

Call for application “Collaborative capacity building for plant biodiversity research and preservation in oasis ecosystems of Pakistan – *Biodiversity+*”

The DAAD funded German-Pakistani research project “Biodiversity+” jointly developed by **Muhammad Nawaz Shreef University Of Agriculture Multan** (MNSUA), Pakistan and **University of Kassel** (section of Organic Plant Production and Agroecosystems Research in the Tropics and Subtropics, Faculty of Organic Agricultural Sciences), Germany, offers four M.Sc. thesis research grants for students of both MNSUA and Faculty of Organic Agricultural Sciences in 2021 (same also in 2022).

Background: Despite Pakistan’s legal support of the Convention on Biological Diversity by its Biodiversity Action Plan since the early 2000, the national conservational frameworks lack effective implementation in halting the loss of natural ecosystems and traditional agro-ecosystems. Studying biodiversity of neglected and underutilized species (NUS) and in particular defining drivers of change, contributes to promoting and protecting NUS species and their associated landscapes/ecosystems and social-ecological interactions. *Biodiversity+* not only aims at conserving and sustainably managing/using, and cultivating NUS *ex situ*, but also contributes to knowledge about and thus informed preservation of the cultural integrity of groups (ethnic minorities, women) collecting and/or cultivating as well as processing and trading NUS.

Approach: As an interdisciplinary research project, *Biodiversity+* aims at training Pakistani/German tandems of post-graduate students and young academics on field- and online research methods in (agro-)biodiversity. Using the concept of “field schools”, participants will be prepared to effectively apply and compare appropriate research methods depending on the respective plant species and social-ecological environment. Young academics will be familiarized with marginal working environments much different than the over-researched Punjab and understand socio-political processes that shape the distribution and management of NUS under field conditions. The learning and application of emerging online research techniques such as online content analysis in plant biodiversity, online interviews, questionnaires, and metadata studies is encouraged to be core of the individual projects. Selected candidates will develop research designs through Pakistani-German supervision tandems, are eligible for small research lumpsums and consumables and will have the chance to join short research and study stays in Germany (for Pakistani students up to 4 months) and Pakistan (for German students up to 1 month).

Application: Given *Biodiversity+*’s social-ecological framework, post-graduate students (candidates holding a B.Sc. degree until current PhD scholars) from agricultural, natural and social sciences are invited to apply. The following criteria are mandatory for the application process

- (1) Diligence / reasoning of their letter of motivation (How do you fit professionally and personally to the project? How likely is your research pursued even when your project involvement ends (thesis completed, mobility finished, project terminates in 2022)?
- (2) CV
- (3) Topic-related research proposal justifying a location and associated NUS of a high- or lowland oasis ecosystem (max. 1 page),
- (4) Outstanding academic performance (among the 10% best graduate students of one academic year, contribution to science such as co-authorship in a relevant peer-reviewed international journal paper). Please provide transcript of record and certificates.
- (5) Knowledge of English at the B2 level (TOEFL or IELTS)
- (6) Recommendation letter of your supervisor
- (7) Filled and signed application form

Biodiversity+ attaches great importance to avoid discrimination based on personal and social grounds. A balanced share of female and male post-graduate Pakistani/German students is envisaged. Potential applicants from disadvantaged groups are specifically invited to apply. When applicants of disadvantaged groups share comparable professional qualifications, they will be given priority.

Application deadline: 15 April 2021. Applications with all necessary documents must be submitted per E-Mail on time at uk082158@uni-kassel.de (cc your supervisor)