive different socio-economic positions and address conflicts of interests between different social groups ('political interventions'), but also engage farmers' voices ('people-centered') and devise strategies of empowerment for weaker political groups.

Associate PhD Position

Associate PhD students of the ICDD Graduate School are based at an ICDD partner university (see list below) and enrolled in its PhD programme. Apart from institutional affiliation with the ICDD, associate fellows can participate in the doctoral programme of the ICDD Graduate School, apply for field research as well as conference participation funds and get involved in the lively academic exchange within and various activities of the ICDD network.

Associate PhD fellows do not receive a PhD scholarship from the ICDD! Applicants must apply for third-party funding elsewhere and final acceptance for the ICDD Graduate School may be conditioned on the successful acquisition of PhD funding.

Application Requirements

- enrolment in a PhD programme at one of the ICDD partner universities:
 - Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán (UADY), Mexico
 - Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp), Brazil
 - University of Cape Coast (UCC), Ghana
 - Egerton University (EGU), Kenya
 - University of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF), Pakistan
 - University of Kassel, Germany
 - Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), India
 - University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), South Africa
- a high proficiency of English (CEFR level: C1 or above);
- academic or vocational experience in one of the disciplines related to the thematic field of development and decent work;
- citizenship of an ODA recipient country (see list attached). PhD candidates with another citizenship can also apply, but opportunities to apply for ICDD funding are restricted in this case.

Application Procedure

Applications can only be made by the ICDD committee, respectively the ICDD coordinator, of an ICDD partner university. Interested PhD students thus need to contact the ICDD committee/ coordinator of his/her university.² If a partner university would like to associate a PhD candidate, it will propose this to the academic board and thereby provide the following documents:

- detailed curriculum vitae (including the academic background, the list of publications [if applicable], professional experience, language skills, voluntary work);

² Applicants at the University of the Witwatersrand should apply through the Wits-GLU/ICDD office.

- PhD project proposal (about 2000 words, including topic, research question, short overview of the relevant literature, theoretical approach, research design and methodology);
- certificates of completed studies;
- letter of support from the ICDD coordinator or PhD supervisor, including a short statement on how the candidate's work fits to the ICDD thematic agenda.

The Academic Board of the ICDD will decide on the basis of these documents and the recommendations of two external reviewers on the admission of the applicant.

For further information visit also the website of the ICDD Graduate School:

www.uni-kassel.de/go/icdd-graduateschool

or contact the ICDD Graduate School staff:

phone: + 49 (0)561 804 7395 / Email: graduateschool@icdd.uni-kassel.de